BREAKING DOWN WELLS: ANALYSIS OF CHICAGO'S *RESIDENTS' JOURNAL*

AND PRACTICES OF CONTINGENT AGENCY VIA COMMUNITY MEDIA

FORMS

by

LOREN BELLE SAXTON

(Under the Direction of Elli Lester Roushanzamir)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores *Residents' Journal* and how its historical and spatial

formations in the Chicago community help shape practices of agency among former and

current Chicago Housing Authority residents. This critical textual analysis specifically

examines media practices during the construction and demolition of the Ida B. Wells

Homes, Chicago's first African-American public housing development. Evidence from

the *Chicago Defender* and *Residents' Journal* provides evidence of how public housing

residents exercised contingent agency, dependent on their individual and collective

community identities and embedded in specific social geographies. Ultimately, the

research challenges contemporary conceptualizations of community media, and the

perceived contradictions between scholarship and activism to locate spaces of resilience.

INDEX WORDS: Community Media, We the People Media, *Residents' Journal,*
    Chicago Housing Authority, Ida B. Wells Homes, Agency, critical
    textual analysis

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LOREN BELLE SAXTON

B.A., North Carolina State University, 2008

M.A., The University of Georgia, 2010

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Major Professor: Elli Lester Roushanzamir

Committee: Janice Hume
Valerie Boyd
James Hamilton
Andrew Herod

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

For your love, support and sacrifice, Tanyna and Larry Saxton.

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Your grace and mercy brought me through. I'm living this moment because of you. I want to thank you and praise you to, your grace and mercy… My God walked with me each step of the way on this journey, never leaving me alone.

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writing, but Professor Boyd challenges me to write from within and without inhibitions. I will cherish our candid conversations over Golden Bowls at the Grit.

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I know that I am truly blessed.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAC	Central Advisory Council
CHA	Chicago Housing Authority
CHAAA	Chicago Housing Authority Alumni Association
CPS	Chicago Public School
HUD	United States Department of Housing and Urban Development
LAC	Local Advisory Council
LSC	Local School Councils
PHA	Public Housing Authority
RJ	Residents' Journal
USHA	United State Housing Authority
WtPM	We the People Media

PROLOGUE

"When you think of Blacks in Chicago the first thing that comes to my mind is poverty…kids getting killed by other kids," said a White middle-class Chicago resident.[1]

In January of 2013, Hadiya Pendleton and Chicago's King College Prep High School's marching band traveled to Washington, D.C. to perform in President Obama's second inaugural parade. Just one week later, Hadiya was shot and killed in South Side Chicago. Hadiya was instantly transformed into a martyr for gun reform. On February 13, her parents sat next to First Lady Michelle Obama during the State of the Union Address.

President Obama stated, "she was shot and killed in a Chicago park after school, just a mile from my house…They deserve a vote. They deserve a vote."

The chamber roared with applause as the President demanded that Congress take action on gun reform. President Obama's recognition of Hadiya's tragic story may have silenced some of his critics that blamed him for glossing over thousands of young Black and women killed daily in urban metropolitan areas. For example, in 2012 alone, 509 people were shot and killed in Chicago, the majority on the South and West Sides. Hadiya's death, which was an unintended outcome in a gang's retaliation, presented an opportunity for our President and the rest of the world to notice

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[1] Quoted in Emily Badger's "How Black Gentrifiers Have Affected the Perception of Chicago's Changing Neighborhoods," published in *Atlantic Cities* Dec. 2012 online edition

that thousands of urban Black families suffer each year from a loss of family members to

gun violence

   "I don't even really know where this place [Bronzeville] is, I mean, I know it's

between downtown and Hyde park, but it's just like empty space in my mind, I never even

think about it."²

  In Bronzeville, Chicago's historic Black Metropolis where Blacks settled during

the Great Migration, and home to some of the first Black public housing developments,

Black "gentrifiers" struggled to revitalize neighborhoods. After the mass demolition of

several public housing high rises that once crowded Bronzeville, Black middle-class

families are rebuilding Bronzeville. Community leaders and residents hope that the

neighborhood's historic roots in Blues legends, like Muddy Waters and Buddy Guy, will

help transform the neighborhood into a "Blues District."

  Blackness is difficult to market, reported The Atlantic Cities, on online

publication that reports on pressing issues in urban cities across the globe. It seems that

the White middle-class can only see the neighborhood as an overcrowded poor Black

public housing community. Black gentrification is failing in Bronzeville, in contrast to

cities, like Atlanta, New York City, and Washington, D.C. where non-White "gentrifiers"

are rebuilding and revitalizing neighborhoods, according to and article in The Atlantic

Cities.

  Black gentrification in D.C.?

  I glanced out of my dining room window, hoping that my neighbors would move

their California-tagged car. Five days had passed and the black Toyota remained idle in

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² Quoted in Emily Badger's "How Black Gentrifiers Have Affected the Perception of Chicago's Changing Neighborhoods," published in *Atlantic Cities* Dec. 2012 online edition

its parking space outside my house. I didn't own the curb that lines the sidewalk in front

of my house. We didn't even own the land our house sits on, but this was our

neighborhood—not theirs.

"Someone is in the car," mommy yelled. "Do you see him?" she asked. "Yes, as

soon as he moves I'm moving my car into that space," I yelled back. I ran upstairs to put

on my rubber-bottom slippers and robe. After grabbing my keys and throwing on my

down jacket, I peered out the blinds. "He's not moving," my mom said. "He's just

warming up his car and cleaning out the trunk. Can you believe that? That car has been

there for seven days now."

"I'm calling the police," I yelled. "They call the police on our guests that only

park on the street for one day. We can't complain about what the police don't do for us, if

we never call." "This is not how we do things," my dad said. "It's the holidays. We can't

let this ruin our holiday."

They called the police, organized and proposed ordinances to prohibit us from

parking along the U Street corridor and even in front of my church, Shiloh Baptist. As the

Washington Post highlighted my church's 150th anniversary, it noted how we've survived

the city's cyclical gentrification. It neglected to mention how we can only street-park on

Sundays between 10 p.m. and 3 a.m. Those would be perfect hours if we were going to a

bar, but it's a church with services at 7:45 and 10:55a.m. For God's sake (literally), why

we can't park in front of their houses for a few hours on Sundays?

But I shouldn't call the police. I can't park in front of my house and I can't park

outside my church. We are being pushed out of our homes and our communities. Times

are changing in Washington, D.C., once affectionately known as Chocolate City.

"When I moved into this neighborhood, we were the only Black family on the block," my mom said as she looked out of her bedroom window. "We were the reason why our White neighbors left this neighborhood. Now, look at it." For the first time in recent history, Blacks are not the majority in Washington D.C.

I turned onto New York Avenue from 395 North, and I drove past new condominiums on either side of the street. I turned onto First Street and was unpleasantly surprised by what seemed to be the massive construction site of the new Dunbar High School. Grandma Belle, my maternal grandmother, attended Dunbar High, the first high school built for Blacks in the early 1930's. Dunbar High School resided just blocks away from one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in D.C., Circum Cordas. As I drove past the construction site, White men and women jogged up and down First Street with dogs and strollers. We've lost that neighborhood, and we're going to lose Dunbar. Instead of praising the D.C. Public School's plans for Dunbar's renovations, I was overwhelmed with feelings of anger and disappointment. I immediately questioned how long it would take for them to redraw the school's boundaries so fewer Black students would be eligible to attend.

Just before I turned onto Rhode Island Avenue, I noticed a new sushi restaurant next to the Yoga Studio on First Street. On some mornings, my cousin who lives in our old house in Bloomingdale, one of the more complete gentrified neighborhoods in the city invites me to her yoga class. Why couldn't the Yoga studio have opened before the neighborhood's demographics drastically changed from majority Black to almost all White. Black people do yoga. We eat sushi, too.

Conflicted by feelings of appreciation and anger, I don't know whether to protest the new amenities in our neighborhoods or make it a point to eat at every new restaurant and buy yoga passes at all of the community yoga studios. I don't know how to feel when I'm home anymore. I am an angry Black Washingtonian.

The city is slipping away from our grip, and I am at the University of Georgia earning a Ph.D. I'm not studying D.C. history or exploring media institutions in Washington, D.C. Distracted by the corruption of the city's local government, violence in the city's streets and seemingly hopeless community organization, I cower away from any research on D.C. Afraid and uneasy about confronting my own experiences growing up in D.C. conditioned by economic and social privilege, I reject any idea of immersing myself in D.C.'s social and cultural life. I am a fraud.

With little signs of what the Atlantic Cities article reported as Black gentrification in D.C., I am devastated as the city slips away from us. I feel helpless against what seems to be vicious movements of mass displacement across my city's historically Black neighborhoods. The amalgamation of unresolved feelings of resentment and anger about cultural changes in D.C. provides a complicated perspective on my research on Chicago's community, media and culture. I channel my anger about the lack of national discourse about crippling practices of gentrification and urban renewal that too often plague majority Black neighborhoods into my research on media and community.

My dissertation explores moments of social transformation to combat paralyzing thoughts of oppressive systemic practices, such as gentrification and urban revitalization. In these moments I examine how people engage in acts of individual and collective resistance and resilience via media. I interrogate how community members engage in

forms of community uplift, such as civic engagement, economic empowerment and political action. In doing so, I shed light on how media simultaneously provide concrete opportunities for people to produce sites of transformation and change, and reinforce hegemonic practices of discrimination.

The research process reminded me of the controversy over the idle Black Toyota Hybrid during Christmas Break and the changing landscapes of my D.C. neighborhoods. Although intentional in choosing a media organization outside of D.C., my economic and social privileges rooted in my experiences growing up at home helped form research goals and expectations. This dissertation emerges out of my struggle to recognize research as my exercise of agency.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION(S)

My research explores *Residents' Journal (RJ)*, an online publication, and how its historical and spatial formations in the Chicago community help shape practices of agency among former and current Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) residents. Throughout the project, I examine the perceived contradictions between activism and research in the context of community media, and narrative and academic writing. The goal of my research is to explore the social and historical processes that condition practices of agency.

In the following sections, I describe We the People Media and its *Residents' Journal*, locate community media research, and highlight scholars who engage in similar research, especially that which explores Black urban life and public housing in Chicago. At the end of this section, I situate my project and describe the goals of my research.

We the People Media and *Residents' Journal*

We the People Media (WtPM), a local Chicago nonprofit, was created to challenge unfounded and inaccurate portrayals of low-income, inner-city Chicago families in mainstream media (We the People Media, 2011a.). Established in 1996 under the auspices of CHA, *Residents' Journal (RJ)* gives voice to public housing and government-subsidized housing residents, with residents themselves writing and distributing it. *Residents' Journal* publishes articles that report information pertinent to Chicago's communities consisting of public and government-assisted housing

developments, including notices in changes with city housing policy and regulations, contact information for redevelopers and relocation services, calls for organized action against redrawn school districts and implemented lease compliance laws.

To combat the often-stereotypical representations of public and government subsidized housing residents, *RJ* also highlights community activities, such as the collaborative efforts in the construction of a new neighborhood library or the expansion of teenage community enrichment programs in the city and abroad. In 1998 the journal's directors and supporters formed the Urban Youth International Journalism (UYIJ) program.   This 8-week training program partners with various Chicago community organizations to teach middle and high school students the fundamentals of writing and reporting news stories. One year after UYIJ began, *RJ* separated from CHA, officially forming the nonprofit, WtPM (We the People Media, 2011b.).

We the People Media is governed by a Board of Directors. The president of the board is Eugene Scott, president of the *Chicago Defender* charities. Other members of the board include current and former CHA residents, a U.S. Congress representative, an attorney at law, sociologist and professor, and an author, (We the People Media, 2011b.). The nonprofit is funded by grants from the following organizations: McCormick Foundation, Polk Bros. Foundation, Pierce Family Foundation, Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, Landau Family Foundation, and Woods Fund of Chicago, (We the People Media, 2011b.).

Residents' Journal has more than 30 contributors, inclusive of freelance writers, photographers and circulation assistants. Mary C. Piemonte is the Deputy Executive Director of WtPM and Editor-in-Chief of *RJ*. Piemonte manages contributors and

oversees the production of the paper. Ethan Michaeli is the Executive Director of WtPM and publisher of *RJ*. Michaeli solicits funds for WtPM and manages *RJ's* publishing processes.

Since its first issue, *RJ* has reported on city policy and mandates that directly influence pubic housing communities. Readers find stories that explain the impacts of city policies on various communities, and that provide instructions for such strategies of activism in communities. Examples of instructions include providing telephone numbers to contact a community alderman, and the locations and times of community meetings organized to plan responses to proposed city budgets or zoning policies.

To explore the *RJ* as one moment of history, conditioned by past and existing social relations, my research historicizes and interrogates the emergence and ongoing transformation of the journal's production. Thus, my research investigates the emergence of *RJ* and its engagement in public housing community life and action.

Conceptualizing Community Media Research

Often traced to Alexis de Tocqueville's comparative study on the function of the French and American local press in the early 1800s, research on community and media has remained a topic of interest in social science and humanities disciplines (Lowrey, 2012). In the early 1920s Robert Park, a social theorist at the University of Chicago examined the role of the immigrant and ethnic press in processes of socialization and assimilation among Black southern migrants and European immigrants (Lowrey, 2012). Several decades later in the late 1960s, Morris Janowitz's research focused research on community and media (Lowrey, 2012). Janowitz was interested in Chicago's community press and its role in community integration (Lowrey, 2012, Janowitz, 1952/67).

More contemporary research on community and media continues to examine the function of media in various social, economic and political contexts. As new channels of communication emerge and grassroots social movements continue to organize, community and local media continue to be topics of interest among mass communication scholars.

Based on the survey of literature on community media, I have identified two major trends in community and media research. One trend explores the role of media in the formation of community life. In this body of work, media are often conceptualized as representative of community life, and analyzed separate from cultural practices. In the second trend, community and media research explores what Howley (2005) identified as mediations that take place through communicative forms and practices. In this literature, media is identified as a site of cultural production, and media are examined to identify ways in which they engage in and encourage democratic communication. Although separated into two categories for purposes of the review of literature, there are some examples of research where both trends overlap.

Media's Formation of Community Life

Reader (2012) defined community journalism as, " a specific practice of gathering, packaging, and distributing news in predominantly small, distinct geographic markets, with an emphasis on local news and information about community life," (pg. 3). Steiner (2012) highlighted that community journalism, unlike corporate, commercial media, is produced by and for specific communities. Its content should be relevant and of vital interest to its listeners. Referencing Raymond Williams and his definition of community in *Keywords,* Steiner (2012) stated that community journalism also explores

the social meaning of community. Steiner highlights the commonalities and communal practices of community, and emphasizes that community journalism tells stories of difference and diversity in sometimes, perceived homogenized, local and small communities.

With this conceptualization of community journalism, community media can be understood as a vehicle of communication, which helps shape and tells stories of community life. In my survey of literature, I have found that research grounded in this definition of community media/journalism often engages in analyses that explore the role of media in the formation of physical geographic communities and social identities of communities. In doing so, community journalism/media is often recognized for its efforts to create alternative spaces and its ability to give voice to the seemingly powerless communities against dominant, corporate media institutions.

Tanikella (2006) examined the role of New York City's Indo-Caribbean media, specifically radio and newspapers, in the representation and formation of transnational identities. Through in-depth interviews, participant-observation and textual analysis, Tanikella (2006) found that NYC Indo Caribbean media provided narratives of belonging and identity. Like Tanikella's (2006) interest in media and identity formation, Novek (1995) conducted research on the role of the local newspaper in a community of high school African-American males. He postulated that in the practice of production and distribution of a community newspaper, the Black males felt increased self-determination, despite the stereotypical negative identity projected onto them by their school. Novek (1995) concluded that community media helped change the way in which the Black males identified with themselves.

In contrast to Novek's work on American Black male identity, Johnston (2011) studied the formation of Noongar identity among Aboriginal Australians. In an analysis of media content and interviews with media consumers, Johnston (2011) found that indigenous radio and television stations represented the complexity and diversity within the Noongar community.

Tanikella (2006) and Johnston (2011) explored relations between media and cultural identity. Similarly, Mhiripiri (2011) examined two Zimbabwe community radio stations' survival and persistence during national political crises. Based on information gathered from interviews with media producers and textual analyses of media content, Mhiripiri (2011) found that community radio prioritized legal action, such as lobbying for broadcasting licensing. Mhiripiri (2011) highlighted how community media can produce volunteer-generated content while also mobilizing listeners to participate in political practices, such as advocacy and lobbying with local officials. In sum, Mhiripiri's research explored the intersections of community, media and structured political processes.

In accordance with Mhiripiri's (2011) focus on political practices, Boyle and Schmierbach (2009) conducted a survey to compare the influence of mainstream and alternative media on political participation. As hypothesized, Boyle and Schmierbach (2009) found that alternative media was positively associated with heavy political participation and protest participation. Orozco (2006) examined Fresno, Ca. radio station and its coverage on the May 1, 2006 pro-immigration marches to explore the impact of the radio's content on the march's participants.

After conducting focus groups with participants and textual analysis of radio content Orozco (2011) concluded that radio content motivated listeners to participate in the march. It also encouraged them to unite and organize to fight against practices of discrimination and exploitation of immigrants. Orozco (2011) also examined radio stations in Appalachia counties in Kentucky and West Virginia to explore what kinds of information was broadcasted that would improve quality of life for residents. After analyzing survey data and in-depth interviews, Orozco (2011) concluded that listeners expected radio stations to disseminate information about more pertinent issues, like drug abuse and access to health care in the community.

All of the articles (with the exception of one) mentioned above, employed qualitative methodology to explore the role of media in the formation of community, of cultural identity, and the motivation of political participation. Analyses separated community media institutions from cultural life and production to highlight how media represented, motivated or helped change forms of cultural life. In these specific examples of research, analyses do not account for the complexities and contradictory nature in community media. In contrast, research that examines democratization of community media historicizes media practices, which helps account for how social, economic and political formations condition media as a part of cultural life.

Community Media as Democratic Communication

Howley (2005) stated, " In the face of the homogenizing influence of national media industries and the encroachment of cultural forms produced and distributed by transnational corporations, community media provide a measure of local cultural autonomy in an increasingly privatized, global media environment," (pg. 35). For

Howley, community media initiatives and strategies are one concrete way to democratize communication to help provide local autonomy in a dominant, corporate media environment. In doing so, Howley (2005) noted that community media provides public space for people to debate politics and celebrate cultural heritage, aspects of building community often missing from dominant media practice. To emphasize the centrality of human action and social struggle, Howley (2005) wrote that community media demonstrates signs of resistance and subversion, and submission and complicity.

Like Howley (2005), Hamilton (2008) highlighted the complex nature of community, and noted how analyses of community media must historicize community action to investigate how media allows for collaboration and solidarity and causes isolation and division. Atton and Hamilton (2008) emphasized the complexity of alternative media/journalism in their discussion on alternative journalism as mixed economy. In sum, the discussion pointed to similarities in training and reporting of news and sources of funds and news among mainstream or popular media and alternative media. Therefore, while community media initiatives have specific goals aligned with democratizing communication, or the expansion of range of voice and power among people, community media also reinforce hegemonic practices of corporate, privatized media (Atton and Hamilton, 2008).

Research grounded in this complex conceptualization of community media explored ways in which community media helps produce and condition forms of cultural change and social shifts. In doing so, scholars critically engaged in the production of media practice, focusing on people's action and struggle in writing, editing, reading and

distributing forms of media. With an emphasis on action and struggle, community media is interrogated as historical and cultural processes, not static, causal tools or objects.

Howley (2005) conducted participatory research at a community radio station in Bloomington, Indiana. In his research, he historicized the formation of the physical geography of community, exploring the social implications of the University of Indiana on community life and the role of railroad on the immigrant and migrant population. While Howley (2005) identified ways in which this radio station provided alternative space for conversations pertinent to local communities, he raised issues of praxis—what voice would represent the community. With an emphasis on the historical patterns of population shifts, examination of class struggle between the "bohemians" and the "professionals," in Bloomington, Howley (2005) located the local radio station at the nexus of class and social community struggle.

Similar to Howley's historical analysis of Bloomington's local radio station, Caldwell (2003) conducted an analysis of community media in migrant populations in Southern California. In his research, Caldwell (2003) traced the role of the Latino migrant worker in the social fabric of Southern California communities. Over six years, Caldwell worked with migrant workers to produce video communicating information vital to community members, such as HIV prevention and access to care. Caldwell (2003) concluded that the production of video was one form of community media, but moments when he and workers occupied unauthorized space on plantations to film video was also one form of alternative media. For Caldwell, community media were simultaneously forms of media practices and political projects, in which migrant workers (re)positioned themselves as powerful, social actors.

In contrast to Caldwell's analysis of community media as political projects, Fisher (2009) conducted a study on community radio in Aboriginal culture in Australia. In his research, Fisher historicized political acts that led to the destruction of many Aboriginal families, and helped shape the remaining Aboriginal communities. Fisher (2009) highlighted how community radio transcended physical space, and helped link up torn-apart families and social values. At the same time, Fisher's research engaged in ways in which community radio reinforced hegemonic practices of dominant media and oppressive political practices, such as disseminating inauthentic Aboriginal cultural messages. He concluded that while community radio emerged out of destructive political acts, it also helped produce further division and lack of cultural awareness among Aboriginal communities.

Like Fisher's (2009) focus on cultural production, Fuentes-Bautista and Gil-Egni (2011) conducted a study on community radio in Venezuela after the establishment of community media policies. Their research traced the enactment of policies and their role in shaping cultural life in Venezuela. While media initiatives encouraged and legalized citizen participation in media production, Fuentes-Bautista and Gil-Egni (2011) identified trends of further fragmentation in media systems, specifically among disenfranchised Venezuelan communities.

With an emphasis on human action and struggle, the aforementioned research on community media employed critical social theories to examine media as cultural practice. As cultural practices, the message is not central to analysis. Instead, the historical patterns of transformations in communities as a result of political legislation and

governance, and social practices of submission and subversion guide analyses on the (re)production of community media.

My research conceptualizes community media as practice as it explores processes of subversions and submission. Conditions, form and practices are prioritized over content; however, as Howley (2005) noted, analyses of content are integral in the examination of community media. Therefore, "Breaking Down Wells" explores historical contexts of *RJ,* which account for the economic and social conditions of its emergence while also examining content of media texts, which help tell a story of Chicago's Black cultural life in public housing.

Chicago's Black Community

My research on *RJ* contributes to existing literature on media participation and practices, as it explores the production of limiting and emancipatory media practices in Black urban life in Chicago. My project locates *RJ* within the context of the Black press, specifically the *Chicago Defender*, and the expansion of public housing to African-Americans in Chicago. In the survey of literature on the intersections of African-American studies and urban affairs and planning, I have found a breadth of research on the role of *Chicago Defender* in Black community life and the effects of public housing on Black community life.

Mullen (1999) investigated the cultural politics of Black Chicago at one peak of the Great Migration from the mid 1930's to 40's. Boyd (2011) analyzed the growth of the Black population in the context of the Great Migration. Both Mullen and Boyd focused on political and economic gains and losses in Black communities across Chicago. Baldwin's (2007) *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration*

and Black Urban Life traced the emergence of a Black middle class in Chicago and the transformation of Black community in urban life post-Great Migration.

Scholars engaged in historical analyses of race, spatial, gendered and class relations in Chicago that helped shape Black communities across the city of Chicago. In contrast to these works which primarily focus on the formation of Black urban life in Chicago as a result of the social shifts during the Great Migration, my project will examine the historical patterns of urban life in public housing via media practices, specifically the *Chicago Defender* and WtPM's publication, the *Residents' Journal*. Since the Ida B. Wells Homes was among the first public housing developments built for African-Americans in the United States, there is a massive amount of research on public housing in Black Chicago communities.

In 1945, St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton published *The Black Metropolis,* an integral book examining Black urban Southside communities in Chicago. In this book, the authors explored the structural formation of the Southside communities through a detailed analysis of race, economic, political and class relations. As demolition projects began on historic public housing development sites several decades later, among other works on Chicago's public housing, Bradford Hunt (2009) published *Blueprint for Disaster*, which detailed the history of public housing in Black communities and its effect on community life over the years.

Similarly, Oakley and Burchfield (2009) conducted research on the spatial constraints on public housing residents' relocation after demolition projects. Their research highlighted how physical boundaries of public housing developments often transformed into social and economic barriers for residents, even after relocation to

mixed-income and government-subsidized housing neighborhoods. Smith (2012) published *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis,* which interrogated the formation of Black civic and political ideologies in post-war Chicago, and its influence on Black public housing communities. Smith examined class and political disputes during the emergence of public housing in Chicago's Black communities. He detailed how the implications of the social space of public housing helped contribute to the fragmentation of Black communities (Smith, 2012).

Scholars have explored ways in which public housing influenced the formation of Black community life. Public housing often caused division in communities, and created spaces and cycles of violence and victimization. In contrast, public housing simultaneously provided better living conditions for a new, emergent migrant population in Chicago and created spaces of community uplift through social and political action.

Situating My Research

Anchored in mass communication, specifically critical media studies, my research draws from existing literature on community media as democratic communication, the emergence of Black urban communities in the context of the Great Migration, and public housing and Black community life. My project attempts to tell the interconnected, seemingly convoluted story of how agency is exercised and conditioned via *RJ's* productive forces. The research examines how class, race and spatial relations exert pressures on practices of social resilience and activism. Using historical cultural materialism and its emphasis on active processes, my research shows how media provide and limit alternative spaces of social (re)positioning and reclamation of social power in cultural life.

Cultural theory and analysis guides my research on *Residents' Journal*. As Reader (2012) stated, the application of this theoretical framework to the analysis of community and media is just beginning to gain momentum within the mass communication discipline. However, he emphasized the relevance and necessity of the engagement with critical and cultural theory because it is flexible, open-ended and not restrained by any single methodology.

The goals of my research are to historicize *Residents' Journal* in the context of the Black press, specifically the *Chicago Defender;* to interrogate exercises of agency, and how systemic structures exerted pressures, conditioning the exercise of that agency; and to critique the perception that research and activism are unrelated activities.

Outline of Chapters

In the next chapter, "Politics of Writing Histories," I explain the theoretical and methodological approach used to guide my investigation of *RJ*. To help build historical context and examine the social relations within Chicago's Black communities, media and public housing, my third chapter, "All is Wells With My Soul," examines the *Chicago Defender's* coverage of the construction of Ida B. Wells Homes. The fourth chapter, "And the Wells Came Tumbling Down," analyzes *RJ* articles published during the Wells Homes' demolition project. Both chapters interrogate specific practices and forms of agency and how hegemonic practices conditioned residents' exercise of that agency. Interspersed throughout my chapters, I've included reflections on personal experiences that help dispel the dichotomous relationship between activism and research. Processes of self-reflexivity show how critical and cultural theories have conditioned the perspectives and understanding of my daily-lived experiences. My research concludes

with a discussion about practices of contingent agency via imperfect forms of community

media.

CHAPTER 2

POLITICS OF WRITING HISTORIES: THEORY AND METHOD

History is active means and constant social process. It is not dead, but alive in the stories and daily interactions of people, alive in experience and cultural practices (Johnson, 1981, p.11).

On Theory and Method

Nelson, MeGill and McCloskey (1987) defined rhetoric as simultaneously content, characteristic and a form of practice. Their book and call for a radical shift in conceptualizing and engaging with theory and method, *The Rhetoric of Human Sciences* traced the theoretical and methodological evolutions in various disciplines while grappling with the often, dichotomous relationship between theory and method in the context of analysis. Traditionally, theory guides method, but Nelson, MeGill and McCloskey's (1987) approach on rhetoric, blurred rigid lines between theory and method.

Rhetoric as content, characteristics and practice informs the conceptualization of communication and guides communicative analyses—thus, acting as theory and method. Johnson (1982) was in agreement with Nelson et al. (1987) as he warned against the separation between theory and method in cultural studies. For Johnson (1982), his engagement with cultural studies is a distinct theoretical and methodological guide. He identified specific pillars of cultural studies, including history, social forms and text (Johnson, 1986/87). These pillars are central elements in conceptualizing theory and conducting cultural analyses.

This chapter discusses theory and method in tandem, which Johnson (1982) and Nelson et al. (1987) emphasized in their work on rhetoric and cultural studies. In doing so, I identify and define central elements in historical cultural materialism and critical geography, as the theoretical and methodological framework for my research. I also highlight ways in which critical and cultural studies are inclusive of critical geography, and as an extension of that discussion, explain my selection of evidence and methods for analysis.

Historical Cultural Materialism

Historical cultural materialism emerged as a reaction to social science's separation of culture from material social life (Klaus, 1993). Terry Eagleton's work on literary theory is one exemplar of historical cultural materialism's shift away from the isolation of cultural objects, and the movement towards analyses that focus on the reconstitution of society (Eagleton, 1998; Roberts, 2000). The analysis of the reconstitution of society rejects economic and technological determinism, and focuses on human practices. In historical cultural materialism, analyses prioritize form over content. Frederic Jameson defined form as the genre, style and structure (Roberts, 2000). In analyses, forms are historicized to interrogate conditions and contexts of emergence, conceptualizing forms as a part of material social life and practices (Klaus, 1993).

In the context of critical and cultural media studies, communication and culture are conceptualized as active historical processes (Marx, 1847 and Klaus, 1993). As action, communication is the continued process of re-creating meaning among individuals in society (Williams, 1961/2001). Meaning is created, exists and is shared both individually and collectively. As meaning is exchanged and remade on a personal

and communal level, community is formed (Williams, 1961/2001). In accordance with Williams (1961/2001), Shin (2009) and Reader (2012) stated that community is a collective formation of diverse individuals. Community is created in and through difference, and thus, community is formed in and through communicative practice.

Similar to the conceptualization of communication as practice, cultural theorists also define culture as active processes, rather than as an isolated, reflective object. According to Williams (1961/2001) culture is made up of intertwined and inseparable historical processes. Historical processes are not linear processes with predictable or specified trajectories. Williams (1961/2001) identified creative human activity as central to these processes. The emphasis on human activity allows for levels of fluidity and movement—all parts of historical processes. It is in this movement that Williams accounts for the emergence of social transformations and change (Williams, 1961/2001; Klaus, 1993).

Historical cultural materialism, rooted in Marxist theory, emphasizes class struggle (Haslett, 2000). The focus on class struggle highlights the centrality of human activity, rather than economic forces (Haslett, 2000; Marx, 1857/1971).   In class struggle, people engage in practices and produce texts, or what Marx termed, material (Haslett, 2000; Marx, 1857/1971). Marx's position on material and human activity helped substantiate his claim that culture is not reflective of economics, and is instead open and in constant flux.

In cultural analyses, social relations are analyzed to examine constantly changing historical processes. Analyses of social relations highlight the dialectical relations between structure and agency. In *German Ideology,* Marx and Engels (1845-46/1970)

articulated the dialectic of agency and structure in an industrial, economic context. "Men are producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc.—real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces," (Marx and Engels, p. 47, 1845-46/1970). Here, Marx and Engels highlighted how individuals participate in the making of their social and physical environments, while simultaneously and continuously being conditioned by those produced forces. Historical cultural materialism's emphasis on human action does not reduce individuals to robots with dominant structures or privileged as decontextualized objects acting with free will. People produce and engage in active material cultural processes and practices that are constitutive of society.

In analyses of structure and agency, culture is not idealized but is recognized as being constitutive of social life (Klaus, 1993). Eagleton (1998) noted that the whole society is reconstituted through people's material interactions within social, political and economic practices. Culture, located in historical processes, is interrogated with questions of past and present, and examined to recognize how social beings, individually and collectively, help create social life (Klaus, 1993 and Williams, 1980). Historical cultural materialism historicizes moments of social, economic and political growth and change in everyday communicative experiences among people, individually and collectively.

Historical cultural materialism's emphasis on communication and culture as practice informs my analysis of *RJ*. Using historical cultural materialism as a theoretical and methodological guide, my research explores how moments of social transformation and change form in daily-lived experiences. My analysis contextualizes *RJ* in historical, spatial and social formations of the African-American community in inner city Chicago.

Drawing upon historical cultural materialism, my research interrogates how structures of race, class and space may exert specific pressures and condition exercises of agency.

Space and Spatial Praxis

Communication forms are primarily contextualized in social space (Shin, 2009). Individuals are historically and socially attached and located in space (Williams, 1973). Physical environments help shape human behavior, influencing political action, civic engagement and democratic practice, among other cultural and social practices (Shin, 2009). In this section, I highlight critical geographers and their work on space and spatial practices, and space and social struggles as crucial to my conceptualization of agency and media practices.

Prior to the 1960s and 1970s, spatiality was primarily thought of as "things in space." Spaces were defined by concrete and empirical geographies (Soja, 2010). In the late 1960s, Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre radically shifted from an empirical restrictive concept of space, to a socially produced and producing concept of space.

Foucault's (1977) work on spatiality explored the intersections of space, knowledge and power. For example, Foucault conducted research on the physical infrastructure of prison buildings. He argued that prisons were built so that inmates would constantly be under surveillance by guards. Space was no longer just a material place on the map. For Foucault specifically, space was a powerful force that exerted pressures on the formation of everyday life. His research helped build spatial consciousness as it explored how spaces were sites of politics, social privileges, practices of oppression, justice and the possibility for emancipation (Foucault, 1977).

Similarly, Lefebvre's (1991) concept of space emphasized human practice, and the (re)constitution of space. Lefebvre emphasized this point in his discussion on the spatial triad. He argued that there are three points in this triad—spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation. Lefebvre (1991) defined spatial practice as the means by which material spaces are made, and human activity that use and transform those spaces. Representations of space are the social relations in which spatiality is produced. On this second point of the triad, he contended that the social relations and their imposition of order are examined to trace historical transformation. Lastly, spaces of representation are the spaces in which people live through complex images and symbols. According to Lefebvre (1991), this triad exists in unity, but is simultaneously contradictive. Lefebvre's triad highlighted how people participate in the production of specific geographies conditioned by specific practices of social life.

Soja's (1989) introduction and application of the socio-spatial dialectic is rooted in Lefebvre's spatial triad as it focuses on social spaces. The socio-spatial dialectic helped move contemporary geography towards more critical analyses of space and spatial structures' role in the construction of social life. The socio-spatial dialectic represents how space and social life are simultaneously contradictory and constitutive of one another. For Soja (1989), space is both political and ideological, molded by historical, political, and social processes. Soja (1989) contended that the relationship between social agency and space is both contingent and necessary. People create geographies within particular geographic, political, cultural and social constraints that then shape human action (Soja, 1985). For Soja, space is inherently socialized, and social life is also simultaneously and inherently spatial.

Soja (2010) and Swyngedouw (2000) argued for the inclusion of a spatial perspective in examining practices of injustices and concomitantly for exploring strategies for social change. Like Soja (1989), Swyngedouw (2000) argued that the production of space is inherently political as it forms in and emerges out of struggle, specifically class conflict. Through class struggle, the production of space constitutes disempowering and empowering processes that either reinforce dominance or create alternatives for resistance (Swyngedouw, 2000).

Herod's (2011) work on labor and spatial practice applied Soja's socio-spatial dialectic to examine distributions and emergence of power in workplaces. Herod (2011) highlighted the formation and exercise of spatial praxis, which he defined as the practices and activities in the making of geographies (both physical landscapes and economic, social and political relations that condition spatial structures). Both Herod (2011) and Soja (1985) contended that spatiality is intricate, unevenly developed and constantly remade.

Physical landscapes are sites of political and social conflict, reflective of social practices and interests of people who built them (Herod, 2011). In Herod's article on spatial engineering in company towns, he stated:

> Such places must continue to be supervised lest their inhabitants
> start to subvert their spatialities by developing alternate geographies
> of social life, even within the physicality of the constraints laid down
> by the town planners…Such is the nature of the continuous struggle
> over space, (p. 38).

Herod's quote pointed to how physical landscapes influence social relations and practices among people who built them and occupy the spaces. The production and reproduction

of social life is complex, as it is conditioned and shaped by historical spatial and social

structures (Herod, 2011; Soja, 1985).

Soja (1985, 1989) and Herod (2011) highlighted the relational and social

production of space. Also, both theorists emphasized the necessity of conceptualizing the

uneven production of space to explore social and political struggle. Harvey (1976) stated

that space is a condition for the (re)production of labor and domestic life. According to

Harvey, the built environment, such as public housing and private property, are spaces

where capital intercedes in class struggle.

Walker (1981) engaged in research on uneven production of urban spaces.

Walker (1981) highlighted how social relations create constraints and pressures that

inform particular forms of spatial organization. He postulated that American urban spaces

are sites of reproduction of capital and capitalist social relations. Harvey (1976) and

Walker (1981) examined the production of built environments, e.g. urban cities, as

divisional and often, discriminatory practices.

In contrast to Harvey (1976) and Walker's (1981) focus on spatial practice and

structural constraints, Herod (2011) emphasized how spatial practices produce alternative

spaces of power. In Herod's chapter on the spatial engineering of company towns, he

asserted that the production of space facilitates exercises of power. To illustrate this

point, Herod explored the relationship between managers and laborers in work

environments finding that laborers recreate space as means to redistribute power.

Although managers construct landscapes to exercise power over laborers,

laborers, as social agents, also create alternative geographies, in which laborers subvert

the symbolic power in the constructed landscapes (Herod, 2011). He detailed how

workers transform parks, originally built by companies as places for relaxation and respite into places of protest against company plans. Herod (2011) provided evidence of the continuous struggle over space, the participation of social actors in that struggle, and at certain moments, creations of alternative geographies.

This section has provided an overview of critical geographers work on space and spatial practices and their role in the construction of discriminatory and emancipatory social practices. My analysis of *RJ* draws upon the research illustrative of constitutive and contradictory relations of space as it explores the struggle in the socio-spatial production of the Wells Homes and the contradictions in representation of this space between Wells Homes' residents and non-residents. In the next section, I highlight how cultural theorists have engaged in spatially conscious analyses to help further contextualize my research.

Spatial and Communicative Practices

My research explores ways in which individuals exercise spatial and communicative agency. Various communication and social theorists have explored functions and practices of communication across space. Cultural theorists, such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall and their work on space, culture and communication guide my examination of WtPM as communicative and spatial practice.

Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams were concerned with how sites of social transformation emerge out of conflict in specific geographic spaces and the relevance of that to broader social and cultural issues. Hall and Williams examined sites of uneven production, exploring historical moments when moments of opposition emerged out of spatial and class struggle. Harvey (1995) referenced Williams in his discussion on

locating working-class individuals in "bonding processes for the working class," (p. 80).

In these processes, the working class search for ways to overcome unfavorable labor, economic and cultural conditions. However, Williams postulated that alternative practices emerge out of specific places conditioned by practices of domination and control. Therefore, for Williams, places may be sites of both domination and resilience (Harvey, 1995).

In his analysis of the representation of country and city life in English literature, Williams (1973) described how the Industrial Revolution's economics and labor relations shaped the formation and divisions of the English city and country. Despite the common contemporary belief (at that time) that the country was an escape from corrupt city life, Williams' chapter "Country and the City" suggested that exploitation of people and nature occurred in the country and in the city. Economic and labor conflict functioned to simultaneously stratify built-environments and exploit people that lived and worked in these spaces.

In his research on social relations in the country and city, Williams (1973) found that many villages in England emerged as communities when economic and political rights were fought for and partially gained. Various people across physical geographic areas formed united communities in and through economic and political struggles. The collective communities, as much as the individual people, were integral in processes of repositioning of powers and emergence of new geographies.

Williams (1973) did not overlook the complexity in the production of space and social relations. Forms of resistance and resilience emerge out of spatial struggle, but can still be corrupted by dominant and oppressive relations. On this point, Hall (1978, 2006)

like Williams identified the centrality of space in the processes of social transformation, and also the complications of social change. As Williams (1973) extrapolated the country and city analogy to describe the constitutive relationship between individuals and space, Hall (1978, 2006) examined representations in language and imagery to interrogate the spatial and communicative practices that shape and inform racial politics.

In Hall's essay, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular," he examined the constant power struggle between dominant and non-dominant classes through popular culture. Hall (2006) argued that culture industries are made powerful and sustained through institutions, but their meanings located in their representations, are in constant flux. And as a result, popular culture is reproduced and reorganized in representation. For Hall (2006), representation as an analytical entry interrogates strategic positions (e.g. social and political), won and lost, by both institutions of power and individual people.

In Hall's (1978) chapter "Politics of Mugging," in *Policing the Crisis*, he analyzed the social construction of Black youth in London ghettos. Hall (1978) described Black youth as victims of systems of housing segregation, labor and employment discrimination, and racial prejudice. Black youth lived in ghettos, which Hall (1978) defined as built infrastructures, conditioned by and representative of violent acts, such as mugging. Hall (1978) noted that London media geographically and ethnically located Black crime in ghettos, where significant numbers of Black youth lived.

Despite negatively biased media attention, people living in ghettos formed a renewed identity, one unitized as a result of consistent policing, segregation and discrimination (Hall, 1978). With this homogenous identity, Blacks, living in the ghetto emerged with a militant consciousness, opposing the government and specifically law

enforcement (See Hall's discussion on the Black Panthers in *The Politics of Mugging* for a similar discussion). Despite the emergence of opposition out of socio-spatial constraints, Hall (1978) made the point that heterogeneity of political and social interests among residents of the ghetto was sacrificed for unitization. The lack of focus on individuality and diversity in one way reinforced the homogenizing (mis)representations of Black youth.

Williams and Hall used spatiality to explore the social, cultural, historical relations of cultural practices necessary for social transformation and change. Each scholar conceptualized communication as practice, and located people at the nexus of spatial and communicative relations. According to Hall and Williams, people are engaged in constant struggle and conflict, which results in strategic societal repositioning.

The section above has detailed how cultural theorists engaged in spatially conscious research. The sections on critical geography and cultural studies of communicative practices shed light on how space has been used to analyze and interrogate the historical and social dimensions of life. With historical cultural materialism as a theoretical and methodological framework, my research will engage in an analysis that is conscious and inclusive of spatial, social and historical processes that help shape lived experiences. Through a critical textual analysis, I will historicize *RJ* to shed light on how communicative and spatial practices reinforce hegemonic practices, and simultaneously provide concrete opportunities for people to produce sites of transformation and change.

Writing Histories

Historical investigation is integral in critical cultural studies and critical geographies. In my research, historical writing is but one means in which to analyze social shifts, transformation and change. Johnson (1982) stated that making histories is concerned with the social relations between past and present. He pointed out that, "We cannot…understand the particular determinancy of class or other social struggles in any other way: re-creating them in the past, necessarily living them in the present and future," (Johnson, p. 201, 1982).

Historical analyses help identify and interpret the significance of popular conceptions of history. They raise questions about public memories, and the social constructions of the relations between past and present human activity, and how it translates in day-to-day interactions (Johnson, 1982). Critical historical investigations explore the emergence and active historical processes of current social and political movements. Again, according to Johnson, historical writing should analyze various cultural groups and their ideas and practices to help create an understanding about the specific conditions that inhibited some form of social change.

Like Johnson (1982), Schwarz (1982), emphasized a close analysis of specific conditions to help make sense of how people participate in the making of their own histories. He warned against the separation of social and economic factors. Schwarz, Johnson and Williams suggested that human activity should be integral in the analysis of transition and transformation. These moments of transition and transformation can only be accounted for in historical investigation and writing (Schwarz, 1982).

According to Johnson (1982), historical writing should not describe the historical details of the past or the historical conditions that foster cultural shifts and changes. Instead, Johnson prescribed that historical writing should work on different levels. Johnson stated:

> It is hard to imagine a detailed account, for example, that does not make assumptions about the nature of human beings in general. On the other hand, there are some social determinations that can only be reached by a close consecutive study of events that re-creates the conditions and the stratagems, (p. 201).

For Johnson, historical writing involves interrogations of the abstract and concrete patterns of social life. Williams (1961) also argued that the analysis of patterns will usually result in an amalgamation of activities, but analyses should remain focused on the possible commonality in the experiences out of which these patterns emerge, and are abstracted in cultural analyses.

Text and Abstractions

Johnson (1986/87) defined text as a means of cultural analyses. From texts, social forms are abstracted and examined as constitutive elements of social life. Abstraction is historical as it locates forms of social organization, and explores the possibility and dimensions of further development (Johnson, 1982). Johnson (1986/87) asserted that forms are defined, contextualized, and interpreted by the researcher.

Textual analyses examine the subjective forms of social and cultural life to explore how people are constituted as social and political individuals (Johnson, 1986/97). Individuals produce and consume texts, exercising some control over the processes of their social lives. In the production and consumption of texts, some subjective forms are prioritized over others. Some forms reproduce existing forms of racial or spatial

oppression or domination, while others provide alternative representations and interpretations of social life. Johnson (1982) stated that forms should be extracted to an abstract level of analysis to scrutinize what structural pressures and conditions shape the historical process.

After the extraction of forms on an abstract level, Johnson (1982) stated that analyses should work on a more concrete level. He noted, "Presenting the real movement means moving, in thought, from abstractions of different kinds to something like the real complexity of the world which we are trying to understand," (Johnson, p. 158, 1982). Through this kind of analysis we can understand how cultural material processes are (re)produced, and active and enacted in people's ideas and action.

Different practices of social life, such as production and consumption of media, are isolated to analyze complex movements, and shed light on any processes of potential social shifts. Moments are isolated for close examination, but then reconstituted. Although historical cultural materialism calls for an analysis of economic, historical and social structures as equivalent dimensions of culture, Johnson (1982) noted that these dimensions must be analyzed individually first, and then reconceptualized as Williams (1961) stated as a complex whole.

Williams and Johnson asserted that culture and cultural analyses are complex whole processes. Similarly, Johnson (1986/87) stated that the text is reconstituted to include various moments of representation and reproductive practices across different genres. After examining forms and processes of production across different kinds of evidence, analyses point to common experiences of social and cultural life.

Textual Analysis, Newspapers and Community

In accordance with Johnson (1981) and Williams (1961) postulations on text and cultural studies, Stuart Hall (1975) stated that cultural analyses should investigate the social processes of production and consumption of texts. In his introduction to *Paper Voices*, he distinguished between content and what he called literary textual forms of analyses of newspapers. Analyses of newspapers as activity, not isolated tools of transmission, focus on tone, which helps interpret the structures of meaning in newspapers. A full literary analysis accounts for the social and technical production of the newspapers and the readers who consume and read the papers. In my cultural analyses, I examine the historical processes of emergence, evolution and transformations that are constitutive of community and social life in inner city Chicago.

Nord (2001) noted that communities are built and sustained via communication. Printed communication has been at the root of community, specifically urban life. In the city, newspapers helped blur the lines between private and public life. In his study of the urbanization of Chicago, Nord (2001) postulated that newspapers had the task of creating a product that would appeal to some part of everyone in the city. Because of this, Nord suggested that newspapers can be examined to help understand the formation and of the constantly evolving community, specifically urban life.

Newspapers help make sense of the intricacies of the nexus of social, political and economic structures necessary to build and sustain community (Nord, 2001). Newspapers also provide evidence of how communities are created within communities. For example, in his study of the yellow fever epidemic in Chicago, Nord (2001) found that newspapers simultaneously helped eliminate and create distance in community. Nord

concluded that the production and consumption of news was one practice of active citizenship.

In accordance with Hall (1975) and Williams (1961/2001), Nord (2001) suggested that this practice of citizenship encompasses more than disseminations of written messages. Nord (2001) acknowledged the social processes in newspapers production and consumption. For Nord (2001) and Hall (1975), newspapers are cultural artifacts that provide evidence of the dialectics and complexities of culture. Newspapers are simultaneously private, public, industrial, economic, social, and political institutions (Nord, 2001). The contradictory nature of newspapers reflects and is representative of the complexities of culture, and the changing patterns of our social and cultural life.

Identification of the Text

Hall (1975) stated that immersion is the necessary first step in historical and cultural analyses. During this stage, Smith (2012) described how the researcher is able to hone in on a narrow, specific area. Hall (1975) asserted that this immersion, what he called "the long preliminary soak," is helpful in selecting meaningful and significant evidence.

Two key elements guided the immersion process—the *Chicago Defender* and the Chicago Housing Authority. Using these two elements, I identified historical moments relevant to my research goals. In 1937, the Chicago Housing authority was established and in 1941, the Ida B. Wells Homes opened, the first public housing development built solely for African Americans. After establishing historical moments, I searched for evidence that would help tell a story about the Ida B. Wells Homes, specifically in African-American communities in inner city Chicago.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Chicago remained one of the main hubs for the Great Migration because of railroad access (Mullen, 1999). African-American newspapers targeted the Black population of the South with advertisements of jobs and safety. The *Chicago Defender*, founded by Robert Abbott, was in national circulation and a main source of information for African-Americans across the nation (Simmons, 1998). One of Abbott's main goals for the paper was to attract more African Americans to what the paper claimed was a stable, safer life in Chicago (Simmons, 1998). Abbott used images and sensationalist headlines to communicate to African-Americans in the South that Chicago was an escape from discriminatory practices, such as sabotaged crops, limitations in employment opportunities and lynching (Simmons, 1998).

Based on the *Defender's* prominence in the newspaper industry and its credibility in the African-American community in the early 1940s, I chose it as evidence for analysis. The Ida B. Wells Homes helped determine the time span of selection of newspaper articles. The homes opened in 1941, but to analyze more critically the construction, opening and function of the homes in community, I chose to gather evidence from January 1935 to January 1945. During this time period, I searched *Defender* articles.

Using the search terms, "Ida B. Wells" on the ProQuest *Chicago Defender* electronic database, I found 13,872 articles published with the search term appearing anywhere in articles, advertisements, and correspondence. To help narrow my search, I chose to reformulate my search to "Ida B. Wells homes" in articles. This search resulted in 3,449 articles. Following this search, I developed new search terms—"Ida B. Wells AND community." Using this search term, I found 585 articles. I created more specific

key terms to more properly focus the scope of my search by eliminating advertisements and correspondence. The search terms—"Ida B. Wells homes AND construction," resulted in 41 articles.

"Ida B. Wells Homes" search term was also used to select evidence for the analysis of the current *Residents' Journal.* The historical analysis focuses on the construction and opening of the Ida B. Wells homes, and the analysis of the *Residents' Journal* covers the demolition of the homes. The demolition project began in 2002 and ended in 2011.

From 2002 to 2011, the *Residents' Journal* published an edition approximately every month; all of the editions are available online at http://wethepeoplemedia.org/archive/. The website does not have the capacity to perform a key term search. To help narrow my search, I scanned articles for mentions of "Ida B. Wells homes" in the titles and the first two paragraphs of the articles. After scanning monthly edition and using the website's tag search, I found 10 articles that mentioned "Ida B. Wells homes." Additional articles were found using tag searches with terms: Oakwood Shores (transformed Ida B. Wells mixed-community) and Plan for Transformation, CHA's multi-billion dollar plan for public housing revitalization.

According to Hall (1975) critical analyses do not account or have concern for breadth and objectivity. Instead, a critical cultural analysis focuses on context; significance may not always be quantifiable (Hall, 1975). The analysis of *Defender* articles specifically examines the position, treatment, tone, imagery and style of articles. Emergent patterns and themes will be accounted for and examined for specific discourse on issues of race, class and space. As Hall (1975) noted, my analysis will also highlight

themes that are not repetitive, as significance is often recognized in cultural analyses in contrast to or an exception to patterns.

Roushanzamir (2004) stated that texts are defined by the researcher, and critical textual analyses focus on evidence of social practice, not representations of cultural and social life.[1] The *Defender* and *RJ* articles are isolated and then reconstituted as the complex whole text for my critical textual analysis. Using historical cultural materialism as a theoretical and methodological guide, my research examines how spatial and media practices help produce communities, sites of individual and collective agency. Within these communities, my analysis highlights how this agency is produced and conditioned by pressures from systemic structures of race, class and space.

My research is grounded in Hall (1975) and Johnson's (1982) prescription for textual analyses. It does not separate patterns of consumption and production of media forms. Critical textual analysis contextualizes the historical and social processes of production and examines the social relations of community via media practice. Evidence from the *Defender* and *RJ* will help tell a story of the exercise of agency through media practice in Chicago's public housing communities.

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[1] Roushanzamir (2004) noted that the text is the "artifact under examination," (p. 16). Drawing from Johnson (1986/87), Roushanzamir stressed how critical textual analyses focus on form and the evidence of social relations in the text. The text is the means for cultural analyses.

[2] In Chicago, like other major urban areas, African-Americans were limited to clerical and teaching positions, and industrial work. King (1996) found that as Black populations

CHAPTER 3

ALL IS WELLS WITH MY SOUL: THE CONSTRUCTION AND OPENING OF THE

IDA B. WELLS HOMES

"The occupants of the Ida B. Wells Homes have a just cause of rejoicing.
For this well appointed and admirably administered project on one of the finest sites in
the city is a marked departure from the congested, disease infested slum areas which are
yet too numerous," (*Defender,* Sept. 6, 1941).

In 1941 the *Chicago Defender,* one of few nationally circulated African-American

newspapers at that time, announced and advertised the first Wells Homes' jubilee.

During this jubilee, community members celebrated the completion of the Wells Homes,

despite political, social and economic obstacles in their construction and opening.

Residents and community members recognized that the jubilee symbolized political,

social and economic progress in the Black community.

The Wells development fostered cooperative community across 123 buildings on

47 acres of land between 37th and 39th streets in Chicago's south side [SEE APPENDIX

A]. The Well Homes created a political system under the name Wellstown, with wards,

elected aldermen and mayors. Committees for health, recreation and consumer co-

operatives offered on-site services. The homes, built to provide safe and affordable

housing for Blacks, also served as sites of political, social and economic action and

independence.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the *Chicago Defender* coverage on the

construction of the Ida B. Wells Homes. This chapter explores ways in which people

exercise agency through media, such as the *Chicago Defender*, and in social and physical space, such as the Wells Homes. This chapter helps build historical context on the formation of public housing communities and media participation during the Wells Homes construction and opening. The analysis of *Defender* articles simultaneously investigates how media help shape social and physical community, and also help provide spaces for exercise of agency.

Ida B. Wells' Great Migration

Ida B. Wells was born on July 16, 1862 in Holly Springs, MS. Both of her parents were slaves at her time of birth (Davidson, 2007). Not long after her birth, the Emancipation Proclamation was signed and thousands of African-Americans fled the South. Many families in Holly Springs left the South in search for a new life in the North and West (Davidson, 2007). Along with few other Black families, Wells and her family remained in Holly Springs to build a life, separate from that of their previous slave owners. In 1878, a yellow fever epidemic killed thousands of people in the region, including Wells' parents and one sibling (Giddings, 2008).

Determined to keep her family together, Wells took care of her remaining siblings working as a schoolteacher during the week in various locations across the South (Gates, 1991). On a train ride to a teaching assignment just outside Memphis, Wells was moved to the smoking car, despite the fact that she showed her purchased first-class ticket (Davidson, 2007). Wells refused to move from her first-class seat, and was thrown off the train by several White men into a city just outside Memphis (Gates, 1991; Davidson, 2007; Giddings, 2008). Wells sued the rail company and received five hundred dollars in

damages from a local lower court, though a higher court later reversed the decision in favor of the rail company (Gates, 1991).

Despite her loss in court, Wells continued to work and live in Memphis, writing letters to churches and local papers about the mistreatment of Blacks across the South, focusing specifically on Memphis. Wells' passion and determination coupled with her education from Shaw University in Holly Springs, MS provided a platform for her to challenge injustices via media (Giddings, 2008). As part owner of *Free Speech*, a Black-owned Memphis newspaper, Wells became infamous for her open disgust and condemnation of lynching. In 1884, after a violent lynching of three Black businessmen, Wells encouraged Blacks to leave Memphis. Black families took her advice and fled. White businessmen asked her to help end the mass exodus of Blacks from Memphis; Wells refused (Gates, 1991).

Later that year Wells published an editorial questioning the motive and legitimacy of accusations against Black men for the rape of White women. In outrage, members of the White community destroyed Wells' paper offices and threatened her life if she continued to publish her paper and live in Memphis. Threatened with death and discouraged in her anti-lynching campaign, Wells left Memphis but continued to use media as a form of protest against lynching during her stays in New York City and Chicago (Davidson, 2007 and Gates, 1991).

At the time of Wells' relocation from Memphis to northern and midwestern states, like New York and Illinois, thousands of other African Americans also left the South. African-American men were among the initial mass exodus to the North and West to take advantage of labor opportunities, and more African-American women left the South to

earn more money for domestic work, and gain access to formal education for their

children. Additionally, with an increase in industrial labor in the North, Blacks fled the

South hoping for more employment opportunities (Schwalm, 2009).

Thousands of African Americans, later termed Exodusters, fled the South at the

turn of the century, and continued to do so throughout the duration of both World Wars.

Historians documented significant Black population increases in cities, such as

Milwaukee, Chicago, Detroit and New York City (Wilkerson, 2010). Sometime between

1892 and 1893, Wells, like thousands of other Black Southern migrants, moved to

Chicago (Gates, 1991).

Wells injected herself into the growing Black community in Chicago. In 1895, she

married Ferdinand L. Barnett, and changed her name to Ida B. Wells-Barnett (Gates,

1991). In Chicago, Wells-Barnett remained active in her pursuit against lynching and

also started the Ida B. Wells Club of Chicago, an organization that advocated for

women's suffrage. She also helped found the National Association of Colored Women.

Between 1910 and 1920, there was a 148.5 percent increase in the Black

population of Chicago, with a concomitant increase in White population of 21 percent

(Chicago Commission on Race Relations, 1922). Shortages in housing and congestion in

slums increased as well (Smith, 2012). Despite limited housing options, housing

discrimination and lack of redevelopment, African-American newspapers, such as the

Defender, continued to advertise and encourage Blacks to leave the South and move

North (Chicago Commission on Race Relations, 1922).

The *Chicago Defender* and Federal Housing Act of 1937

They're Leaving in Memphis in Droves
Some are coming on the passenger,
Some are coming on the freight,
Others will be found walking,
For none have time to wait.

-Written in *The Negro in Chicago* by the Chicago Commission on Race Relations, 1922

At the turn of the century, both mainstream and African-American press flourished for a variety of reasons. The rise of railroads and steamboats as modes of transportation contributed to increasing city populations. There, access to formal education contributed to lower illiteracy rates and an increase in audience for mainstream newspapers. In the early twentieth century, practices of yellow journalism in mainstream newspapers declined as White publishers discussed terms of objectivity, resulting in a paradigmatic shift in newspaper writing (Washburn, 2006).

While White owned newspapers valued nonpartisanship in its coverage, the African-American press continued to distribute advocacy papers focused on pertinent issues effecting African-American communities. The Black press published positive representations of Black communities to help combat practices of racism and discrimination, often witnessed in mainstream press. Black communities looked to the African-American press for strength and resources to help encourage and foster excellence in education and economic growth (Mullen, 1999; Washburn, 2006).

Robert Abbott, the founder of the *Chicago Defender,* believed one way African Americans could achieve economic stability and advanced education was by leaving a violent, disadvantaged South. Under Abbott's leadership, the *Defender* published articles

about families leaving the South and finding success in attaining education and jobs in the North, and stories and images that illustrated violent, unjust practices in the South.

Abbott mimicked yellow journalism using sensationalist styles to communicate the increased number of job opportunities and safer living conditions (Simmons, 1998 and Mullen, 1999). He published crime stories and printed images of lynching to convince southern Blacks to leave for the North immediately (Simmons, 1998). In addition to Abbott's use of sensationalist tactics to persuade Blacks to leave the South, Abbot also wanted to provide a paper that African-Americans in the North and South could collectively identify with (Simmons, 1998).

Abbott published stories that were intended to uplift Black communities. Such stories included feature articles about conventions of political organizations, the commencement exercises of historically Black colleges and universities and editorial pages with columns of varying perspectives on issues, such as Black patriotism, forms of education and entrepreneurship.

Mainstream papers largely ignored news of specific concern to the Black community. Therefore, Abbott, like other editors of Black newspapers, made a conscious effort to publish stories that would inform and strengthen Black communities. The *Defender* challenged and inspired readers to become involved in the political, social and economic movements that demanded equal rights for Blacks across the country.

As the *Defender* and other Black newspapers continued to help attract thousands of Blacks to northern cities, housing shortages also increased. In 1917 the Chicago Commission on Race Relations reported that in one day 664 African Americans applied for housing, with only fifty houses available. The Commission's report noted that some

single units would list up to ten families as occupants (Chicago Commission on Race Relations, 1922). Although Blacks had more work and educational opportunities in Chicago than in the South, housing discrimination, housing shortages, and high rents led to the creation of concentrated, congested slums. Many of these areas were in the Southside of Chicago, often called the Black Belt (Smith, 2012). The Commission (1922) reported Black Belt homes and apartments with malfunctioning plumbing and sewer systems, dilapidated buildings, and high numbers of rats.

In between World Wars and attempting to recover economically from the drastic stock market crash, the United States government implemented a series of economic policies. Under the New Deal program, President Franklin D. Roosevelt enacted the National Industrial Act of 1933, which authorized the use of federal funds to finance development of low-income housing and slum clearance projects (King, 1996). In response to complications in the completion of public housing developments, the National Housing Act of 1934 created better standards for of construction, particularly of low-income housing, and increased quality of development in suburbs (King, 1996).

Despite the government's intervention, there were still minimal housing options for low-income families (King, 1996). The Federal Housing Act of 1937, which authorized public housing programs, had two ultimate goals—to help alleviate reoccurring unemployment and remedy unsafe and unsanitary living conditions for low-income families (King, 1996 and Smith, 2012). As part of a nationwide focus on public housing, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) was founded in 1937.

Elizabeth Wood, CHA's first executive secretary, and Robert Taylor, the first Black board member of the CHA fought for the construction of the first public housing

development for African-Americans in Chicago (Smith, 2012). Taylor argued that

residents in Chicago's Black Belt suffered the most from substandard living conditions.

He reasoned that if Blacks could not have access to private housing because of opposition

from real estate industries and White residential neighborhoods, public housing was the

only and best option (Smith, 2012). Taylor made the case that better living conditions

would decrease juvenile delinquency, crime and violence among the increasing Black

population (Smith, 2012).

Public housing was identified as a remedy to the increase of the uncivilized Black

migrant (Commission on Race Relations, 1922; Smith, Mullen, 1999; Smith, 2012).

Pressures from Black civil leaders eventually led to the finalization of plans for the first

African-American public housing community, originally named Southway Park Homes.

After nomination and deliberation between CHA and the Federal Housing Authority,

Southway Park Homes was officially named Ida B. Wells Homes in 1939.

Black civic groups and federal agencies alike thought the name was appropriate.

Black civic groups wanted to highlight Wells' tireless efforts in the Black community

against lynching and her involvement in the uplift of Black women. In addition to her

contributions to the development and progress of Black Chicago, the CHA also

recognized the location's significance, as it was built adjacent to an area heavily

populated by African Americans.

Ida B. Wells Homes in the *Defender*

Between the years 1935 and 1945, the *Defender* published 585 articles inclusive

of the search term: Ida B. Wells AND Community. After conducting a more focused

search, 41 articles were chosen for analysis. These articles were selected using the search

term: Ida B. Wells Homes and construction. After finding a reoccurring use of

"Wellstown" in several of the articles, I discovered that Wellstown was the name of the

Wells Homes among its residents. As a result of this finding, I conducted an additional

search using the search term: Wellstown. This search yielded 17 articles, thus bringing

my total number of articles for analysis to 58.

Three themes emerged in the analysis of *Defender* articles—labor disputes,

housing eligibility and community organization. Although each theme deals with issues

of race, class, and space, and simultaneously conveyed images of social and cultural life,

these themes were separated for critical analysis. Each theme was selected based on

number of articles that discussed these issues, with one article often discussing more than

one theme.

Labor disputes, housing eligibility and community organization help tell a story of

community in the Ida B. Wells Homes. Each sheds light on the simultaneous physical

and social barriers in the construction and completion of the development, the protest of

community members and the community organization within the homes. A close analysis

of the Wells Homes' construction and opening help build context on class, race and space

relations in Chicago's public housing communities.

Labor Disputes

The federal government's authorization of public housing for low-income

African-American families was met with resistance in inner city Chicago. Real estate

industries, some Chicago residents and politicians protested the CHA's decision to build

a public housing development for African-Americans. Protests translated into delays in

the construction of homes.

In 1939, the first two articles mentioning the Wells Homes detailed the adoption of the Ida B. Wells as the official name for the development. In both articles, Wells was praised for her political and civic engagement in the Chicago community. In addition to the recognition of Wells in this article, community members exuded excitement about the construction and completion of the homes.

The article stated:

The Ida B. Wells Federated Club women…held a celebration party…
which reminds one that women of the Race can be proud not only of
the careers being so ably handled today, but of those in past years—
from which benefits are still filtering through the generations,
(*Defender*, p.16, June 24, 1939).

The homes, which provided safe and sanitary housing units to Black families also were a step forward in the fight for equality. The quote above also indicated the recognition of strength among Black women in the community, and recognition of the spatiality of historical practices, such as Ida B. Well's fight for racial justice and equality.

While the first two articles detailed exhilaration and anticipation about the construction of the homes, an article published on June 10, 1939 highlighted one of many labor and employment issues. The story, "Only White Considered for Construction Post," announced that the general superintendent of construction would be White. The *Defender* reported that community members were baffled at the decision by the CHA because a Black male, a "Race man," William Thornton had necessary qualifications for this position.

Thornton, who had once believed he was considered for the position was told by the architectural firm in charge of designing the projects, that White men were only being considered for the position. A representative from the firm stated:

> A Race man in such a position would create a problem with
> contractors and workers who would object to working with him,
> (*Defender*, p. 3, June 10, 1939).

The quote from the architectural firm provided evidence that despite the government's support for the Wells Homes, the construction of the development was conditioned by racial discrimination in hiring and employment opportunities. A "Race man," conveyed an often threatening image of Black masculinity. According to the article, this image trumped Thornton's expertise and mastery in construction and architectural design.

In response to the firm's decision to not hire Thornton as superintendent, the following article reported that Thornton and his professional organization, the National Technical Association, would protest the decision, seeking assistance from the CHA and the mayor of Chicago, Edward Kelly. In an article published July 15, 1939, the *Defender* detailed how Thornton was offered a civil engineering position, but refused because he felt it was an insult to his intelligence. Thornton stated:

> I refuse to compromise and let down those individuals and
> organizations which have fought so hard for the recognition of
> Negro technicians on this project, (*Defender,* p. 7, July 15, 1939).

Thornton's refusal was in protest to the CHA's decision to mainly hire African Americans for positions unrelated to their training and/or educational backgrounds. The article provided evidence of how the *Defender* both celebrated access to public housing, while still reporting stories of resistance to discriminatory practices.

With hopes that the construction of the homes would provide more managerial, administrative and technical jobs for Blacks, the articles in the *Defender* detailed how the CHA did not intend on challenging the status quo. Opposition from Black civic and

professional organizations about the lack of appointment of Black managers and

superintendents prolonged the construction of the Wells Homes. Headlines of articles

reporting this issue included, "Delay on Ida B Wells Homes Lies at Door of CHA," and

"Threaten Delay on Ida B. Wells Homes." In both articles, the *Defender* reported

disappointment in the delays of progress on the homes, and the lack of involvement of the

CHA in resolving any delays in construction.

On Sept. 23, 1939, the *Defender* published an article titled "Labor Troubles Halts

Chicago Home Project." The story began with this quote:

> Labor difficulties are responsible for the snail's pace progress
> being made in construction of the Ida B. Wells low cost
> housing project… (*Defender,* p. 22, Sept. 23, 1939).

The remainder of the story described how labor union groups rejected the plans for the

contractor, Thompson-Starrett Company, to use extensive machinery instead of manual

labor to mix concrete and lay bricks for the Homes. However, labor unions argued that

more than 500 men would be without work if the machinery were used during Wells

Homes' construction.

In addition to the dispute between the contractor and labor unions, the *Defender*

mentioned how the newly constructed buildings violated city building codes. The next

five articles each discussed the labor dispute between the contractor and labor unions, and

its influence on the opening of the Wells Homes. On Oct. 14, 1939, the *Defender* printed

an article on the delays in construction and the eventual opening of the Wells Homes.

Robert Taylor, the Black CHA board member, reported that labor unions were on

strike, and no work was being done on the Wells Homes because of their disagreement

with the contractor. The *Defender* stated:

> The groups according to Mr. Taylor are (1) conscientious objectors
> to public housing programs; (2) persons opposed to the site of Ida
> B. Wells Homes and (3) real estate interests which are capitalizing
> on the present housing crisis by exploiting member the Race who
> are restricted to this area, (*Defender*, p. 6, Oct. 4, 1939).

According to Taylor, three groups were responsible for halting progress—those vehemently opposed to public housing, in general, people opposed to the physical location of the Wells homes, and real estate industries who were exploiting of African Americans limited to living in Wells Homes.

Taylor's speculation was that all three groups had some influence on state and federal government, and contributed to construction obstacles such as building code violations and denial of work permits. Based on these events, Taylor stated that he was suspicious of what seemed to be purposeful delays in the construction and opening of the homes. Furthermore, he urged readers to plan militant action to fight against delays. He stated:

> The man on the street, especially the unemployed man looking
> for a job on the project is convinced that a combination of
> greed, jealousy and racketeering on the part of labor leaders and
> local builders and supply concerns are the root of evil,
> (*Defender,* p. 6, Oct. 14, 1939).

For Taylor, the strike and series of building code violations were all acts of greed with purposeful malicious intent. The article urged community members to reach out to civic organizations, and to remain informed on what response and action plans Black community leaders would implement. Taylor, who fought for the construction of these homes on the basis of community and social organization, highlighted how the labor

unions and lack of progress on work ordinances was rooted in individual greed and lack of community.

On Oct. 21, 1939, the *Defender* published an article about Taylor's request for assistance from the mayor of Chicago, Edward Kelly. It was noted in earlier articles that the CHA remained uninvolved in the strike because the dispute was between the labor union and the contractor. CHA would only intervene if the contract were violated, meaning the homes were not completed in the planned time period. Taylor, unsatisfied with his agency's response, reached out to Mayor Kelly. At this point, labor unions described how acts of violence were proposed to end the strike and continue construction on the Wells Homes.

By Oct. 28, 1939, the dispute between the contractor and the unions was settled. After seven weeks without any progress on construction, the strike was over. According to the *Defender*, with the help of a mediator secured by the mayor, the contractor agreed to hire the men displaced by the machinery to finish the construction on the homes. Once the strike ended, there was a shift in the tone of articles.

On Nov. 4, 1939, the *Defender* published an article titled, "Fighting Band of Race Citizens Win Housing Project for Chicago." In this editorial, David Howe praised the tireless efforts of Taylor and other Black leaders in the community who banded together against the opposition. He stated:

> Chicago Race citizens have been confronted with a very difficult
> situation, and the fact that this project has finally reached the stage
> of construction is a tribute to their courage and determination…The
> story of the fight…should be spread across the country as it would
> provide encouragement and perhaps incentive to members of the Race
> who are struggling to improve their position on the economic and social
> frontiers, (*Defender,* p. 14, Nov. 4, 1939).

The end of the strike symbolized a political and economic gain for Black community members across the nation. Although the government authorized the public housing project, Howe described how community members played a necessary active role in the progress and completion of the development.

In contrast to earlier articles, the *Defender* reported that George Jones, a highly skilled architect, was hired to work with the CHA. Jones joined Taylor at the CHA. Despite this hire within the CHA, articles questioned who would be hired in managerial positions within the Wells Homes community. On July 20, 1940, the *Defender* printed an article revealing the appointment of manager and superintendent in the Wells Homes. Oscar Brown, a well-known Black attorney and Howard Shaw, a foreman and electrician, was appointed as manager and superintendent of the homes.

On Oct. 19, 1940, the *Defender* announced plans for the Wells Homes' dedication set for October 27. On this day, 10,000 Southside community members attended the dedication of 123 buildings over 47 acres of land. The homes were built to house about 1600 families, an estimated 7000 persons. At the dedication, Taylor stated:

> Only the united effort of the people of community and the cooperation
> of the city and Federal government made this victory possible.
> The case for public housing in America is clear, sound and defensible.
> The facts are that low wage earners constitute a large ratio of the total
> population. Private enterprise is not producing housing for this
> group. A community cannot afford to allow a large proportion of
> its citizens to disintegrate because at the moment at the least, our
> economic system cannot supply them with one of man's most
> vital needs…proper shelter…(*Defender*, p. 3, Nov. 2, 1940).

According to Taylor, collective community helped solidify plans for the Wells Homes, and he also reported that it was in the best interest of the state and country to provide housing for a significant amount of its working population. While this statement

provided evidence of the homes' influence in the conceptualization and formation of active community, it also shows how African Americans fought for and demanded an economic stake in society. This statement showed that working-class and low-wage African Americans recognized their collective economic contribution. Safe and affordable housing would in some sense translate into the federal government's recognition of African-Americans' collective economic contribution.

Although the union aid and contractor's strike was reportedly resolved previously, disgruntled workers still protested around the Wells Homes on the day of dedication. This time, window washers were displeased with working conditions and pay, and threatened to disrupt the celebration. According to articles printed Nov. 2 and Nov. 9, 1940, a last minute agreement was settled and window washers ended the picket line just before the start of the dedication program.

Taylor described the settlement in the following statements.

[this is the kind of] victory the people may attain under democratic government. Only the unified effort of the people of the community and the cooperation of the city and the federal government made this victory possible, (*Defender,* p. 4, Nov. 2, 1940).

While Taylor celebrated the completion of the Wells Homes, his emphasis on community seemed to undermine the collective efforts of labor unions to fight unfair pay and job qualifications during the Wells Homes' constructions. The *Defender* classified the labor union struggle as a distraction to greater accomplishments, such as public housing for African-American families.

Although the Black community rejoiced during dedication ceremonies, inspection dates still delayed the official opening of the homes. The *Defender* interviewed Thomas

Ryan, president of the Wells Homes' managing contracting company. Ryan told the *Defender* he gave notice to the CHA that 332 units were currently available for occupancy [SEE APPENDIX B].

Ryan stated:

I do not mean that every little insignificant detail has been taken care of, but I mean that is possible for persons to live in these buildings without the slightest inconvenience…I'd like to see some families enjoy Christmas…if the CHA cooperates, (*Defender,* p. 5, Dec. 28, 1940).

Ryan's statement told a story of how the CHA and contractors did not agree on a date for the opening of the Wells Homes. It appeared that the contractors planned to open the Wells Homes before all units were completed. Ryan later accused the CHA of missing the purpose of the Wells Homes, which for him was an immediate remedy for a lack of safe and secure housing for a desperate population of people.

Ryan's disagreements with the CHA supported the *Defender's* speculations on purposeful delays in the opening of homes. However, after several years of labor disputes, the Wells Homes were completed and open for occupancy. As labor unions and contractors debated the use of industrial and manual labor, Taylor along with other Black community leaders organized to ensure progress and completion of the Wells Homes. Many low-income families, who had migrated from the South, had a chance to leave the congested slums of the Black Belt area and build a new life. While excitement ensued around the thought of a more safe, affordable and sanitary community, articles in the *Defender* also debated another issue, i.e. eligibility of tenants.

Housing Eligibility

The Federal Housing Act authorized the construction of public housing for low-income families, and as the Wells Homes neared completion, the question of eligibility was raised several times in the *Defender.* As early as Oct. 19, 1940, articles in the *Defender* mentioned how the CHA had not clearly established who qualified as low-income tenants. Without a clear definition on who qualified as low-income, relievers who were individuals and/or families that were already receiving some form of monetary governmental assistance, were questioned for eligibility.

Although a story printed on Nov. 1, 1940 reported that source of income would not affect eligibility for occupancy, later articles expressed concerns on behalf of the city council. On Dec. 28, 1940 the *Defender* covered the inspection of the Wells Homes. The article did not discuss the debate about the qualification of tenants. However, to the left of the inspection coverage, the article "Group Termed Paupers and Undesirables" detailed positions of the city corporation council and the U.S. Housing Authority on relievers and low-income tenants.

Two representatives from the city council—Al Gorman and Barnet Hodes, wrote and issued court opinions on relievers. According to the *Defender*, both representatives disagreed that home and work relievers, those receiving monetary government assistance towards housing and work income, were eligible to apply for public housing. Hodes argued that people who received governmental income did not classify as low-income, because of the source of the income. According to Hodes, governmental income was equivalent to no income, and if accepted as tenants, these relievers could not afford rent.

Hodes stated:

> We do not believe that Congress had paupers in mind when in the
> United States Housing Act of 1937 it used such language as: shall
> be available solely for families whose not income at the time of
> admission does not exceed five times the rental,
> (*Defender,* p. 5, Dec. 28, 1940).

For Hodes, paupers did not qualify as low-income, but those individuals receiving

pension were eligible. If Hodes and Gorman's opinion was accepted, 25 percent of the

17,000 tenant applications for the Wells Homes would have been rejected, and three

percent of residents, Black and White, already living in public housing across the city

would have been evicted.

The *Defender* reported how the city council's opinion was in opposition to the

U.S. Housing Authority Bulletin, which stated that low-income persons should be eligible

for public housing, regardless of the source of income. Just one month later, Hodes

issued a second opinion.

> Under the present statutes and decisions, there is no minimum amount
> of money that an applicant or resident must have; nor is an applicant
> disqualified because supported in whole or in part by relief or charity…
> It is not intended to stigmatize a person on relief to refer to him as a
> 'poor person' or 'pauper' in its legal sense, (*Defender,* p. 4, Jan. 18, 1941).

In addition to Hodes changing his opinion on the eligibility of relievers, he also distanced

himself from his prior statements that stigmatized poor people as "paupers." The

Defender attributed Hodes' revised court opinion to criticism from press and public

housing advocates. The *Defender's* coverage of it pointed to the newspaper's function in

political, economic and social practices.

To help justify his second opinion, Hodes stated, "Bad housing occupied by

families on public relief is just as detrimental to the community at-large as bad housing

occupied by others." For Hodes, relievers and traditional low-income families living in

unsafe and unorganized conditions were equally harmful to the greater Chicago community. Therefore, it made sense to make relievers eligible for public housing, if it were going to help the greater Chicago community.

Although Wells Homes accepted tenants with varying levels of low-income, the CHA established a flat rent rate for all tenants. According to an article printed on April 6, 1940, tenants at the Wells Homes were charged $14.75 per month. The rent included heat, gas and electricity. The low, flat rent-rate was established for purposes of equity in the community.

The debate about the necessity of public housing, its location and the influence on Black cultural life remained a topic of concern for years after the development of the Wells Homes. However, evidence suggested the *Defender* did not highlight the opposition from Black community members. The lack of coverage on this topic was in accordance with the paper's reputation to publish articles that uplifted the community, and challenged the mainstream's press opinion and coverage on the Black community.

The *Defender's* decision to only publish stories about the acceptance of relievers into the homes and flat rates showed that the paper could have wanted to help validate the federal government's decision on the construction of public housing for African Americans. Any signs of early dissent during the completion and opening phases of the Wells Homes would have shed a negative light on the Black Belt community and undermined all of the efforts of leaders, such as Robert Taylor, the first Black vice chairman of the CHA board.

Community Organization

     After the first tenants moved in the Wells Homes, the *Defender* primarily published articles about the selection of managers and community organization. These stories portray that the Wells development and all of its individual and collective accomplishments should serve as an example for other public housing communities across the country. The *Defender* published articles on political, social and cultural organization in Wellstown, the community name created and adopted by Wells residents.

     The *Defender* recognized that the CHA provided the infrastructure and landscape for safer and cleaner living conditions. Articles about Wellstown emphasized how the formation of community relied heavily on the staff and residents of the Wells Homes. The *Defender* highlighted the strengths within the Wells Homes to encourage the CHA and other city governments to use it as a blueprint for future public housing developments.

     On Sept. 6, 1941, the *Defender* published an article on the election of the first mayor of the junior municipality of Wellstown—12-year-old, Jelina Carr [See APPENDIX C]. Carr was pictured being sworn in by the personal assistant to Chicago's mayor, Edward Kelly. Just below her picture was a photograph of the junior aldermanic staff, which the *Defender* described as "good and true" young boys and girls [SEE APPENDIX C]. While the caption did not detail the function of the mayor and aldermanic staff, other articles allude to some of their responsibilities, including program development in recreational activities and annual jubilee planning. Each year, new junior mayors were elected and named chief executives over several thousand children living in Wellstown.

On Aug. 8, 1942 the Wellstown Aeronautic Club was featured in the *Defender* for its model airplane exhibit in the community center. The caption stated:

> [Robert] Smith is one of a group of teen age boys being taught to
> model planes by Wilard Cole an employee of the project,
> (*Defender,* p. 13, Aug. 8, 1942).

Formed by Wells Homes' staff members and parents, the Aeronautic Club is one concrete example of how *the Defender* documented how Wellstown was a better standard of living and community in urban Black Chicago. It also described how Wells Homes' employees earned financial stability, and dedicated time to working with young Wells residents. The *Defender* pointed out that the dual focus on financial stability and community activism was central in the sustainment of Wellstown.

In addition to the Aeronautic Club, a spread printed on Sept. 18, 1943 detailed the formation of Wellstown's Infant Welfare Center, Health Center and a Co-Op store. In this collection of photos, vice president Wallace was photographed visiting Wellstown and expressing his sincere satisfaction of the organization and conditions of Wellstown [SEE APPENDIX D]. Wallace visited each center and talked to its leaders about the function and purpose of it in Wellstown.

On June 24, 1944, the *Defender* provided more details on tenant organizations and centers. Wellstown had three main organizations—the Health Service Committee, the Recreation Committee and the Consumers' Cooperative. The Health Service Committee provided healthcare services, such as vaccinations, to residents. The Recreation Committee provided youth with alternative activities, such as the model airplane exhibit to help reduce child-gangs and adolescent deviant behavior. The Consumer' Co-

operative was a group that helped provide residents with necessities of life, such as food and employment opportunities.

The municipal and tenant organizations were described in several *Defender* articles, and vice president Wallace's approval of Wellstown expressed one form of accomplishment by community members and the CHA. According to the *Defender*, Wellstown's social organization helped reduce criminal behavior in communities, while also helping community members stretch their income, save money and engage in recreational and educational activities. An article printed on June 24, 1944 stated:

> A housing, project, as we have become increasingly aware,
> is not simply an extra large apartment house, with more living
> units than ordinary apartment homes. A housing project is a
> community. A new attitude towards group living and co-operative
> community action is developing in these housing projects,
> (*Defender,* June, 24, 1944).

The new attitude towards group living and community action helped residents achieve the highest standard of living according to their financial income. The quote above suggested that Wellstown was the collective social identity of the Wells Homes development. The expressed belief in the success of Wellstown's formation helped the *Defender* communicate the differences between housing conditions in Chicago's Black slums and those in public housing developments. The *Defender's* Wellstown coverage shed light on collective progress made in the Black public housing community and effective governmental policy and legislation.

In the coverage of the Wells Homes first jubilee, the *Defender* published an article on Sept. 6, 1941 that stated:

> Families residing in these homes were occupants of dwellings
> which in most cases were considered unfit for human beings,
> where rats were so big and numerous that they would bite the babies…
> where cold and dampness sapped strength from growing children
> and brought ultimately collapse to the adults, (*Defender,* Sept. 6, 1941)

The article continued:

> People who lived in these conditions could not do much about their health
> problems, crime, juvenile delinquency and tension between families,
> (*Defender,* Sept. 6, 1941).

In this statement, the *Defender* established a causal link between physical environments and social behavior to position public housing as a necessary component in the uplift and sustainment of Black communities.

To further support the paper's established relationship between physical environment and social organization and behavior, the *Defender* published an article on July 24, 1943 about the American Friends Association (AFA), a Philadelphia Quaker organization that visited Wellstown to conduct a work camp and institute. During the visit members of the AFA, some of who were White, instructed Wellstown children and adolescents in sports, such as softball and volleyball. At the end of the article, the *Defender* wrote, "the American Friends Association spreads doctrine of interracial understanding and good fellowship," (*Defender,* p. 20, July 24, 1943).

Although AFA's goals were consistent with Wellstown's Recreation Committee in providing youth with alternative activities, it also highlighted how Wellstown was situated as a site of social transformation. According to the *Defender,* it seemed that Wellstown was better equipped and more prepared to conceptualize and benefit from interracial interactions.

In the paper's call for other cities to look to Wellstown as an example of community, it asked government agencies to pay close attention to the "fortunate who live in Wellstown." When critically examined, these statements simultaneously praised the government's efforts in providing an alternative living and communal space for Black Chicagoans, and also alluded to class divides among those Blacks who lived in slums and those living in Wellstown. It later called for the entire Black community to rejoice in the success of Wellstown, even those who did not live there and remained in not so fortunate living conditions.

The triumph of Wellstown's construction and function as community was highlighted as a social and economic progress for the entire Black Chicago community. The *Defender* painted a binary picture between slums and Wellstown life to emphasize the CHA's overall good decision to move forward and complete the Wells Homes development. The *Defender* urged that Blacks who continued to live in slums to remain hopeful for better living conditions in public housing, as it called for the CHA to model its future housing developments after Wellstown. Blacks could transition from slums and crowded ghettos to similar communities, if the government recognized Wellstown's contributions to the Black community's social organization, which was communicated as means to decrease the crime, delinquency and tension in Black Chicago neighborhoods.

The *Defender* discussed future plans for Altgeld Gardens, the second Black public housing development in Chicago.

> Committees cannot be developed from higher-ups…[the]
> strength of committees depend on willingness of the people
> concerned to work and plan. Altgeld Gardens becoming a
> community depends on cooperative action of community,
> (*Defender,* June 24, 1944).

Despite the paper's praise for government intervention by the CHA, it made note of how

the strength of the Wellstown community and any other future public housing

development depended on its residents.   The recognition of the role of the individual, or

human action alluded to the contradictions to the perceived mutually exclusive function

of government institutions and the autonomous individual. The *Defender* praised the

CHA for its success in the construction of the homes, idolized the Wells homes, while

also urging individual accountability and responsibility in the social organization of

public housing communities.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to examine *Defender* coverage on the

construction of Ida B. Wells Homes. In doing so, I interrogated ways in which spaces of

resilience are created in and through media practices. This chapter provided historical

context on the construction of public housing in Black Chicago, and forms of media that

simultaneously told a story about community formation, action and transformation, and

engendered concrete practices of agency—as seen in the chapter's focus on issues, such

as labor disputes, residential eligibility, and Well's community organization.

Consistent with the time period's political, social and cultural climate, the

Defender reported on how discriminatory practices of hiring and employment practices

conditioned the construction of the Wells Homes.[2] Black laborers with relevant

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[2] In Chicago, like other major urban areas, African-Americans were limited to clerical
and teaching positions, and industrial work. King (1996) found that as Black populations
grew in major urban areas in the North and West, so did exploitation of Black laborers.
With limited job and housing opportunities, low-wages and long hours for Black laborers
continued to increase.

qualifications were restricted from managerial and administrative jobs during Wells Homes' construction.

It was noted that Blacks wanted to live in the developments, and help build the Wells Homes, actively participating in the development of the physical landscapes of their community. *Defender* articles told stories about moments of resistance to employment discrimination, as labor organizations retaliated against unfair policies, and individual instances of Black men refusing jobs unrelated to their skillsets and training.

Articles held the CHA accountable for falling short of its mission to provide more managerial positions for Blacks during the construction process. It also condemned CHA for its lack of response to labor difficulties between contractors and labor unions. Although condemning the CHA, Defender articles also questioned the intention of labor unions in the completion of the construction of homes. While labor unions fought for labor hours instead of use of machinery, ultimately providing more men with jobs, the Defender partially blamed unions for the delay in the Wells Homes' construction.

Labor unions and other organizations were recognized as roadblocks to the successful completion of the Wells Homes. Black and White organizations opposed the construction of public housing, for economical and social reasons. Articles debating housing eligibility implicitly expressed the complex nature of race and class relations in Chicago during the Wells Homes' construction, particularly intra-racial and class

relations.[3] It seemed that the lack of explicit examples and specific instances of Black opposition to the Wells Homes was consistent with the paper's overall mission to publish articles that would uplift, not divide, Black communities.

Articles about housing eligibility shed light on the influence of local and national governmental institutions on community life. The *Defender* condemned local officials, who criticized potential Wells Homes' residents, who were poor and fully dependent on government income. In contrast, the *Defender* praised the CHA, one form of federal government for its promotion for public housing for Black Chicago residents. Again, consistent with the paper's theme of publishing stories that would help Blacks gain economic, political and social leverage in Chicago, the evidence suggested that the *Defender* positioned the CHA as a more race and class-conscious government institution.

According to the *Defender,* the CHA helped secure funds and the construction site for the Wells Homes. In contrast, *Defender* articles about Wellstown illustrated how Wells Homes' residents formed social collective community identity. With the continued support from organizations like the CHA, and the active participation of community residents, the *Defender* suggested that other city governments should use Chicago as a guide in their pursuit to provide safe and affordable public housing for Black residents.

Articles revealed how governmental institutions conditioned the construction of

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[3] Smith (2012) noted how during the construction of the Wells project, many middle-class and elite African-American organizations opposed the development. For example, the Citizens Committee of West Chesterfield, an organization consisting of Black affluent homeowners and professionals, opposed the construction of housing developments for "wage-earning Blacks." The committee feared that the development would turn into slums, and decrease value of their nearby homes and businesses. In contrast, Anthony Overton, publisher and editor of the *Chicago Bee*, a Black Chicago newspaper, criticized the Committee's opposition to public housing and noted that the Black community could fight against unfair treatment in class factions.

Wells Homes, both delaying completion and implementing policies to achieve housing equity. The *Defender* called on members of the Race—those living in Wells and those living in slums, to celebrate the completion of the Wells Homes. In doing so, articles pointed to class factions among Black communities, but urged for collective racial community action to trump any notions of individual (economic) gain. Although articles drew a connection between residents' behavior and physical geography (living conditions), it also told a story of how residents transformed Wells Homes into Wellstown, a space governed and occupied by social and economic agents.

Conversations with History

I boarded the train at Brookland-Catholic University station with a few sheets of notebook paper and a pen stuffed in my purse. I needed just enough paper to write down every word of advice she would give me. As I rode from my Northeast neighborhood through downtown, past NOMA (North of Massachusetts Avenue) station, formerly known as New York Avenue station, and into upper Northwest Washington, D.C., memories of train rides to junior and high school resurfaced.

In eighth grade, we spoke for the first time about my history fair project. Eager to find out that I was conducting research on her great-great grandmother, A'Lelia Bundles sent pictures of Walker products and financial records. Those pictures would later appear on my six-foot tall history fair project on Madame C.J. Walker, most popularly known for her entrepreneurship in hair care and beauty products for African-American women.

More than ten years later, I revisited Walker's life and reconnect with Bundles. As I passed the Tenleytown station, just one stop away from my destination, my nerves

kicked in. Why was I meeting with Bundles? What if she didn't remember me? I did have my mom slip her a note at a conference in October and had my professor email her on my behalf.

After all this, what would I say? Hi, A'Lelia Bundles. I did a project on Madame Walker eleven years ago and I recently wrote a paper on her. Can you read it?

I arrived at Maggiano's and sat in a booth to the left of the entrance. I vaguely remembered what she looked like—enough to recognize her when she walked in. About ten minutes after I arrived, I saw a short woman with a blue baseball cap walk through the door. Short silver hair peeked out from under her cap, and with newspaper and iPhone in tow, she walked towards me. I guess she did remember me.

"Hi Mrs. Bundles. I'm Loren Saxton from the University of Georgia," I said. "A'Lelia Bundles," she responded. "Let's grab a table." We returned to the booth I had claimed earlier. In this moment, it felt most appropriate to reminisce about the history fair and my project on Walker.

Very few junior high schools in the city participated in the history fair, and my sister and I happened to attend one. Even at Alice Deal Junior High, not many people participated unless it was a class requirement. My sister who is two years older than me did her first project on the 54th Massachusetts Regiment. It started as a traditional tri-fold board and morphed into a six-foot tall foam board masterpiece.

Following in her footsteps, I too participated in the history fair. My parents, then experts on the rules and regulations, and what was expected of winners at the history fair, worked tirelessly with me on my project. The unspoken consensus was that we had

to compete with and beat the other students (majority White) at my school, who had more experience with the history fair. The ultimate goal was to advance to Nationals, and win.

We visited Moorland-Spingarn, the archives room at Founder's Library at Howard University, The National Archives and the Library of Congress. We collected primary documents and conducted interviews. It was a family affair. Daddy carved the foam board into the shape of a tri-fold mirror and lined its surface with silver wrapping paper. Mommy edited thesis statements and captions for grammatical errors, and Grandma helped cut pictures and timelines to be glued on the board. Grandma even let us cut a piece of her mink cape to make the picture of Madame Walker's fur hat three-dimensional [SEE APPENDIX E].

Mommy drilled me about facts on Walker, and how my project coincided within the fair's theme, Turning Points. For weeks, our dining room was a workshop filled with pieces of foam, construction paper and rubber cement bottles. After winning first place at Deal JHS, I advanced to the citywide competition.

I was interviewed by three judges about primary sources and Madame Walker's contribution to Black female history. I answered questions with ease as my mom stood just outside the door of the interview room. She paced in silence just outside the door— listening to each answer I gave, taking mental notes to help prepare me for the next round of interviews.

I won citywide and advanced to Nationals. We searched tirelessly for more primary sources, which were golden in the history fair. I was a novice at the history fair, compared to students across the country, who had traveled to Nationals consecutive years. But this was no excuse. Although having little experience and knowledge of

national history fair competition, my parents and I built and prepared what we knew was an award-winning project.

We walked through University of Maryland's gym and were blown away by wooden display boards with three-dimensional signage and artifacts built into display boxes. Computer screens with videos sat in front of some boards. Slightly intimidated, I found my spot and we set up my project, Madame C.J. Walker: Changing the Image, Opening Doors. Our hard work was validated as people walked by and marveled at the mirrored board with a mink fur accent.

I went to my dorm where I would stay for five days. My history teacher was thrilled and the history fair coordinator from the National Archives just knew my project would win. "Would you compare Walker to Oprah," one judge asked during my interview. Oprah, I thought to myself. This is the only other Black woman these White men could think of. "Actually, no," I said. I remember saying something like, "Oprah broke some barriers, but I think comparing Walker to Oprah minimizes her political influence during a time when it was absolutely unheard of for women, especially Black women to be patriotic and politically active."

I must have offended one judge. I received all superiors on my score sheet. The National Archives representative even convinced my family and I to remain at the awards ceremony, because she was positive I would win something. My mom is still baffled as to why I didn't win. "You should have won," she continues to say thirteen years later. "That was a BAD project."

As a result of the history fair, I presented my research on Walker in front of members of the Association for the Study of African-American Life and History

(ASALAH) and was featured in the National Park Service's tent during the Black Family Reunion on the National Mall. "She was the woman who told Black women they weren't pretty enough," said one Black woman pointing to my board. "She developed the hot comb so Black women could look like White women." Puzzled by her misinformed assertion, I thought twice about responding. I knew for a fact that Walker did not develop the hot comb. It was a tool of her trade.

I stood in silence afraid of how the woman would react to a 13-year-old telling her she was incorrect. In that moment, I realized everyone did not admire Walker like I did. In fact, some Black women despised her.

Years later, I stood in the ballroom of the Hyatt Chicago with my poster, Madame C.J. Walker: Educational practice, media and culture. Relieved that it was accepted to our annual conference and excited about the poster's aesthetics, that included burnt edges to resemble old newspapers, I hung my poster with pride. "She was an accommodationist," I heard someone say. "Just like Booker T. Washington. How was she any different from any other Race man or woman at the time?"

Somewhat expecting his remarks, I confidently responded. "Interesting," said the Black professor from Alcorn State University as he shrugged his shoulders and walked away. In transition to a panel presentation on the Black press, I routinely called my mom to tell her about my poster session.

"It's the same thing you went through at the history fair, Loren," my mom said. "You knew this was going to happen. Don't let this discourage you now. Remember, this is why A'Lelia Bundles was committed to telling her story."

Both of Bundles' books help dispel some of the negative myths associated with Walker by highlighting and exploring different platforms of her political, social and civic engagement. "I am so happy people like you really took an interest in Walker's life," Bundles said. She told me of how she was featured as a guest speaker at the National History Fair luncheon last year and met two young girls also doing research on Walker.

After ordering tea and side chopped salads, I asked questions about the use and relevance of scholarship in community uplift. "Scholarship is necessary," Bundles said. "I value scholarship. Something about having data, analyzing data that says something about your work. Look at Melissa Harris-Perry during the election. She did something special."

On her MSNBC morning show, Harris-Perry broaches topics, such as Black conservatism, Black voter suppression and Black urban education policy. On the weekends, she's a talk show host and during the week, she teaches courses at Tulane on economic and environmental justice and religion and civic engagement, to name a few. Featured on panels and discussions at universities across the country, Harris-Perry lives her life as an academic, an activist.

More interested in Bundles' current work on Walker and her writing process, I avoided talking about my research on Chicago. She raved about DropBox and the importance of filing systems. She shared with me that I could access the Defender database through the D.C. Public Library online system. "Now don't blame me when you're reading the Chicago Defender from your computer at 3 a.m.," she laughed.

After checking her phone, she realized that almost two hours had passed. She slipped on her red-framed glasses and waived for the waiter to bring the check. I pulled

out my wallet and she signaled for me to put it away—she's got it. "I think I can handle this," she laughed. "It was so good speaking with you," I said. "Thank you so much for meeting with me and I'll be sure to keep you posted on my research."

We both walked in the direction of the train station. Before I crossed the street, we hugged and parted ways. I just spent two hours chatting with A'lelia Bundles—Madame Walker's great-great granddaughter. I rode the escalator down into the Friendship Heights Station and took out my pieces of notebook paper and pen. As the train departed from the station, I started to scribble down every detail I could remember about our conversation.

CHAPTER 4

AND THE WELLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN: THE DEMOLITION OF IDA B.

WELLS HOMES

"The city has a paid a price for that, and it will continue to pay a price for all the social,
psychological, familial, and human problems that come with packing a very large number
of very poor people into one small place,"
-Monsignor John Egan, director of Chicago Archdiocesan Office of Urban Affairs,
quoted in Bradford Hunt's, *Blueprint for Disaster: The Unraveling of Chicago Public
Housing*

For more than thirty years after the construction of the Wells Homes, the CHA

continued to build public housing developments. The Second Great Migration, postwar

population influxes and lifted bans on housing segregation contributed to the lack of

efficient construction of public housing developments (Hunt, 2009). Increased

populations forced hasty mass construction, which Egan's quote above points to as

detrimental to the entire city of Chicago, not just public housing residents.

Over the years, public housing communities transformed into vertical and

horizontal Black ghettos, labeled based on the physical structure of the high-rise and

walk-up or low-rise housing developments (Hunt, 2009). The developments'

concentrated violence, drug activity, and persistent poverty attracted attention across the

country. In media coverage and scholarship alike, Chicago's public housing

communities were sites of criminal acts and corruption (Hunt, 2009).

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate *Residents' Journal*, a current online

publication on a mission to combat existing negative stereotypes of public housing and

low-income residents, and its coverage of the demolition of Ida B. Wells Homes. This

chapter explores media as active processes, taking into account form and content, to

interrogate the exercise of agency and the conditions of its emergence and limitations. To

help build context for the demolition of the Ida B. Wells Homes, I provide a brief

background on the expansion of public housing in Chicago. Within this context, I discuss

CHA's projects of housing integration/(re)segregation, slum clearance and urban renewal

to situate the CHA's Plan for Transformation, an initiative that encompassed the

demolition of majority public housing developments in Chicago's South and West sides.

CHA's Expansion and Plan for Transformation

After the completion of the Ida B. Wells homes in Chicago's Black Belt in the

early 1940's, CHA began plans for expansion of public housing developments across the

city. The 1949 Housing Act, which initiated mass slum clearance in predominantly

African-American neighborhoods, led to an influx in applications for public housing

(Smith, 2012).[4] Debates on qualification for residency, location of new developments,

development costs and fulfillment of racial quotas continued for more than thirty years

(Hunt, 2009).

During this time, thousands of units were built across the city, but because of cost

per unit and challenges with integration policies, a concentration of predominantly

African-American developments emerged in the South and West side corridors of

Chicago (Hunt, 2009). For example, Prairie Avenue Courts were built in Chicago's

Southside in 1955 with 27 percent White occupancy. By 1962, that number decreased to

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[4] Smith (2012) noted that in the early 1940's 200,000 people lived in the Black Belt
neighborhood, with an infrastructure built to accommodate 150,000 people. The most
densely populated area of the Black Belt had a population density of 70,000, twice as
dense as comparable White neighborhoods.

5 percent. According to Hunt (2009), the abolishment of legal racial restrictions on qualifications and application processes for public housing caused the influx of African-American residents.

By the 1970's, media outlets in the city, such as the *Chicago Daily News* had run numerous stories on the persistent poverty and violence existing in the city's public housing developments (Hunt, 2009). Concomitantly, sociologists studied the behavior of children and families in concentrated areas of poverty. Articles and scholarship alike criticized the CHA for its lack of concern for the social and cultural effects of geography and infrastructure on individual and group behavior. Interviewed or researched residents responded to research studies and media stories combatting stigmatization of public housing residents and communities (The Urban Institute, 2003). Too often, residents' testimonials and anecdotes of success and survival were overshadowed by stories and research on crime, violence, drug activity and corruption (Hunt, 2009).

In the 1980's the CHA experimented with mixed-income housing, as one means to rehabilitate and revitalize public housing developments (Hunt, 2009). Building restrictions and protests from surrounding neighborhoods and school districts halted any immediate widespread changes from public housing to mixed community housing. In 1995, the CHA became a subsidiary of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Under HUD, the CHA secured federal money to begin plans for a mass urban renewal (The Urban Institute, 2003).

In 1999, CHA initiated its Plan for Transformation, a ten year 1.5 billion dollar project to transform public housing properties into mixed-income communities. The plan called for the redevelopment of about 25,000 public housing units. To accomplish the

massive redevelopment, family public housing was to be reduced, and more than 6,000 families living in public housing had to be relocated (The Urban Institute, 2003).

In the relocation of current residents of various public housing communities, CHA initiated strategies to help move public housing residents into the private market (with Section 8, also known as vouchers) until construction was complete. In conjunction with the pubic housing Central Advisory Council (CAC), the CHA signed a Relocation Rights Contract. The contract guaranteed public housing residents supportive services during the relocation process, such as real estate counseling (The Urban Institute, 2003).

From 1999-2003, the CHA demolished approximately 7,000 units, rehabilitated more than 2,000 units, and began construction on several small, mixed-income developments. The Ida B. Wells Homes' demolition began in 2003. The CHA planned to replace the then 3,200 public housing units with 3,000 mixed-income units, with 1,000 of those units to house public housing residents, (Piemonte, 2002). The CHA transformed the Ida B. Wells Homes into Oakwood Shores, a mixed-income community.

Like the Wells Homes, several other housing developments were demolished and reconstructed as mixed-income communities. As of fall 2012, some former public housing residents qualified to live in new mixed communities, while others remained on waiting lists due to problems with lease compliances (Piemonte, 2002).

Community Formations in *Residents' Journal*

Chicago Housing Authority originally formed *RJ* in 1996 to help create better relations between the CHA and public housing communities, *RJ* published monthly editions that covered topics ranging from proposed CHA housing policies to community reunions and block parties. Contributors include youth and adults, sometimes formally

trained as journalists, from various low-income, mixed-income and public housing communities. According to Ethan Michaeli, the publisher of the journal, *RJ's* purpose was to provide public housing residents with information on changing housing policies, and promote and preserve their perspectives on changing housing communities.

Articles for analysis were retrieved from *RJ's* online archive between 2002-2011, the projected time for the Ida B. Wells demolition project. Published articles that mentioned Ida B. Wells either in the title or in the body of the article were selected. Although initially defining a time frame to collect textual evidence, I found two articles outside of this time frame that were included in this analysis. In June 1997 and August 1998, *RJ* published two articles that helped tell a story of community organization, celebrating the Ida B. Wells Homes.

At the end of each journal article, the website provided tags that indicated keywords in the article. After conducting an initial reading of the 10 articles, I also conducted a tag search for articles with key term "Oakwood Shores," which is the name of the mixed-income community built on the site of the Wells Homes. This search yielded four additional articles, although three also were inclusive of the Ida B. Wells tag. Accounting for the overlap, these two searches bring the total number of articles to 14.

After doing another reading of these articles, I noticed a consistent story—the CHA's Plan for Transformation. To further investigate this narrative, I conducted a third tag search for "Plan for Transformation," and collected 34 articles. After conducting three different searches, my final count of articles for analysis is 48.

Four themes emerged during the critical textual analysis: strategies for change, public housing diaspora, unfamiliar spaces, and (im)mobile movements. Each theme

portrayed how residents participate in various practices of agency in their respective

communities. Themes simultaneously explored how race, class and space exert pressures

on the formation and exercise of people's agency. Although operating in tandem, the

themes were separated for critical investigation.

Strategies for Change(s)

In accordance with *RJ's* stated purpose to advocate on behalf of public housing

residents and provide pertinent information on evolving housing policy, several articles

published stories on various community organizations' plans, meetings, and/or activities.

Stories detailed ways in which residents banded together to oppose new CHA policies,

reached out to advocacy organizations for legal assistance, and demanded accountability

from community members on the sustainment of thriving, safe communities. A few

articles provided profiles of "positive people," housing residents that usually grew up in

public housing communities, went to school and returned to Chicago to advocate for at-

risk neighborhoods.

In June of 1997, Annie Smith, a *RJ* contributor and Wells Homes resident wrote

"Wells on the Rise," an article about her experiences at Wells Day, a community event

celebrating the life and heritage of Ida B. Wells and the community named after her.

Smith began her article with a personal narrative about how certain spaces in the Wells

community haunted her in her dreams. At the end of her narrative, she began her

reporting and stated:

> But today, as we marched past that location where the nightmare took
> place, I wasn't afraid. In fact, I chanted with a resounding voice as I
> passed the area, as if to say I've confronted my fears….Today I had
> with me a group of people who were not afraid and were ready for
> battle. Today, not even a Black cat could defeat the Wells community
> in their fight to reclaim their community, (Smith, June 15,1997).

Smith expressed how she once feared to walk around in her own community. However,

Smith along with other community members celebrated the history of the Wells

development. Smith reported that her neighbors' strength inspired her to join them in

their fight for safety and security measures in their own neighborhood. While the

specific quote above does not indicate who she is fighting against to reclaim the Wells

community, Smith later named her opponents as drug dealers, organized crime lords,

winos, the Public Aid Department and the CHA. She stated, "Our community can only

be a representation of its residents."

According to Smith, the Strategic Planning Committee planned Wells Day. This

committee, among others, was formed among residents who believed it was time to plan

events and programs that helped build better relationships among community members.

These programs were all in efforts to push detrimental practices, such as drug

transactions and shootings, off the Wells Homes' grounds. Like the Strategic Planning

Committee, the Chicago Housing Authority Alumni Association is another organization

that planned programs for and donated money to community members.

In Mary Piemonte's article, "Ida B. Wells Reunion," she described the function

and rehabilitation of the Chicago Housing Authority Alumni Association (CHAAA). The

CHAAA was founded in 1984 and was made up of community members that awarded

scholarships to CHA youth. Piemonte noted that the reunion's purpose was twofold. It

celebrated former Wells residents and raised awareness about the revitalization

CHAAA's scholarship program. The organization had four chapters across four housing

developments. To provide readers with more information, Piemonte included contact information for the CHAAA.

Smith and Piemonte's articles provided concrete examples of functioning community organizations working to enhance safety and living conditions and academic opportunities for residents. The following articles told stories of practices of opposition and resilience in the forms of research, job creation and legal counseling. Articles detailed specific community actions, often led by local advisory councils (LAC), elected representatives in each public housing development.

"A 'One Strike' Battle Planned" provided the history of CHA's "One Strike" public housing law and the consequences for Chicago public housing residents during the Plan for Transformation. According to Piemonte, under the law public housing residents could be evicted if family members were convicted of any drug possession or any drug-related crime, on or off public housing property. Despite the law's intention to deter crime, Piemonte and public housing residents were concerned that the CHA was more interested in evicting families to prepare for housing demolition.

The Central Advisory Council (CAC), in conjunction with its legal counsels, planned to combat the law's rigidity and demand protection for innocent public housing residents that often do not know that family members engage in illegal activity. Piemonte stated:

> The CAC will push Congress to include in the Anti-Drug an
> "innocent tenant defense," and senior residents would not lose their
> homes because of drug or criminal activity they had no knowledge of…
> The CAC would arrange to meet with CHA soon and inform them of
> residents' leaders intentions, and to also ask them for a letter of support.
> Then CAC would draft a document to present to the Illinois congressional
> legislators proposing the amendment to the drug law, (Piemonte, June 4, 2002).

Here, Piemonte provided information to readers on specific plans of action that residents and legal counsel planned to take to amend the law. The statement illustrated the consistency in the involvement of the CAC in processes of drug amendments. Although the article did not guarantee any changes to the law, it indicated the persistence of the CAC in its communication with CHA and state legislature.

This article also included quotes from a press secretary of a Chicago U.S. Senator describing the processes of passing law amendments. The inclusion of this process communicated two points to readers. Piemonte showed the relative ease of access to often-perceived distant state legislatures, and also informed readers of the bureaucratic processes of law amendments.

Similar to the CAC's planned response to the "One Strike" Law, Piemonte described the CAC's criticism of the relocation process during the CHA's Plan for Transformation. In addition to reminding residents of their rights under the Resident Relocation Rights Contract, she also detailed CAC's plan of action, which included a letter to the CHA and a meeting with the CHA Board of Commissioners. In response to a research report released from the CHA on the failures of residents' support services, the CAC demanded the CHA take responsibility for its failed attempts to relocate families, and take immediate action to remedy existing compromising situations for CHA residents.

In addition to meetings with CHA board of commissioners and legal counsel, CHA residents filed a lawsuit in 2003 against the CHA for failing to provide adequate relocation assistance and effective social services to families displaced by public housing demolition. Allegedly, the CHA was in violation of the Relocation Rights Contract in its

failure to provide housing outside of high poverty areas. In this article, explicit issues of

race and class emerged in discussions of high poverty and segregated housing.

Piemonte wrote:

…plaintiffs charged that CHA knew Changing Patterns for Families
was not providing information to the families on opportunity areas
where there was a low poverty level that was racially diverse. But
CHA failed to take any action to prevent Changing Patterns from
relocating the families to predominantly African American neighborhoods,
(Piemonte, Jan. 16, 2003).

While the description of the plaintiff's identified alleged discriminatory practices

of the CHA and the residents' legal response, it also compounded African-American

residential neighborhoods and poverty. The article did not provide context on the

advantages of moving into racially diverse neighborhoods. Furthermore, the journal's

assertion that physical movement away from predominantly African-American

communities and low-poverty neighborhoods yielded improved living condition

reinforced existing stereotypes classifying people living in poverty and people of color as

problematic.

In 2004, *RJ* assembled an Advocacy and Outreach Team to survey community

members on the thoughts and perspectives of CHA residents on the Plan for

Transformation and its relocation efforts. According to Gabriel Piemonte, the team was

the first of its kind, as it was "a report documenting low-income Chicago community

imagined, researched, and written by public housing residents and other members of low-

income communities." Unlike research previously mentioned in *RJ,* this research was

conducted from within targeted communities, and showed a community life that

combatted most research on Chicago public housing developments.

Instead of focusing on the violence, drug activity and corruption, the research emphasized the need for more information resources for community members. The research concluded with a proposal for a resident-run Relocation Information Center, which would have provided information to residents and monitored services received during relocation efforts. Although this specific article did not provide concrete examples of community practices that dispelled negative stereotypes, Ethan Michaeli's, "Who Could Miss the Hole?" provided an alternative perspective to the public housing life alluded to in Piemonte's article on the Advocacy and Outreach team.

Michaeli's article described a reunion among former Robert Taylor and Stateway Garden Homes residents. Michaeli (2008) stated, "The overall atmosphere was relaxed and congenial, even as men who once shot at each other in the development's notorious turf wars now exchanged stories of old times." In a space once plagued with violence, nicknamed the "hole," because one resident told Michaeli that once you got in, you couldn't get out, residents gathered to celebrate community and commemorate friends killed in the Robert Taylor and Stateway Garden communities.

Michaeli included short anecdotes from former residents about their times in Robert Taylor and Stateway Gardens. According to Michaeli, residents linked deplorable living conditions to poverty, not animosity among people; despite persistent poverty, residents overcame continued disdain and rejection of those individuals and institutions in power. Several former residents were quoted comparing their current living conditions to the conditions in CHA housing.

Francine Washington, the last local advisory council (LAC) president of Stateway Gardens stated, "Some live in nice neighborhoods but they're just alone. They're used to

the camaraderie they had in Stateway." Her quote juxtaposed the practices and

formations of community in public housing to those in private market communities.

Washington expressed that despite the perceived and real danger in public housing

communities, residents felt a sense of security and belonging with one another. It was so

strong that when the physical space was revisited, residents looked past former territorial

rivalries and celebrated community life. The gathering of former residents in a specific

place was one concrete form of resilience to the CHA's demolition plans and relocation

of residents.

> Following Washington's quote, Michaeli stated:
>
> For the former residents, their community endures. It is a foundation
> that no bulldozer or wrecking ball can destroy. Not so for the rest of us.
> Like most Americans, I didn't know most of my neighbors in the nice
> suburban area where I was reared. It was a collection of strangers rather
> than a community, (Michaeli, Nov. 6, 2008).

Although emphasizing the community's reclamation of space and continued communal

ties among residents, Michaeli's interpretation formed a weak relationship between the

formation of community and public housing residents. While Michaeli seemed to intend

to emphasize the strength in public housing communities, he instead called attention to

differences between himself (other Americans) and public housing residents.

His statement implied that public housing residents were better equipped to create

community as a response to systemic pressures from government entities, such as the

CHA and HUD. In contrast, his "nice suburban area" did not afford him the opportunities

to create such a community. While this praised public housing residents, it also portrayed

that community was more easily achieved in public housings' dangerous living

conditions, as described in other *RJ* articles.

In an article published in 2010, Mary Piemonte described how Cabrini-Green residents protested CHA's lack of rehabilitation to remaining occupied row houses. Residents, along with members of various advocacy groups, held a rally outside the complex in June 2010 demanding that CHA fulfill its promise of rehabilitating existing homes. In addition to detailing the concerns and plans of action of residents, *RJ* also consistently published information about how to contact the CHA about its analysis and plans for Cabrini-Green.

Articles that detailed strategies for change outlined how community members organized in individual housing residences, and across CHA housing (LAC and CAC). Articles also provided evidence of community organization in the form of protest, rallies and reunions. Despite the articles' inclusion of concrete practices of resilience, the use of existing crippling stereotypes pushed public housing residents into the peripheries of Chicago's social and cultural life.

Public Housing Diaspora

Various public housing developments closed during the initial stages of CHA's Plan for Transformation. CHA residents relocated into private residential neighborhoods, mixed-income communities, and remaining public housing developments. Several articles in *RJ* criticized CHA for its lack of support for residents during processes of relocation, and the consequences of mixing communities.

In "South Suburban Living," Beauty Turner interviewed mayors in Chicago's suburbs to ask about the influx of population of residents on housing vouchers. The mayor of Joliet, a southern suburb stated:

> …there have been some political discussion about certain
> ones who get involved in unsociable activities such as drugs and gangs.

> Some of these type[s] of activities make politicians and local people
> frown upon people from different areas and not just from CHA,
> (Turner, Nov. 11, 2002).

The mayor's statement highlighted the negative consequences of moving CHA residents into the Joliet community, and the how "unsociable activities" of some relocated residents reinforced existing stereotypes of the deviant CHA resident.

Turner reported that very small numbers of housing residents were relocated into the suburbs. According to Michaeli, the CHA ensured that housing residents would be relocated into "opportunity" areas, defined by CHA as neighborhoods that do not have high African American populations or concentrations of poverty. However, in his article, "Report: Residents Steered to Poor Areas," Michaeli stated that more than 70 percent of relocated residents ended in areas of persistent poverty, and 95 percent relocated to neighborhoods with more than 30 percent African-American populations.

Michaeli criticized CHA's failed promise and referencing Sudhir Venkatesh's, (a sociologist and WtPM board member), research on public housing he argued that CHA was destroying vibrant and strong communities during its Plan for Transformation. Michaeli stated:

> These legislators believe that public housing developments need to
> be destroyed before they are replaced with something better. That
> spirit is ever-present at the CHA…Venkatesh's study suggests,
> however, that there are hidden strengths in public housing
> communities…Venkatesh paints a portrait of places where residents-
> legal and otherwise-pool their scant resources with their neighbors in order to
> survive, (Michaeli, Jan. 5, 2004).

In this statement, Michaeli highlighted the CHA's flawed approach to transforming public housing communities. While criticizing CHA's plans to build new mixed-income

communities, Michaeli did not provide alternative strategies or plans to provide more safe and secure livelihoods for residents. Instead, he emphasized how residents employed "legal and otherwise" survival techniques. In drawing the connection between community strength and scant resources, Michaeli suggested that public housing residents faired better in those conditions, rather than in different economic and social conditions, such as mixed-income or private market housing neighborhoods.

To help raise awareness on the dangers and risks in relocating families into different territories, *RJ* published a series titled "Deadly Moves." In these articles, *RJ* interviewed CHA tenants that had moved into different public housing communities. This series investigated increased numbers of homicides in public housing communities during CHA's Plan for Transformation.

Turner and Brian Rogal's investigative article, "Deadly Moves: Moving at Their Own Risk," published in August 2004, followed the Wright family from the Robert Taylor Homes to the Englewood Community. Wright's son, Kemp was murdered within one year of moving into the neighborhood. One of Kemp's brothers said:

> It's like they took all the gangs and mixed them up. Every project they
> shut down, they don't check where they put you. They just put you.
> Gangs are automatically bumping heads [and the CHA's attitude is]
> whatever happens happens, but we got them out of our hair,
> (Turner and Rogal, Aug. 2, 2004).

Kemp's brother suggested the CHA largely ignored the violent consequences of physical relocation of public housing residents. The statement also pointed to one way, although detrimental, public housing residents (re)claimed territory in various neighborhoods. It provided evidence of some of the complexities in community organizations across physical landscapes.

Later in the same article, Turner and Rogal interviewed two brothers from the Cabrini-Green Homes, where several families were relocated from the Taylor Homes, Rockwell Gardens and Stateway Gardens. The Edwards brothers attributed the majority of violence in their community over the years to the drug market that younger residents found more economically rewarding than unemployment or low-paying jobs. At the time of the article, Turner reported that more than 350 families were given a notice of relocation out of Cabrini-Green.

One 18-year-old Cabrini-Green resident described the increase in violence in his community as a result of the relocation process. He stated:

> They know they're going to be shipped off. Some of the dealers
> would rather go down than face life on the outside. Some people
> are planning to die before Cabrini is torn down,
> (Turner and Bogle, Aug. 2, 2004).

Although shedding light on some of the illegal and violent activities in the community, the young Cabrini-Green resident also highlighted how residents were literally willing to risk their lives before moving into a new community. The use of words like "life on the outside" indicated how the young man did not locate himself or his Cabrini-Green community in any socio-spatial peripheries.

RJ established a link between the Plan for Transformation and Chicago's Public School (CPS) system's changes to schools located on Chicago's South and West sides. According to Brinson's story, "Renaissance 2010: Sweeping Changes," residents believed that changes in schools made new mixed neighborhoods more appealing to non-CHA tenants. And for many children, these changes resulted in a mid-year transfer.

Residents argued that a change in living environment coupled with a new school environment created recipes for disaster among already at-risk children.

As a part of the school's transformation plan, the article detailed how new schools would not have Local School Councils (LSC), the governing body of parents and community members that help choose school principals. The article's coverage of the removal of LSC's compounded the CHA and CPS's plans for transformation. In the article, residents expressed concerns about the consequences of privatizing public schooling and housing.

> For example, the president of one LSC stated:
>
> Our fight is for meaningful parental involvement and local community control of our schools…local community control is mandatory. We must be involved in the decision making process…our struggle is now a civil rights issue….(Brinson, Nov. 6, 2004).

The quote above highlighted how political institutions, such as the CHA and CPS, exert pressure, limiting the amount and range of autonomy and participation of community members in integral political, economic and social decision making processes, such as school and relocation choices. Also, the article alluded to the arbitrary nature of the relocation process, which to public housing residents prioritized expected new mixed-community residents, thus de-prioritizing the needs of low-income and former CHA tenants.

In April 2010, Michaeli published an article telling the story about how former housing residents were remaining in contact with one another during and after relocation processes. "Robert Taylor Online," stated that after the Robert Taylor Homes were demolished in 2006, a Facebook group was formed. The page had more than 2,300

members and positive posts from more than 100 Facebook users. Michaeli described

how users exchanged stories about past experiences at Taylor Homes.

One user posted the question, "How do you feel about public housing being torn

down and in which way did it affect your life?" Michaeli highlighted how more than 50

comments attributed the cause of the demolition of developments to the negative

behavior of public housing residents. One resident wrote, "You cannot deny that some of

the children and adults were out of control and when the government saw this, it was a

ripe opportunity to come in and take over." Michaeli then wrote:

> This discussion was sad for me to read. No one talked about how the
> CHA's Plan for Transformation wasted millions of dollars on 'good
> neighbor' programs and 'service connectors' that even they now admit
> didn't work…Instead, it seems that most of the former Robert Taylor
> residents blame themselves for the demolition of the high-rises,
> (Michaeli, Aug. 21, 2010).

Michaeli's statement seemed to have undermined the statement of the Taylor Homes'

resident, as it condemned the resident's personal opinion on some of the consequences of

her own community's violent and illegal practices. Although Michaeli may have

intended to empower residents by fully blaming the housing system for the

development's destruction, in some sense his words stripped away practices of self-

awareness and consciousness among public housing residents.

RJ's stories on the various accounts of relocation processes and consequences

provided information to residents about the pitfalls and failures of CHA's Plan for

Transformation. Articles told stories of how embedded residents were in the physical and

social landscapes of various housing developments. While residents could rely on *RJ* to

tell stories that supported their already existing concerns for housing transformation and

provide information on latest changes in CHA and CPS policies, there was a lack of inclusion of positive transitions out of public housing into the private market or other public housing communities. This oversight may have communicated to readers that low-income residents could not thrive, build or adapt to communities outside of public housing.

Unfamiliar Places

Residents' Journal published several stories from its youth journalism program about the complications during CHA's Plan for Transformation. Youth reporters expressed fear and disappointment in the transition from public housing to mixed-income communities, e.g. Ida B. Wells transforming into Oakwood Shores. Reporters also worked to combat negative stereotypes of life in public housing. Several of the stories were written in nontraditional news story formats.

For example, Jameel Hasan wrote "Me and My Hood" to describe his experiences in Ida B. Wells. He wrote:

> If somebody says something wrong we about to get it cracking…
> Nowadays people say that the Wells is through
> Wherever we move it won't be as good
> As the days gone by and me and my hood, (Hasan, Nov. 7, 2008).

In the last part of his poem, Hasan expressed his love for his community, and his recognition that his life would change after moving into a new community. Hasan's quote described how although Oakwood Shores may have been built on the same grounds of the Ida B. Wells Homes, he felt displaced after the inclusion of socioeconomically diverse neighbors and rehabilitated buildings.

Tashawna Ollie also expressed the social and cultural differences between

Oakwood Shores and Wells Homes, preferring her life in Wells Homes. Ollie stated:

> The Ida B. Wells will truly be missed after they've finished tearing
> it down. So as for Oakwood Shores we will just have to get used to
> living in a new community. Oakwood Shores ain't Ida B. Wells,
> (Ollie, Nov. 7, 2008).

Ollie rejected any similarities between Oakwood Shores and the Wells Homes. Although

some residents were on track to move into Oakwood Shores from the Wells Homes, Ollie

and Hasan conveyed that it was still a transition into an unfamiliar place.   Jasmine

Holmes provided some examples of the differences between Oakwood Shores and Wells.

> Holmes stated:
>
> No more selling nachos and candy out of your house. There will be
> Jazz on the Boulevard, Oakwood Shores and many more. In a blink
> of the eye our childhood memories and landmarks will be demolished,
> (Holmes, Nov. 7, 2008).

Holmes shed light on some changes in her community representative of the changes in

demographics. For Holmes, the demolition of Ida B. Wells Homes was the first step in

preparing her old neighborhood for new residents. And these residents would bring with

them new forms of community entertainment and new standards of living in Oakwood

Shores, which she discussed later in her article.

Kirby Stanton wrote about some of the problems families experienced during

relocation processes. Stanton also told stories about the struggles of living in public

housing. She expressed that poor people usually suffered the most in society.

She stated, "Some citizens of Chicago have had a hard time finding a way to re-

enter society and be able to free themselves and their families." Stanton alluded to the

difficulties that families faced when moving into the private housing market. Using the words "re-enter society" and "free themselves and families," Stanton expressed that many temporary housing situations for residents during CHA's Plan for Transformation translated into community and residential purgatory. It was not home for many CHA tenants, and relocation processes made it difficult for families to enter back into existing public housing or new mixed-income communities. The private market was portrayed as unfamiliar and stifling to CHA tenants.

In contrast to the previous articles' focus on the differences between Oakwood Shores and Ida B. Wells, the remaining articles described positive experiences in Ida B. Wells and suggested ways in which their community could thrive even as Oakwood Shores. Felicia Gordon's "Everyday Life" highlighted the consequences of bad behavior in the Wells Homes on young children. She questioned why shootings and drug activity seemed to be normal behavior for community members.

Gordon suggested one strategy to help rebuild and maintain a safe community. "What we need around this place is some unity. That would be a real plus if we could start getting together and helping one another out," wrote Gordon. Alphonso Parker supported Gordon's call for unity to help strengthen the community. Parker's "Stereotypes," also highlighted how his community was actively engaged in community restoration and revival.

He stated:

In general, this is a hardworking community that has much more to
offer than what the outside world sees…This community is striving
to move forward and past all of the obstacles in our path. We're looking
to make a change, (Parker, Nov. 7, 2008).

Gordon and Parker's articles emphasized the existing strength within the Wells Homes. Despite the name change and addition of new residents, these two articles provided evidence that a younger generation of residents recognized power in unity and inclusiveness. One article, "Growing Up" highlighted some explicit optimism about CHA's plans for the Wells Homes.

Paris Haynes wrote, "Now that they are demolishing Wells, it makes me happy and angry. Happy because I know that what they will build should make this a better place, and angry because I'm going to miss all my friends…" Although previous articles told stories of how negative behavior plagued neighborhoods, they generally proposed community organization and unity as a means to resolve issues of crime and increase safety. However, Haynes was the only writer that expressed some sense of anticipation for the new community. Haynes hoped that Oakwood Shores would create a space for less shootings and drug sales, and more opportunities for picnics and reunions, which she referenced as events where community members came together and enjoyed each other.

Writers in the youth program used a variety of analogies to convey contrasts between the Ida B. Wells Homes and Oakwood Shores. While some writers emphasized the differences in community gatherings and entertainment and the impact these practices would have on their daily lives, others called out for a return to and/or a continued focus on current practices of community organization that symbolized unity and togetherness. Only one article explicitly mentioned any feelings of hope that community construction and revitalization would improve living conditions in the Wells Homes.

(Im)mobile Movements

In accordance with the journal's focus on the complexities and complications of CHA's plan for transformation, the following articles within this theme outlined how the CHA politically and economically disadvantaged public housing residents. Articles told stories of alleged intentional lack of maintenance on public housing property, outrageous and unmanageable utility bills, and an overall lack of concerns for the livelihoods of CHA tenants. Although *RJ* raised legitimate concern and addressed relevant and timely issues for residents, in doing so the journal primarily positioned residents as helpless or powerless against political and economic institutions, such as the CHA.

In 2002, Bobby Watkins wrote "Who Speaks for Public Housing Residents?" Watkins pointed to different organizations that advocated for public housing residents. He noted that when CHA launched its Plan for Transformation, it seemed that many organizations, including LACs and the CAC became more concerned with personal economic and social gains, rather than the uplift and upkeep of the entire community. He stated:

> This goes for the Coalition [to Protect Public Housing], too.
> The Coalition is now made up more of groups outside of public
> housing than inside public housing, (Watkins, June 9, 2002).

Here, Watkins expressed a lack of trust and faith public housing residents had in government and city officials who did not live in public housing. Despite existing community organizations, Watkins described how outside political and economic pressures negatively influenced local governing practices.

Beauty Turner published a series of articles concerning the consequences of lease compliance conditions for re-entry into CHA housing. If a tenant was found non-lease

compliant, e.g. delinquent in utility bill payments, the CHA exercised the right to remove the tenant(s) from waiting lists. Some electric bills were reported as high as $10,000.

Turner interviewed one Englewood resident about her high electric bills. Fleming, a young single of mother of nine, was relocated on a housing voucher. Turner reported that she and her family were without gas or electricity for over five months because of an outstanding $13,000 electric bill.

Electric and gas companies established programs to help alleviate some of the financial burden of increased bills as a result of flawed relocation processes. Despite these efforts, residents who made little to no income did not have the resources to pay adjusted monthly bills. Fleming expressed her frustration with the system and stated, "Sometime[s] I still wish that I was back in the projects, I didn't have all these problems."

Fleming was relocated on a housing voucher although she did not have any monthly income. The CHA's failure to account for her financial instability set her further back in returning to CHA housing. Other residents' testimonies in Turner's series on lease compliance described how the rules and regulations within CHA were more tolerable and therefore, preferred. However, in both instances, articles positioned residents in helpless opposition to a flawed and corrupt housing public and private housing market.

In an attempt to help alleviate some of the fears among public housing residents about relocation processes and the completion of the CHA's Plan for Transformation, Michaeli published "Myths and Urban Legends." In the article, he identified five myths that he stated delayed execution and completion of transformation plans. While trying to

dispel myths, such as the mayor's support of the Plan for Transformation and the lack of

funding for completion, Michaeli used language that reinforced existing stereotypes of

housing residents, and suggested that fundamentally public housing communities would

not thrive with assistance from Chicago's reputation for corrupted governmental

practices.

For example, to dispel the myth that CHA developments are not "isolated pockets

of poverty," Michaeli stated:

> On any given day, a veritable United Nations of people come to
> Cabrini-Green and many other developments to buy drugs or engage
> in other nefarious activities. Police…often reach 'accommodations'-
> meaning that they get bribes from gang members… (Michaeli, Jan. 2, 2003).

Michaeli highlighted the corruption of Chicago police within public housing communities

and pointed to how Cabrini-Green residents are stereotyped based on activities on that

include Chicago city officials and non-public housing residents. While this helped

dismantle the idea that public housing communities were somehow isolated pockets of

poverty, Michaeli spent three paragraphs describing the criminal activities in the

development. He did not provide subsequent context of any specific counter practices

that would have addressed the poverty-stricken stereotype of housing residents.

Later in the article, Michaeli discussed another myth—that no one cares about

residents. In his attempt to refute this myth, he highlighted how outsiders, such as WtPM

board members genuinely cared for public housing communities. However, he did not

provide any examples of how residents cared for one another within various

communities. Instead, Michaeli named his organization's founders, such as the

MacArthur foundation as sincere and knowledgeable advocates for public housing

residents. He followed that statement with this one:

> There are others who 'care' about what happens in public housing,
> even if the reasons they care are more connected to their bank
> accounts than the welfare of residents…CHA's housing is not safe
> nor decent sanitary and the agency doesn't even come close to
> housing all of the city's poor, (Michaeli, Jan. 2, 2003).

Michaeli distanced his organization, WtPM and its funders from other organizations,

such as the CHA, construction companies and real estate brokers. He condemned

organizations making a profit from public housing communities, and praised

organizations that received minimal economic gains. Michaeli's statement failed to

explore if and how WtPM received economic benefits and incentives from employing

public housing residents. To establish a correlation between economic royalties and

'care' for residents provided little hope for residents and their partnerships with

organizations, like the CHA, which made major decisions affecting housing communities

and residents' personal lives.

> At the article's conclusion, Michaeli wrote:
>
> Many of [myths listed above] are derived from other myths, darker, more
> pernicious ideas like racism, sexism and classism. If we do not believe
> those myths, we should not act like poverty, drug abuse, violence and
> a lack of health care are the specific problems of public housing tenants,
> (Michaeli, Jan. 2, 2003).

In Michaeli's emphasis on universal problems of poverty, drug abuse and violence, he

minimized the specific ways in which racism, classism and sexism exerted pressures on

the lives of CHA residents. He situated residents in a larger social context to combat

stereotypes of public housing as epicenters of drug, abuse and violence. However, his

attempt stripped away the specific social and cultural relations that helped build and sustain public housing communities. A lack of discussion on the differences in cultural and social relations diminished the individual and collective community identity, which Michaeli stated emerged out of places known for "meager incomes" and "non-isolated concentrated poverty."

In November 2004, Miachel Ibrahem wrote an article on voter activism and ways in which relocation would effect residents' voter registration. The article started with an overview of various organizations, such as United Power, that visited Chicago to encourage community members to vote and demand respect and accountability from local and national politicians. The article provided information about how community organization could help increase voter education and registration.

At the end of the article, Ibrahem interviewed a few of his community members on Election Day. One resident stated,

> I mostly remember being engulfed by the single feeling of hope or
> hopefulness. I lost much of it the closer the time came to cast my vote,
> (Ibrahem, Nov. 24, 2004).

Another resident stated,

> [The vote] feels good, but I might borrow in a literary way from
> Cryrano de Bergerac: 'You really cannot change what cannot be
> changed, you can only make the right gesture, (Ibrahem, Nov. 24, 2004).

The residents' quotes on voting pointed to the mixed emotions that some public housing residents had about democratic processes and the sincerity of government officials. However, the inclusion of these two quotes, especially the last one, seemed to have contradicted efforts to raise awareness about the voting power and voter participation. It

undermined efforts of organizations, like United Power, and reinforced the existing

stereotype that public housing residents are apathetic voters because the political system

does not work on their behalf.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I examined *RJ's* coverage during the demolition of the Ida B.

Wells Homes. I explored ways in which agency is exercised and conditioned in the

journal's production. In doing so, I examined media as simultaneous practices of

resilience and perpetuation of hegemonic practices of discrimination.

Residents' Journal told stories of resilience in forms of protests, rallies, reunions

and community organization. Articles that specifically discussed strategies of change

detailed how community members fought against infiltration from organized crime, drug

wars, and individuals/organizations that exploited public housing residents. Specific

outlets, such as local advisory councils, were referenced as means to advocate for

improved housing policies and regulation. In its coverage of community reunions, *RJ*

highlighted how residents, despite often unsafe and poor living conditions, survived and

formed positive relationships with each other.

While praising the residents' resilience, *RJ* shed a negative light on relocation

efforts, which often resulted in public housing residents living in the private housing

market. In doing so, it may have limited residents' perceptions of living outside public

housing developments.   In articles detailing the public housing diaspora, the CHA was

often criticized for its lack of concern and support during relocation processes.

More specifically, *RJ* accused CHA's relocation plans of destroying strong

communities located inside public housing developments. With stories of increased gang

violence, murder rates and crippling voucher policies, *RJ* explicitly rejected the CHA's Plan for Transformation's claims of revitalization and urban renewal. Instead, *RJ* linked the plan to destruction of communities, disadvantageous public school policies, and decrease in civic engagement among residents.

While *RJ* included stories that criticized CHA's Plan of Transformation, it also reinforced existing stereotypes of public housing residents. Articles described how public housing residents built, sustained community, survived, and thrived inside the public housing system. In contrast, journal articles that described living conditions outside public housing continued to illustrate CHA's flawed processes of relocation.

Teenagers participating in *RJ*'s youth journalism program mainly wrote about transitions into unfamiliar places, such as Oakwood Shores, the rehabilitated Ida B. Wells Homes. Young writers wrote about the differences between the communities, attributed to changing demographics and new buildings. While reminiscing about the familial aspects of the Wells Homes, younger Wells residents also highlighted some of the more negative community practices, such as drug sales and gun violence, in the Wells Homes. Despite this recognition, only one article called for former and current Wells residents to reunite and continue to build community in the newly constructed space.

Amidst relocation and transformation processes, *RJ* published articles detailing how community organizations questioned CHA's authority and policies, encouraging other members to join the movement against unfair housing policies. However, many of the articles discussed in the latter sections of this chapter overwhelmingly focused on the violent, dangerous and corrupt lifestyles in public housing communities.

Articles detailed hopeless attempts of moving outside the public housing system, in some sense suggesting that public housing residents are incapable of living and thriving in the private market. Similarly, government institutions, like the CHA, were often positioned in opposition to residents, rarely recognized or explored as any form of resource. Articles discounted many attempts of organization, such as voting power and local and central advisory councils. Stories of community organization were often overshadowed by the focus on and criticism of crippling governmental organizations and practices.

I'm a Fraud

"I'm trying to catch a cab to 4859 S. Wabash Ave.," I told Steve, the bellhop at the Congress Plaza Hotel in Chicago. "Why are you going there," he asked me with a puzzled look on his face. "I'm interested in finding out more about We the People Media and its office is at 4859 S. Wabash Ave."

"I used to live in that neighborhood, but I got out; by the grace of God," said Steve. Steve worked as a bellhop for 15 years at the Congress Plaza. For seven out of the 15, the workers have been on strike outside the hotel because of unequal pay. I never liked to cross the picket line, but I couldn't afford to stay in the conference hotel. Steve told me he couldn't afford to be on strike.

Steve, who was born and raised on the South Side of Chicago, alerted me that I was going to the other part of the city. I'm from D.C. so I was comfortable taking public transportation, but Steve insisted I take a cab to S. Wabash. He personally called Femi the cab driver.

With my hazelnut Dunkin Donuts coffee in hand, I waited for Femi to arrive, rehearsing my conversation with Ethan Michaeli, the Executive Director of We the People Media and publisher of RJ. I was dressed casually to help build what journalist Isabel Wilkerson calls accelerated intimacy. Dress pants would have been a bit too stiff, so I opted for dark denim slacks with a blue blouse, and flats of course, because in the city, you never know when you have to walk.

"Are you an activist," Steve asked as I waited for Femi to arrive. Am I an activist? I grapple with this question on a daily basis. I'm the scholar who includes a slide in each of my formal presentations with a quote from Alice Walker: "Activism is the rent I pay for living on this planet." I cite the Donnie Bow and Celeste Condit article debating the meaning of feminist activist scholarship and passionately tell my students that research is a legitimate form of activism, social protest. But, am I an activist?

"Well, I'm doing research on the organization for my dissertation," I said softly. Who am I to fly to Chicago and just pop up in this dangerous neighborhood to do research? I'm not any better than any of these other "do-gooders."

"I believe my research on media and community can provide an outlet for communities of color to fight social injustices," I told Steve, also hoping he would give me the benefit of the doubt and not ask me to explain to him what this fight for social justice would look like. Why? Because I don't know. I just finished taking my comprehensive exams and I am on a theory and method high. Please don't ask me to explain what my research will really do for this community. Please.

"You have a good heart sister. God is going to bless you," said Steve. Is he just trying to be nice or is he being genuine? I need this conversation to happen with Ethan

because I need my dissertation evidence. I need my dissertation evidence so I can walk across that stage in May wearing my high-priced tam and robe. The best dissertation is a finished dissertation.

"Treat her like she's my first cousin," Steve told Femi. "She's good people." I'd never met Steve before this day. Femi was cool. We talked about the city and one of his girlfriends who was possessive and apparently demanded a lot of his time. Before he picked me up, he'd been with his girlfriend. It sounded like she hadn't been happy that Steve called him for me.

During our time in the cab, he showed me where downtown ended and told me why cabs didn't like to drive to the neighborhood I was traveling to. According to Femi, people hopped out of cabs without paying and robbed cab drivers for money and the car. I snapped photos for visual evidence as we drove away from office buildings, parks and skyscrapers and towards dilapidated buildings and police stations [See APPENDIX F]. I normally don't talk to cab drivers in D.C. unless I see them taking an extra long route to raise the fare. On this day, everything was a piece of evidence. I needed to talk to everyone.

"Do you have a card," I asked Femi. I wanted to have a number to call so he could come pick me up. "I'll have to charge you double to pick you up." Steve told me Femi was a straight shooter. I got his number knowing I wouldn't call because I was not paying $40 for a 14-minute car ride. I thanked Femi and stepped out the cab.

Pictures of children lined the walls on the first floor of the CHA (Collaborative Housing Authority) building. "I'm here to see Ethan Michaeli from We the People Media," I told the security guard. "Is it E-tan or E-than," he laughed. "I'll take you

upstairs." As he escorted me up the stairs, I rehearsed my questions and reminded myself to play it cool.

As we walked into the office, I see Krystal sitting at a desk on the computer. I knew it was her because I familiarized myself with profiles of employees from WtPM's website. Although I wanted to ask her questions about her experiences at WtPM, I played it cool and just said to her that I was here to meet with Ethan.

He walked out of his office wearing blue jeans, a blue polo shirt and brown shoes. He extended his hand for a proper greeting and invited me into his office. His computer desk was covered with what appeared to be papers he was grading. The wall to the right of his desk was lined with bookshelves filled with papers, books and magazines. We both sat down and I started the conversation, desperately trying to eliminate the awkward distance between us.

After thanking him for agreeing to meet with me, I started to talk a little bit about myself and why I was interested in WtPM, specifically Residents' Journal. I mentioned how I believed that students and scholars in mass communication could learn so much from this organization and its journal. I explained goals for my research and how I thought RJ would help tackle those goals. "I'd like to spend some time with your organization to observe how the journal functions; how writers and editors interact," I told him. "We don't have time for you to do that," he responded. "Not to be rude in any way, but we've been recognized by the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune. Everything I think you need is on our website."

Taken aback by his response, I tried to reiterate that I was interested in both the content of the journal and how it is produced in and through community. "It sounds like

you don't really know what you want," he said. "Well, I can send you a detailed

proposal to clarify some of my goals and provide a detailed timeline inclusive of dates

and schedule," I interjected. "I don't have time to read a proposal of that nature and if

you were to spend any time with anyone from this organization, I would have to facilitate

those interactions," he responded.

"We just turned down someone from England who wanted to do something

similar," he said. "What do we get out of your research?" he asked. In attempt to try to

communicate sincerity and awareness of the uneven relationship between researchers

and subjects of research, I highlighted how I eventually wanted to publish articles and

even a book about my research. Academic research would be just one more channel for

WtPM's story to be told. He didn't buy it.

He sat across from me with his hands clasped together in his lap leaned back in

his office chair looking at me with a you-don't-know-what-you're-talking-about face.

Determined not to leave this office without some sort of verbal agreement about future

research with WtPM, I tried to peel away layers of myself, my overall goals as a

researcher, to try and prove to him that I was worthy of working with his organization.

"I'm very conscious and careful about the questions I choose in my research," I said. "I

have to be inspired and motivated by my work. I want it to reach outside the academy."

He smirked. "That's laudable of you, but most of my academic friends get whatever

since of gratitude or feelings of transformation you're looking for in the classroom with

students," he said. "And you won't get tenure doing that kind of work, will you?"

Tears welled in my eyes, and I wanted to walk out. How did this interview about

dissertation research morph into an assault on my research interests and ability to earn

tenure? I naively thought that my otherness, formed at the intersections of my race,

gender and class, would help me gain access to a community of people who looked more

like me than Ethan. In that moment, Ethan simultaneously challenged and dismissed my

otherness, which led me to question my own identity.

Although equipped with a language that could have articulated how his

statements and actions perpetuated White male hegemony, I fumbled with my words,

trying to formulate a response void of any emotion of anger or disappointment. I rattled

off names of scholars that I admired and studies written by bell hooks, Bob McChesney

and Stuart Hall. Pretending not be rattled by his rude comments, I listened to his

subsequent plugs on his future book on the Defender and wrote down irrelevant

resources he listed I should read about Chicago's public housing communities.

"Well, I'm so glad that you agreed to meet with me," I said. "I'll definitely send

you some more information." "Yes, I'll walk you down and show you to the train

station," he responded. "Just walk around like you're from here. It's not the best

neighborhood, but you'll be fine." He walked me down the back stairs, in the opposite

direction of Krystal and the other few people in the office. "Be sure to send me your

paper on Madame C.J. Walker," Ethan said as he waived goodbye. I thought to myself

that I'm definitely not sending him my paper. I smiled and thanks to Ethan's directions,

walked in the wrong direction to the train station.

Ethan frustrated me by his lack of willingness to give access to his organization.

His audacity in separating himself from what he called those people (his staff) made my

blood boil. He pissed me off when he told me I wouldn't get tenure. He worked my damn

nerves when he had asked for a copy of my paper, "Madame C.J. Walker: Educational Practice, Media, and Culture."

I took off my Michael Kors watch as I walked down the empty streets of Chicago. I'm from D.C.; how dare he think that I'm afraid to walk to the train station. I looked over my shoulder every now and then to see if anyone was following me. I walked in between abandoned buildings and along dirt paths—a route my mom would cringe to know I walked along by myself. A man is walking towards me and instead of grasping my purse any tighter to my chest, I smiled and said, "Hello, how are you." He nodded and walked past me.

I walked past an older man cleaning out the trunk of his Black escalade. I saw a woman walk past me with groceries. "Is the train on this block?" I asked the man. "Sure is," he responded. "Turn left at the corner and you can't miss it." That wasn't so bad. I didn't get robbed or attacked. I just overheard a woman on her phone talking about someone getting robbed at the train station. She said it was at night, and she (or he) should have known better riding the train that late.

I walked into the conference hotel lobby and sat at the table to record all of my feelings. Just get it on paper, I told myself. This was a part of the process, right? Tears fell as I thought about what just happened and listened in on conversations of fellow academics debating whether it was too early for a cocktail at 12:30 p.m. What the hell was I doing?

I was frazzled in the hotel lobby about my seemingly naïve motivation as an academic, and my overly passionate attitude towards my research. As I forced myself to regurgitate every memory of my conversations with Steve, Femi, Ethan and the security

guard, I became paranoid about my too casual attire for the annual conference the year before I was on the job market.

I had just waltzed right into Ethan's office with a proposal to observe his organization and to tell some form of the classic rags to riches and tragedy to triumph stories. "Poor Southside residents claim a stake in Chicago Media" and "Black Public housing residents find a voice in media"—two examples of hopeful yet unrealistic stories of liberation and recaptured power told by me, the conflicted academic and activist. I struggled to keep my composure in the hotel's lounge. But, I could not figure out how I was displaced from a conference that accepted my research, and a community that I thought I could relate to in ways that Ethan never could.

CHAPTER 5

CONTINGENT AGENCY AND IMPERFECT FORMS: CONLCUSION AND

DISCUSSION ON THE *DEFENDER, RESIDENTS' JOURNAL* AND COMMUNITY

MEDIA

Community media, therefore, provide an exceptional site of cultural analysis to consider
the fundamental, yet enigmatic relationship between communication and community: a
relationship that stirs the popular imagination and stimulates academic debate.
–(Howley, p. 258, 2005)

Historical cultural materialism analyses refute essentialist claims and binaries.

With a focus on the specific historical and cultural contexts, historical cultural

materialistic analyses of media explore social relations, and the emergence of specific

cultural conditions (Hamilton, 2008). In doing so, these analyses investigate human

activities, such as writing newspaper articles, forming local advisory councils, and

submitting counter housing policy proposals to the CHA.

The purpose of this research was to examine *RJ's* historical transformations and

practices of agency. I situated RJ within the context of the Black press, specifically the

Chicago Defender during the construction and opening of the Ida. B. Wells Homes, the

first public housing development in Chicago built primarily for African Americans.

After contextualizing *RJ,* I explored the current publication during the demolition of the

Ida B. Wells Homes.

Using textual analysis, I examined specific geographies, highlighting the social

and cultural conditions, in which *RJ* emerged. Analyses of both the *Defender* and *RJ* will

be discussed below to discuss how systemic processes helped produce spaces of subversion and oppression for marginalized communities. Hegemonic processes of race, class and space, although all working in tandem to create specific social relations are explicated separately to convey concrete examples of resilience through and reinforcement of oppressive practices. The examination of systemic pressures of race, class and space, will then help develop a language to help define and explore the exercise of contingent agency via imperfect media forms and practices.

Racial, Class and Spatial Pressures

Both chapters of analysis explored media participation and production. Informed by historical cultural materialism and textual analysis, I identified emergent themes that helped situate media production in urban Chicago's cultural life. Both publications told stories of residential eligibility, community organization, labor disputes, and relocation processes. Although emerging out of different historical and cultural conditions, my analysis provided evidence that systemic practices of racial, class and spatial injustices conditioned practices of agency in the *Defender* and *RJ's* production.

<u>Race and Community Identity</u>

Articles in the *Defender* explicitly grappled with racial discrimination. Examples of these stories detailed inequalities in access to employment and limited access to sanitary and safe housing. The *Defender* was established in 1905 to provide news for African Americans, who were legally socially and economically marginalized in the early 1940s. Like other African-American newspapers, the *Defender* told stories of Black communities' social and economic gains, in opposition to the mainstream press that rarely printed stories about African-American communities.

Stories also included calls-to-action for African Americans across the country to continue to fight for racial equality. Examples of calls-to-action in my analysis were specifically related to the construction of the Wells Homes. The *Defender* called on community members and organizations, emerging political leaders and social/professional organization to put pressure on CHA officials. Delays and labor disputes delayed construction, and the *Defender* provided information about construction and opening delays, and offered strategies for needed community organization.

However, evidence suggested that the *Defender* was restricted in its scope in coverage on racial injustices. In the early 1940's, the *Defender* was a source and act of community uplift, and also recruitment. While it explicitly challenged some racial and political injustices, it also aimed to encourage African Americans in the South to move to Chicago.

For example, in articles on the delayed construction of the Wells Homes, the *Defender* challenged the CHA for its lack of resolution, and also questioned the motivations for some Black professional and civic organizations that protested labor conditions. Articles called attention to the CHA's lack of response to disputes over construction work and materials, and criticized groups that led to any complications in the completion of homes. Even though these organizations provided support for unjust treatment of Black laborers and residents, the *Defender* highlighted how these groups were a jealous and greedy. Although criticizing governmental practices, the *Defender* urged community members to sacrifice individual identity for a collective community identity. With a collective identity and the help of federal government, the *Defender* expressed that the Wells Homes could be successfully completed. Also, articles

suggested that the Wells Homes would serve as an example and help set a standard for public housing in Black communities in other urban cities across the country.

Similarly, *RJ* told stories about collective community to help combat existing stereotypes about Black public housing residents. In many of the stories, often published in narrative nonfiction or poetic form by youth writers, Ida B. Wells Homes was described as a hardworking community.   Articles described how neighbors gathered for community picnics, helped raise young kids and supported out-of-home sales of baked goods, chips and candy.

One former Wells resident described her upbringing to RJ reporters.

I thought we had moved into a rich neighborhood…To live
here, it meant it was a community within a community. My
mother could leave and the neighbor's mother took care of us…
Families thrived and went on to do greater things in life by using
the positive philosophy of individual family growth and development,
(Thompson, Oct. 5, 2011).

Thompson's article highlighted how public housing residents negotiated individual and collective identities for the greater good of the community. It provided concrete examples of how residents interacted and supported one another. But despite many of the articles' focus on survival and resilience via collective community identities, many articles were not inclusive of specific issues dealing with race within public housing communities.

Some articles did not mention specific racial tensions between public housing communities and the greater Chicago community. When race was explicitly discussed, it was in the context of describing correlations between extreme poverty and majority African-American neighborhoods. While these articles called attention to specific

consequences of living in racially homogeneous and extremely poor neighborhoods, it further perpetuated the stereotype of the undesirable Black neighborhood.

In one article written by Ethan Michaeli, the journal's publisher, argued how racism is often falsely conceptualized as a problem stemming from and only existing within public housing developments. In refuting this claim Michaeli attempted to eliminate some of the socio-spatial distances between public housing communities and the private market. However, in doing so, it seemed his article also stripped away some individual community identity. It ignored the specific historical and social context in which these communities were formed and how institutionalized systemic practices of racism work against public housing residents.

Many of *RJ's* articles did not explicitly discuss racial discrimination. However, my analysis suggested a transformation in individual and collective communities among African-Americans. In the early 1940's, *Defender* articles contextualized the Wells Homes within a larger fight for racial justice and equality. The *Defender* urged all Blacks, despite class status or housing location, to show support and celebrate the opening of the Wells Homes.

Consistent with other Black newspapers at the time, the *Defender* promoted collective identity unified in race. Fifty-plus years later, post-housing policy changes, desegregation laws, and Civil Rights Acts restructured the social landscapes of public housing, most of the *RJ* articles of analysis did not specifically focus on racial discrimination. My analysis showed that *RJ* focused more on collective community united in specific spaces, i.e. public housing developments, and class status, i.e. low-income and working-class CHA residents.

Evidence pointed to a shift in the social relations of Black public housing communities in Chicago, and the complexities in the intersections of racial and class hegemonic practices. While systemic racism continued to exert pressures on public housing communities, *RJ* articles conveyed class divisions and economic struggles as immediate and salient social forces.

Class Divisions and Economic Struggles

RJ and the *Defender* told stories about economic disadvantages in marginalized communities. Articles provided examples of social consequences of being restricted to public housing. The *Defender* covered debates on eligibility, and *RJ* pushed back against CHA's lease compliance laws, which complicated relocation processes for residents who received full governmental income.

During the Wells Homes' construction, local city officials attempted to reject applications from residents who received partial or full governmental income. Officials feared that residents on government assistance would not be able to pay rent, and thus hurt the economic stability of the CHA and Chicago's city governance. Although this opinion did not eventually impact the eligibility of the first residents in the Wells Homes, the *Defender's* article that discussed opinions on relievers and paupers pointed to class divisions in Chicago, determined by both amount and source of income.

RJ articles expressed that source and amount of income determined who was eligible for public housing and housing vouchers during CHA's Plan for Transformation. Articles detailed that after moving from public housing to the private market, many residents wished to move back into public housing developments. Without fixed utility rates and flat rate rents, and some without any source of income, many former public

housing residents did not pay rent or bills in their temporary housing. Lease compliance policies restricted residents who failed to pay bills from moving back into renewed housing policies.

Community members challenged CHA's decision to relocate individuals living on full governmental assistance into the private housing market. *RJ* articles on lease compliance policies and high electricity bills portrayed the cyclical nature of economic oppression. As relocation processes moved public residents into the private housing market on housing vouchers, *RJ* articles highlighted that many residents acquired thousands of dollars of debt. While *RJ* pointed to how large amounts of debt complicated residents' transitions back into public housing, *RJ's* coverage of this issue also reinforced class divides in the city by not publishing stories on any positive transitions from public housing into the private market. *RJ* conveyed that public housing residents could only survive in restricted socioeconomic landscapes.

My analysis examined several articles that outlined consequences of CHA's relocation processes. Residents shared stories of increased gang violence, drug activity and school displacement with *RJ* reporters. Consistent with *RJ's* attempts to criticize CHA's Plan for Transformation and also illustrate the far-reaching effects of relocation processes, Michaeli wrote several articles on how CHA's plans impacted the middle class.

In these stories, *RJ* described how housing shortages across the city made it more difficult for low-income and middle class families to find affordable housing. He also drew correlations between increased homelessness during relocation processes.
He stated:

> I do believe that one day our national mood will change and we
> will recognize that it is better and cheaper to prioritize housing,
> education and health care…It's better and cheaper for middle-income
> Americans most of all, since they are the main ones whose taxes
> currently pay for those military adventures, prison construction…,
> (Michaeli, May 3, 2003).

Michaeli argued that CHA's lack of compassion and action plans to reduce Chicago's homeless populations were to the detriment of middle class families. While his argument pointed to the interconnectedness of homelessness, CHA's Plan for Transformation and middle-class communities, his statement also called for an economic remedy that alleviated economic burdens on mainly the middle-class.

The middle-class was not only positioned in opposition to low-income, poor CHA residents and homeless families, but also situated low-income residents as solely dependent on and detrimental to middle-class families. His argument provided strategies for change to strengthen the middle-class. Without further context or conversation about the intersections of middle- and low-income residents, *RJ* further marginalized low-income residents as helpless and unable to economically survive without economic stability of the middle-class. Michaeli's statements seemed to undermine articles that described practices of economic stability among public housing residents and communities.

My analysis also noted how Michaeli established further distance between middle-class and low-income residents in articles on differences between suburban and city life. His focus on lack of community in suburban and more affluent neighborhoods attempted to combat some of the existing stereotypes of dangerous and flawed public housing communities. While he highlighted the formation of community, his article

reinforced the idea that public housing residents could only build community in neighborhoods with scant resources.

RJ articles that focused on failed attempts of increased police presence and outside organizations drafting policies and making decisions for CHA residents expressed the need for self-governance within public housing developments. Stories demanded that CHA residents be active participants in decision-making processes on relocation and revitalization plans. However, the publication's focus on the lack of trust in internal organizations, such as the CAC and LAC, RJ pigeon-holed CHA residents between the corrupted and flawed governmental system and cycles of whole economic dependence.

Reliance on larger narratives that prioritized middle-income families and individuals in class hierarchies located low-income CHA residents in social peripheries. For low-income residents, private housing was conveyed as undesirable, unattainable and ineffective. Stories of economic struggles were often rooted in binaries of the dominant government institutions and the powerless low-income class, limiting the emergence and remaking of spaces of social power and action.

Spatial Formation and Displacement

The Defender and RJ told stories of formation of communities in specific geographies. Publications also conveyed how public housing residents participated in the creation of social landscapes during processes of subversion and reclamation of oppressive power relations. Concomitant processes of infiltration and displacement in public housing communities provided evidence of exercise of spatial privileges, and provided evidence of the continuity in reproducing social landscapes.

Defender articles established spatial distance between Black slums and the newly constructed Wells Homes. Articles shed light on the unhealthy and unsafe conditions in overcrowded slums. Articles highlighted that the Wells Homes would have both provided low-income Blacks with better housing and an opportunity to establish cooperative communities.

As noted in my analysis, Blacks living in the Wells Homes were socially prioritized over those remaining in slums. For example, the American Friends Association reportedly visited the Wells Homes to teach African Americans how to engage in interracial interactions, and the importance of such interactions. Inside the Wells Homes, residents formed governing bodies and tenant organizations. Although mandated and built by a governmental institution, articles on Wellstown suggested that residents established a sense of social ownership in the physical landscape. Through elections of officers, health and recreation services, and job training, residents fostered a collective community identity. CHA built the infrastructure for the Wells Homes, and articles described how residents were responsible for engendering the new co-operative community. The renaming of the Wells Homes to Wellstown was evidence of residents' reclaiming and reconstituting community.

Decades later as the CHA implemented demolition and revitalization plans, the Wells Homes were renamed and remodeled into Oakwood Shores. My analysis highlighted how *RJ* youth reporters shared some of the differences between Oakwood Shores and Wells Homes. Although built on the same land, reporters complained of new rules that eliminated routine community practices, such as cookouts and front-porch gatherings.

My analysis shed light on how former Wells Homes' residents conceptualized Oakwood Shores. Youth reporters detailed how Oakwood Shores brought different amenities to the former Wells Homes neighborhood, such as new restaurants and forms of entertainment. Oakwood Shores represented a transformation in the socio-spatial relations of the Wells Homes community. Residents did not identify with Oakwood Shores, and through *RJ*, young reporters memorialized community formations and practices that no longer existed in their revitalized neighborhood.

Youth reporters used poetry and narrative nonfiction to reminisce about the Wells community, in spite of physical and social changes. *RJ* also told stories about how former residents of other demolished public housing remembered their communities. For example, my analysis shed light on *RJ's* coverage about Robert Taylor and Stateway Gardens' reunions. While both public housing communities were in stages of demolition, residents gathered in the physical landscape where buildings once stood. During these reunions, *RJ* told stories of how once rival territories and gangs gathered together to remember loved ones in their respective communities. Despite the demolition of buildings and relocation of residents, *RJ* told stories of how former residents maintained community across space.

Analysis of *RJ* articles described the resilience of communities despite processes of infiltration and displacement. According to *RJ*, police officers, city officials, and other non-public housing residents criticized public housing developments for their perceived lack of care of facilities and also condemned illegal drug activity. However, *RJ* shed light on how some police officers helped sustain drug cartels by negotiating deals with community drug dealers. Similarly, *RJ* reported that non-public housing residents visited

developments to purchase drugs. The publication portrayed how economic and social privileges allowed for spatial mobility and the exploitation of public housing communities.

During processes of relocation, *RJ* reported stories of physical and social displacement. Evidence conveyed how residents' lived experiences were embedded in the social landscapes of public housing developments. One resident stated that he would prefer to die before facing life on the outside. Although many articles focused on the crippling and deplorable conditions of public housing communities, some also highlighted stories of survival. *RJ* suggested that private market housing did not provide spaces for community formation. Without more concrete positive and legal examples of stories of economic and social survival within public housing developments, *RJ's* focus on the lack of potential for building community and stability in non-public housing neighborhoods reinforced the stereotype that Black low-income residents could only thrive in drug-infested and dangerous neighborhoods.

Together the analysis and discussion on spatial, class and racial relations in public housing communities pointed to the limitations on and opportunities for the exercise of agency via *RJ's* production. The explication of systemic pressures helped conceptualize how *RJ* conveyed public housing residents' simultaneous subversion and reinforcement of hegemonic practices of oppressive power relations. In the analysis of *RJ*, my intention was not to discount any efforts of resilience or social repositioning. Indeed, my research provided evidence of how public housing residents exercised contingent agency, dependent on their individual and collective community identities and embedded in specific social geographies. Borrowing Raymond Williams' words, my research located

RJ as the medium for and message of contingent agency, accounting for the journal's both content and form.

Defining Contingent Agency

Residents' Journal, as a cultural process, clearly was conditioned by structures of race, class and spatial relations. The explication of how these structures exerted pressures on *RJ* pointed to the dialectical relationship between agency and structure in media practices. *RJ* helped produce spaces of community organization for opposition and sometimes, resilience as it informed residents about pertinent issues on public housing policies, and was both a call-to-action and resource for community organization. Additionally, the material production of *RJ* was an exercise of agency as community members reported and wrote some of the journal's content. Residents' employed agency, which my research found were contingent on and negotiated in the historical and social conditions of specific geographies.

British sociologist Anthony Giddens developed a vocabulary to help conceptualize dialectic of agency, power and society. Although his theory of structuration is not wholly aligned with my research's theoretical and methodological foundation, Giddens' understanding of agency helps clarify the differences between human action and the exercise of agency. In Giddens' explication of agency, he emphasized action that produces particular results. Giddens (1984) stated:

> Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place. Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently, (p.9).

For Giddens, agents have the capability to exert some form of power with a specific intent or purpose. In Giddens' definition, agency is distinguished from action, which he argued is necessary for individuals' daily functions. The exercise of agency is the conscious process of movement and/or action with specific intent.

RJ, as a community media form, engendered a sense of shared belonging among public housing residents. The reporting and publishing of stories on internal community organizations, consequences of CHA plans of relocation and employed strategies of protest and resistance against unfair policies reinforced collective community across public housing developments. Housing residents exercised one form of agency when reporting and publishing *RJ* articles. Stories were intended to inform residents of pertinent issues, and also produce an alternative news source that shared lived experiences that emerged within public housing communities.

My research suggested that *RJ's* exertion of agency subverted oppressive systemic practices, such as the lack of inside perspectives of public housing communities in Chicago media, and existing stereotypes on minimal community organization and civic engagement in public housing communities. However, my research also suggested that this agency was contingent on material relations embedded in residents' specific geographies.

In articles on CHA's Plan for Transformation, relocation processes, and strategies for change, *RJ* often reinforced existing stereotypes of public housing communities and residents. These stereotypes were rooted in oppressive racial, spatial and class divisions. Articles resituated public housing residents of consumers, not engaged citizens.

On a more concrete level, many of the articles were written and published by *RJ's* current publisher Ethan Michaeli, a White male, non-public housing resident, and former investigative journalist for the *Chicago Daily Defender*. Some articles' content may have been prioritized over others based on Michaeli's personal social agenda, which in some cases may not have been consistent with public housing residents. Therefore, consistent with Williams' assertions on selective tradition, the evidence suggested that Michaeli's social privileges (race, class and space) conditioned the production of *RJ*.[5]

Michaeli's "selective tradition" is one exemplar of contingencies in *RJ's* media practices as exercises of agency. My research's explication of *RJ's* contingent agency contributes to existing literature on media participation and practices. It reemphasized the necessity to critically examine the subversive and oppressive relations in the exercise of agency. It also pointed to the misperception that popular media and community media, or mainstream media and alternative are mutually exclusive.

My research called into question the definition of community media, and its significance to critical and cultural mass communication research. Howley (2005) stated that community media are not perfect. Hamilton (2008) stated that democratic communication is often sustained by the very conditions that created for a need its existence. My analysis of *RJ* is consistent with Hamilton and Howley, which themselves challenge the perceived rigid boundaries between traditional/popular media and community/alternative media through analyses of media forms and social relations.

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[5] Williams (2009) described how lived culture is experienced in a particular place within a particular historical moment. After the moment has passed, it becomes more difficult to uncover the structures of feeling. Cultural analyses rely on records of culture, which Williams argued become fragmented through processes of selective tradition. Selective tradition is usually determined by the interests of the dominant class.

RJ's website stated that the journal is the "authentic voice of Chicago's inner-city," (We the People Media, 2012). *RJ's* mission is to push back against other Chicago's media tendencies to ignore problems pertinent to public housing residents and perpetuate crippling stereotypes of public housing communities. However, my analysis and discussion have both highlighted that when both *RJ's* form and content are interrogated, the perceived differences between *RJ* and other Chicago media, e.g. the *Chicago Tribune*, become less distinct.

RJ is under the direction of Michaeli, an outsider to public housing communities. My analysis found very few stories of economic and social stability within public housing communities that did not involve illegal activity, such as drug sales and gang violence. There was a consistent theme that shed light on public residents' ability to build and sustain community using very little resources. Furthermore, evidence suggested that certain conditions, such as drug sales, gang violence and police corruption, were necessary to build community.

My research does not make any general claims on the function of Chicago's community. Instead it explored a historical moment, the Ida B. Wells Homes' construction and demolition, to examine media practices as the exercise of conditioned agency. I do not discredit *Residents' Journal* or its active role in the formation and sustainment of public housing communities in Chicago.

Limitations and Future Research

In "Breaking Down Wells: Analysis of Chicago's *Residents' Journal* and Practices of Contingent Agency via Community Media Forms," I told one story about *RJ* as a media form, and how agency is exercised via media. As researcher, I subjectively

defined the text of analysis, i.e. *Defender* articles and *Residents' Journal* articles, and personal experiences and personal reflections. This text was historically contextualized by the construction, opening and demolition of the Ida B. Wells Homes.

Guided by critical and British cultural theories, my dissertation focused on the production of *Residents' Journal,* which Richard Johnson and Stuart Hall both noted accounts for processes of production and consumption. My engagement with the text was limited to primarily productive practices. Newspaper articles served as primary evidence in analyses, and as a result, my dissertation did not explore the patterns of consumption of media practices, e.g. reading and sharing of *RJ*.

In addition to focusing on productive processes, the selection of evidence limited the scope of my discussion on how political and economic pressures helped shape specific race, class and spatial relations. The addition of governmental archives and/or documents would have helped trace the legalized historical transformation of Chicago's public housing communities. Archives may have included personal records, e.g. applications for public housing and residents' letters to CHA, that would have helped provide more context about community life and consequences of relocation processes. Different assumptions about public housing communities may have emerged from an analysis of governmental archives/documents and personal records.

Media content also limited the conclusions about community organization and action that emerged from the textual analysis. Observation and interactions with *RJ* reporters and CHA residents would have honed in on consumption processes, and helped build context on how agency was exercised through writing, reading, distributing and

sharing *RJ*. It would have also helped tell a story of how their agency was conditioned by concrete discriminatory hegemonic practices.

The recognition of the limitations of the examination of a specific historical moment is necessary in the research process. Limitations do not delegitimize the emergent and focused conclusions from the evidence analyzed in my dissertation. Instead, I highlight the boundaries drawn by the focus of my research. The exploration of limitations of research also helps form future research questions.

Based on my findings about the blurred lines between media forms, my future research will continue to challenge contemporary concepts of community media, agency and activism. I am particularly interested in how newspapers, traditionally categorized as minority-owned (e.g. African-American press) help shape culture, and the lived experiences of community residents. Consistent with scholarship on social movements and media activism, I plan to focus on how the production of and engagement with media practices is an exercise of agency. I call for the continued critical analyses of media practices' material conditions of emergence. It is in the examination of these conditions that my research will continue to explore social and historical contexts of media forms located in specific geographies where contingent agency is exercised.

EPILOGUE

Our living depends on our ability to conceptualize alternatives, often impoverished. Theorizing about this experience aesthetically, critically is an agenda for radical cultural practice. For me this space of radical openness is a margin—a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a 'safe' place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance,
-(bell hooks, 1991, p. 149).

hooks reminds us that spaces of openness and resistance are risky. These spaces are confusing, conflicting, and sometimes hurtful. My anger as I drive through the gentrified streets of D.C., disdain for Michaeli and confusion about my own motivations for and values in research are woven into my thoughts and written into this dissertation. Through the recognition and interrogation of my lived experiences shaped by social privileges and systemic pressures, I locate my community of resistance in academic research and activism.

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I've come to the ends of my research on Residents' Journal. From writing the end of my dissertation, I delight in the idea of never writing about WtPM or its journal again (exception: I'll willingly submit conference papers and publish parts of my dissertation when I transition into a tenure-track position). My personal encounter with Michaeli in WtPM offices in Chicago coupled with the dissertation's challenge to personal convictions about community and activism allows for a smoother departure from this research topic.

Michaeli's exercise of White male privilege was evident in many of RJ's articles, and often overshadowed the stories of public housing residents. His criticism of my research plans, personal goals, and his assault on my Black female identity seeped into my analysis. While analyzing articles, I struggled to look past Michaeli to tell the stories told in RJ about CHA residents' daily-lived experiences.

Yet, I couldn't look past Michaeli because he is part of the story. He is the publisher of RJ, Executive Director of WtPM, and a RJ reporter. He manages production, solicits funds for the organization, and writes articles for the journal. Michaeli disappointed and infuriated me.

Completely immersed in my research and heavily invested in exploring ways to make a difference, I had hoped to report that RJ was championing efforts to increase literacy rates through media writing, or encouraging residents to put pressure on the CHA for the construction of the Ida B. Wells Homes Museum. I felt helpless for residents after reading those stories. In retrospect, this speaks to my own privilege that this project has forced me to confront. Although I hate that I had to sit through one of the most humiliating conversations of my life to begin to unpack my knapsack of privilege, it served a purpose to help identify myself as Loren, the academic and activist.

For example, my connection to Madame C.J. Walker is not coincidental. Step one: my father stood in line at five a.m. to enroll me as an out-of-bounds student at a junior high school that participated in the history fair. Step two: my parents made sure I was placed in geography and history classes that required history fair projects. Step three: I, along with my very-involved parents and history teacher, learned the rules and regulations of the history fair, and then the expectations of an award-winning project.

The transformation of my board from the traditional tri-fold cardboard display into a 6-foot custom-made masterpiece was a direct result of my parents and family members' commitment and sacrifice. Their commitment and sacrifices were conditioned by desire and access to finances for art supplies, knowledge of history fair rules and expectations. Both of my parents worked jobs that allowed them to spend afternoons and evenings bent at the waist over our dining room table cutting, pasting and arranging pictures, captions and timelines.

Was I destined for scholarship in the academy? It seemed that way. My mother insisted that my return to Madame Walker years after the history fair confirms that I am doing what I was called to do. I kind of believed her, until I met Michaeli.

After leaving his office, I imagined what he saw when he looked at me. Did I threaten him? Did my Michael Kors wristwatch and D&G glasses coupled with my enthusiasm about research, history and teaching invade his safe space of power and control? I enjoy imagining that it did.

I still like to imagine that Michaeli feared that my research would uncover some form of corruption within his organization. I like to imagine that I intimidated him. In our conversation, I displayed my expansive knowledge of community media, Chicago's Black Belt history, and contemporary research on Chicago's public housing. After I'd rattled off names of books he should read to help write his forthcoming book on the Chicago Defender, and alerting him to the Moorland-Spingarn Archives in D.C., perhaps he was unnerved. To hide his fears of loss of power and exposure, he attacked.

He was afraid of me.

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Community media initiatives invite cultural scholars not only to test their theoretical propositions in particular and distinctive contexts But also to contribute their analytical insights to the everyday lived experience of their local communities,
(Howley, 2005,p. 269).

For three years I've struggled to situate my research in contexts of activism and social change. After my first year in the Ph.D. program, I made a decision to engage with critical social theories and British cultural studies. But it wasn't until I began writing this dissertation that I engaged with self-reflexive processes, which I believe to be inherent to critical and cultural theories. In "Breaking Down Wells," I simultaneously confronted pain and confusion from acts of racism and classism, explored the contradictions between personal social and economic privileges and the conviction that my research is activism, and informed by these experiences, outlined legitimate assumptions about community life and actions in media among public housing residents in Chicago.   For the first time in my academic career, I broke down the walls between my scholarship and personal life and my research and activism, and allowed this dissertation to emerge from the rubble.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LOCATING IDA B. WELLS HOMES
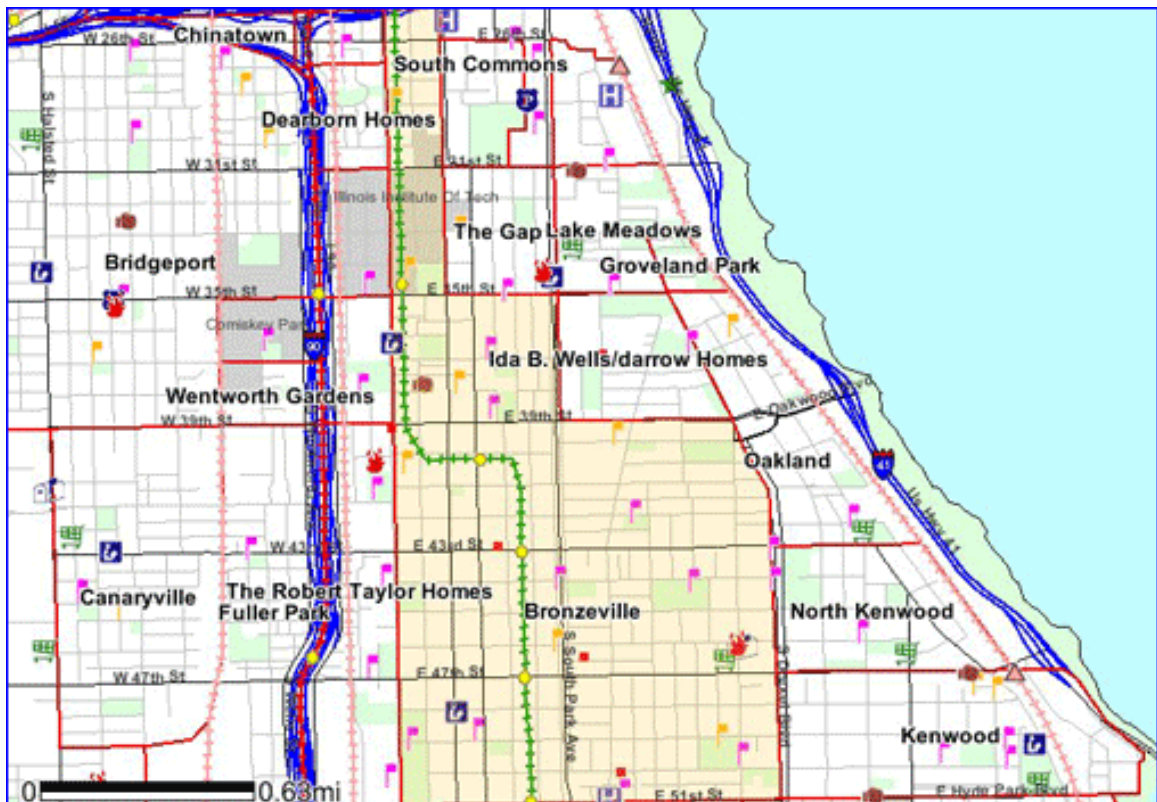
http://www.thelubygroup.com/l_local_maps.asp

APPENDIX B

INSIDE OF WELLS HOMES

APPENDIX C

YOUTH MAYOR OF WELLSTOWN

GIRL BECOMES MAYOR OF 'WELLSTOWN'

Top picture shows George A. Hutchinson, personal representative of Mayor Edward J. Kelly, swearing in 12-year-old Jelna Carr as first mayor of the ʼ... ᵐᵘⁿᶦᶜᶦᵖᵃˡᶦᵗʸ ᵒᶠ Wellstown, which is the name given the Ida B. Wells housing project. Below Mayor Carr is seen flanked by her aldermanic staff, 12 boys and girls, good and true.— Photo by Gushiniere.

APPENDIX D

VICE PRESDIENT VISITING WELLSTOWN

Vice President Wallace Tours Wellstown Homes

AT INFANT WELFARE CENTER of the Ida B. Wells | project in Chicago. The Vice President spent several hours | COOPERATIVE STORE at Wellstown interested Vice Presi- | him. Holding a bag of Co-Op flour together with the
homes on the Southside. Vice President Wallace says | touring the homes and spoke to several hundred tenants | dent Wallace as Wellstown Manager Oscar C. Brown (left), | Vice President is little Alfreda Buckner while two clerks
hello" to some youngsters who live in the big housing | who turned out to meet him. | president of the local N.A.A.C.P., explains its workings to | in the store look on.

HICAGO'S NEGRO POLICE CAPTAIN Harry Deas welcomed the Vice President | GETTING THE AUTOGRAPH of the Vice President at Wellstown was Pauline | SPEAKING TO TENANTS of Wellstown who gathered to welcome him, the

APPENDIX E

MADAME C.J. WALKER: CHANGING THE IMAGE, OPENING DOORS

APPENDIX F

TAXI RIDE TO WE THE PEOPLE MEDIA