

URBAN CORE

The Heart of the City | April 2021

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WE ARE ENLIGHTENED, POWER TO THE PEOPLE

by Jackie W.

What is gentrification? The process where an urban area or a section of city usually occupied by people of color, working class families or families living off of a fixed income, is subjected to an influx of renovations that benefit or attract wealthier individuals.

With the continuation of gentrification the people living in that area will eventually be pushed out or decide to relocate on their own. And there you have it, a larger wealthier community with less diversity that has a chance to thrive, unlike those who were pushed out. Given the drastic change in status, I can almost predict the City of Boston's politicians will find quick solutions to the drug epidemic that has not only crippled many in this generation and sadly the following generation. Because of these tragic turns of events many children will be without their parents or will suffer

Continued on page 1 >>



Shawmut Ave, Boston 1939 by Allan Rohan Crite

Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance

This issue of Urban Core includes some of the poetry of Langston Hughes, one of the leading figures of the Harlem Renaissance. His poetry captures the struggles and spirit of Black people in the U.S. in the first half of the 20th Century. As part of an ongoing

effort to share the real history of this country, we are glad to prominently feature Hughes' poetry throughout this issue. We plan to include the work of other poets and authors in future editions to expose people more to important Black artists.

Have Something You Want to Write About?

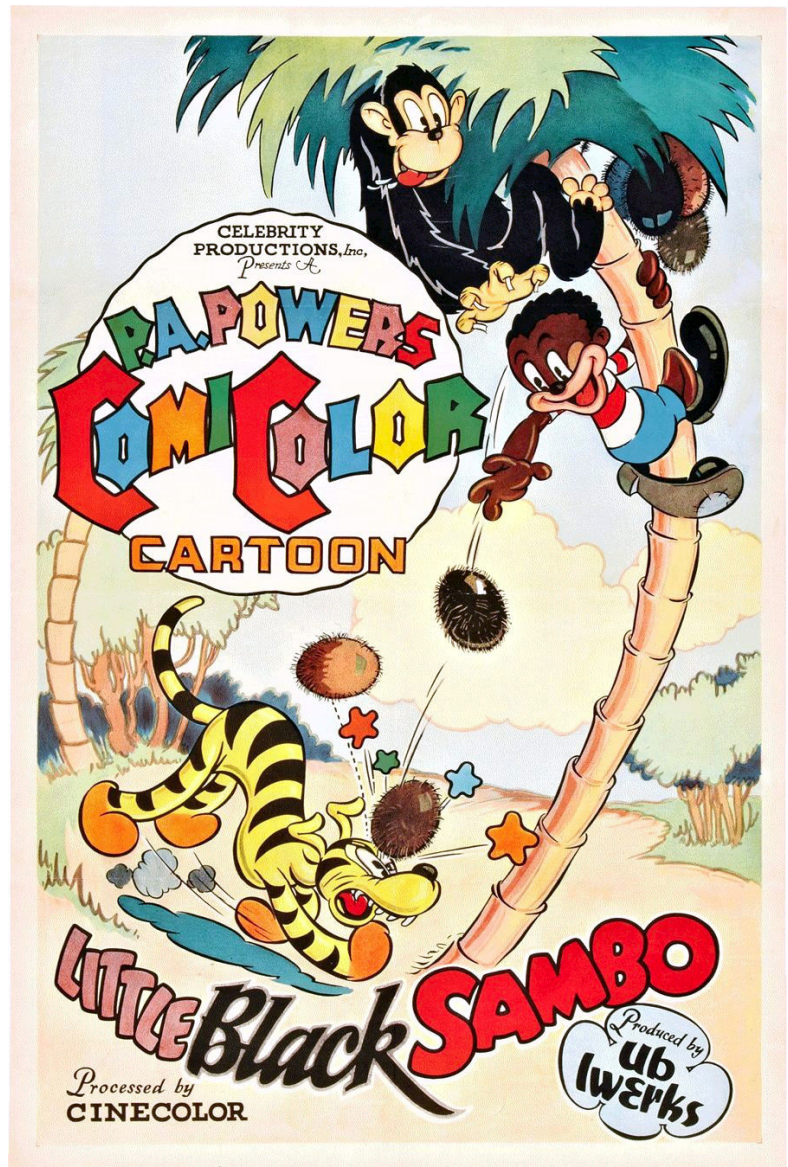
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in other ways.

What is white supremacy? The idea of Caucasians dominating other races and religions for their own benefits.

Understanding the psyche of most black people... Let's begin with the black man. How do you view the black man? Who is supposed to be loving, the rock, the provider and protector for his family. (writing those words made me smile.) However personally, my perceptions are a bit different. The version of what I believe it means to be both a great man and parent. Keep in mind he still has to rise against all odds under the microscope of the world. Therefore I pay attention to the general characteristics. What is he teaching his children? How does he treat both his spouse and child? How does he behave when they are not in his presence? I also consider the troubled or failed version of what most in society secretly wants us to be. Ignorant, naive, disrespectful, at times self-hating. Anything other than great. Because if you want to rule or divide and conquer in America you must keep the larger percentage in a state of delusion. Yes, literally out of their minds.

Usually, little do we know a child is at times a product of their environment. So naturally how do you first reach a child? It begins as an infant. We began to teach them basic words with the goal to hear them communicate verbally. The child continues to grow then reaches the age of 3, 4, 5 when we have to take an innocent human being and educate them for the greatest benefit for his or her development. This is our responsibility as parents and educators. The beginning stages are when a young toddler is most vulnerable.



For a long time Black children had to read racist stories like "Little Black Sambo" in school, which taught them to be ashamed of being Black from a young age

This is the perfect time for them to attend school. The third stage of critical development is age 5-13. Once filmmaking and books were produced it gave history and education a platform to become worldwide. And taken in by black America. In the current times of 2021 there are additional ways to influence vulnerable minds with the great advances in mainstream media. Now given these influences the question to ask yourself is how do we perceive ourselves after being systematically

brainwashed? The facts are you caught on to what color is considered the prettiest, statements our family and others in your environment passed along, the book handed to you in school based on a true story of a boy who decides it is best to be a girl. It ok if people chose to be a different gender or if they are gay, but it's not ok to for the schools to manipulate people's mind when they are still developing, and kids still haven't realized who they really are. Spending most of your day with a teacher who is either racist or blindly teaching you the white standards of how to be. As a young male who is often depicted as less than, the trouble maker, it is now ingrained in your subconscious mind and you now unknowingly act off hidden thoughts. This is the same for young girls. It becomes your life unless you are fully aware of what is going on around you.

High self esteem along with the knowledge of right and wrong has to be in tack at an early age because soon you will experience what the world has to offer. There is a chance you may not be accepted and that child must revert back to the lessons they were taught. That's why in films we are painted as weak, only good enough to entertain caucasians like the fun loving motion picture Shirly Temple. A young pretty cauacian girl who once stood strong in the face of danger. While the grown black man in front of her trembled with fear. Earlier pictures are far worse and too much for my eyes to bear. One day, I had a free day too myself,so I decided to watch a movie titled *The Help*. It was made a few years back but I never watched it. Once the movie was over a feeling of relief came over me. I was grateful that I had quit my job and promised myself to never work that



The Shirley Temple films are infamous for their racism and glorification of the Southern Slave-owners

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hard for anyone else ever again. Now that you have destroyed many black men who are supposed to lead their families or distorted their young minds where do you go from there? Unfortunately sometimes the climate worsens. Let's fast forward to the 1980 as crack and cocaine flood the streets of the inner cities destroying two generations and neighborhoods. Unfortunately, some people compared the physical hardships of their neighborhoods to a war zone. As a young male looking for guidance and money where do you turn. Some turned to drugs.

Mom's, sister, aunts etc. Some chose to get rich quick. People were serving 25 years for the possession of crack due to the new laws put in place by former president Ronald Reagan. How could we rebuild families that way? A lot of people believe it was that very president that flooded the streets with crack. And honestly with what I see when I walk out my front door the assumption doesn't sound too far fetched.

Look at Massachusetts Ave. and Nubian square. I don't care what you named that area. It is never a satisfying feeling to watch drugs constantly being sold long into the next day. Alongside the prostitutes and the 2-3 police cars so called patrolling the area all day long. I can't count how many times I've witnessed drugs being sold in front of the police. That station is no longer suitable for my teenage son to pass through as he travels back and forth to school. We don't deserve to fear for our children's safety while on the other side of Massachusetts Ave. You make a police call and the authorities arrive within a few minutes. My home is about 0.7 miles away from the D-4 police station. Nubian Square is right across the street from the B-2 Police station and about 1.5



While Ronald Reagan's White House ran a "Just say no to drugs" campaign, they also cut deals with South American drug cartels and worked to bring crack cocaine into inner cities across America

miles away from the BPD Headquarters. There should be no reason for the ongoing crime other than many in this profession simply do not care or might be a part of the corruption taking place.

The issues I choose to bring attention to are sensitive. But I feel compelled to share my words and thoughts. These issues need a bigger platform. Just know that I mean no harm and I love everyone weather you are black, white, gay, asian, whatever. We must fight. We do not accept our conditions. Anyone who is silent I don't mind fighting on your behalf. The system is set up to destroy us. Parents please be careful how you are raising your young children. They are young and impressionable. It's vital we do our best to give them the vital essentials for their best physical, social and intellectual growth. Build happy memories. Expose them to hobbies they love to bring them solace and develop talents. If these articles reaches the hands of any young child or confused soul please know that you are Greatness. Black Beautiful and Gifted.

THE BALLAD OF THE LANDLORD

By Langston Hughes (1940)

Landlord, landlord,
My roof has sprung a leak.
Don't you 'member I told you about it
Way last week?

Landlord, landlord,
These steps is broken down.
When you come up yourself
It's a wonder you don't fall down.

Ten Bucks you say I owe you?
Ten Bucks you say is due?
Well, that's Ten Bucks more'n I'll pay you
Till you fix this house up new.

What? You gonna get eviction orders?
You gonna cut off my heat?
You gonna take my furniture and
Throw it in the street?

Um-huh! You talking high and mighty.
Talk on-till you get through.
You ain't gonna be able to say a word
If I land my fist on you.

*Police! Police!
Come and get this man!
He's trying to ruin the government
And overturn the land!*

Copper's whistle!
Patrol bell!
Arrest.

Precinct Station.
Iron cell.
Headlines in press:

MAN THREATENS LANDLORD

•

• •

TENANT HELD BAIL

•

• •

JUDGE GIVES NEGRO 90 DAYS IN
COUNTY JAIL!

LANGSTON HUGHES

Born in 1901, Langston Hughes became a leader of the Harlem Renaissance, writing countless poems, plays, novels, and stories for children. He was quite political, using his writings to expose and oppose racism, segregation, poverty, and more. He was a supporter of the Communist Party USA when they were leading the struggles of sharecroppers and tenant farmers in the South. More than just an artist, Hughes was an active participant in the important social struggles of his time. His work is still an inspiring example for artists today to learn from. The poem above was written in 1940. According to official inflation statistics, \$10 then would be worth around \$200 now.



THE HARRIET TUBMAN HOUSE AND BLACK RESISTANCE IN THE SOUTH END/ROXBURY (PART 2)

By Maya Morris



Inside the now demolished Harriet Tubman House, where many used to congregate

It took a village to build the third Harriet Tubman House in 1976. After moving from Holyoke Street, the South End/Lower Roxbury community raised funds to help build the house at its 566 Columbus Ave location. Just behind 566 sat an old meeting house for Black Pullman porters, organizing against their wage slavery to the Pullman Company in the 1920s. Across the street, a branch of the NAACP opened up in the 1960s at the peak of the struggle to integrate Boston schools. These landmarks have since been wiped off the map of Boston. What we see now in the place of the NAACP branch (firebombed within a decade of its opening) is a Shell gas station; a small sign among the sea of cookie-cutter brownstones is all there is to give recognition to the Pullman porter meeting house; and an empty lot is all that's left of the Harriet Tubman House.

The disappearance of this history is the

opposite of natural. Each of these spaces represented a certain kind of power that Black people had in coming together—which, in their respective times, posed real threats to the city's wealthy elite. Preserving these legacies would mean glorifying how Black people have challenged the corrupt and overtly racist government in the city of Boston. To save face, the city gave no adequate recognition to these landmarks of Black history.

Boston has been quite sloppy with this erasure and bulldozing of Black history in the past. But the powers-that-be have since realized that in order to serve their own interests they have to be a lot more cautious with their maneuvers. They often use a facade of being “for the people.” This looks like endorsing slogans such “Black Lives Matter”, and having it painted across Washington Street by Dudley or on the side of Fenway Stadium. But did Black

lives really matter to the city when officials and politicians alike gave the green-light for the demolition of the Harriet Tubman House, a beacon for Black people? The use of slogans like BLM act as cover for the city to be able to justify their predatory acts on Black neighborhoods. With the destruction of the Harriet Tubman House, we have seen even more of these empty gestures. The United South End Settlements, New Boston Ventures, The Boston Planning and Development Agency, and Boston politicians tried to paint the demolition as “beneficial for the community”, but the real beneficiaries are the rich and powerful.

In October, 2018, the USES announced that the Harriet Tubman House needed to be sold off. They claimed that their endowment was drying up, and that the organization was close to going under. This dwindling endowment couldn't pay for the supposed millions of dollars in repairs needed to fix the building. It was not the most energy efficient building, but it wasn't anywhere close to being condemned by the City. All that the Harriet Tubman House needed was a new HVAC system and a new roof. However, the USES continued to claim that in order to pay for renovations, keep the organization afloat, and preserve the non-profits they house, the only option was to sell the Harriet Tubman House. According to President Maicharia Weir Lytle, selling the house was their “last financial lifeline.” While the USES played victim to the press, developers entered into the competition for the winning bid on the property.

By May 2019, the USES announced that the building would be sold to New Boston Ventures. And what had they proposed in their winning bid? To demolish the Harriet Tubman House and erect 66 new units of luxury condos, placing \$13.25 million in the pockets of USES. Apparently this is what Lytle meant when she said that the NBV developers were selected



boston planning & development agency

BPDA: A CORRUPT CENTER OF WEALTH AND POWER

Created by and for the business elite in 1957, the BPDA (originally the BPA) ran Boston's infamous Urban Renewal policies which displaced many poor people, especially Black and Spanish-speaking people. They used federal money to destroy neighborhoods deemed to be “blighted areas” by the City. This was done to make Boston a more attractive investment for wealthy real-estate developers.

Today this agency is at the center of not only the destruction of the Harriet Tubman House, but also gentrification all across Boston. They continue to help developers find lucrative deals in the real-estate market, and have no concern for the people's lives that they destroy in the process.

for their understanding of “the sensitivities surrounding the property.” Lytle made it seem like NBV's other developments were wonderful examples of what they would bring to the neighborhood. A quick Google search tells you all that you need to know about their “community-oriented” properties.

In their “portfolio of developments” you will find a slice of the lucrative real estate pie in the Seaport district, where the asking price for a New Boston Venture condo starts at \$1.4 million. These luxury developments only serve to raise rents and price people out of the neighborhoods they grew up in, and even out of the city entirely. But, of course, NBV understands the “sensitivity” surrounding

NEW BOSTON VENTURES

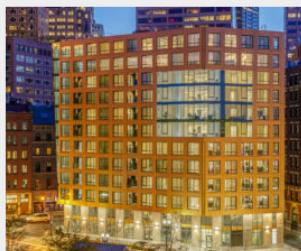
HOME PROJECTS ABOUT US CONTACT



45 ON BURNETT



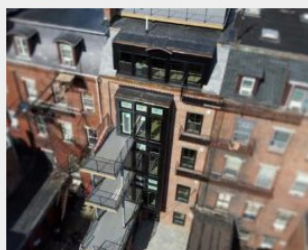
THE LUCAS - 136 SHAWMUT



THE BOULEVARD - 110 BROAD



945 E. BROADWAY



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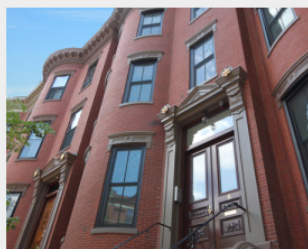
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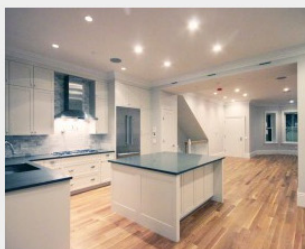
26 ALDEN STREET



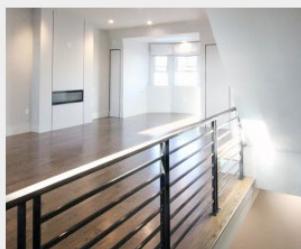
47 CONCORD SQUARE



6 CLAREMONT PARK



9 COLUMBUS SQUARE



38 UPTON STREET



WALNUT STREET FIRE STATION

A quick look at New Boston Ventures' website tells you all you need to know about what type of condos they plan to build

the Harriet Tubman House. This means that they won't exclusively build luxury condos, but will instead set aside a whole eleven "income-restricted" units. Both parties have touted these additional "affordable" units as being great for the community. It doesn't take much to see through this bold-faced lie. By their measures for "affordability", rent for a studio will be between \$1,200-1,500 per month. And on top of that, the biggest units in the new building will only have two bedrooms. Both USES and NBV know fully well that apartments at this price and size are not meant to house the community. They are planned for an influx of wealthy singles. Branding these units "affordable" only serves to disguise lucrative real estate deal behind the scenes.

The South End/Lower Roxbury community has been in an uproar over these backdoor deals. After getting word that the USES was looking to sell the Harriet Tubman House, community organizer, Arnesse Brown, started getting folks from the community together to start organizing. Arnesse Brown along with a group of women from the South End/Lower Roxbury, came to form the coalition group "I Am Harriet." The group started getting community meetings together to talk about the need to preserve the house and stop the sale. They got the community talking about what was really going on here: exposed the USES on various fronts, unmasked their lies, and tied them into the city's larger scheme for

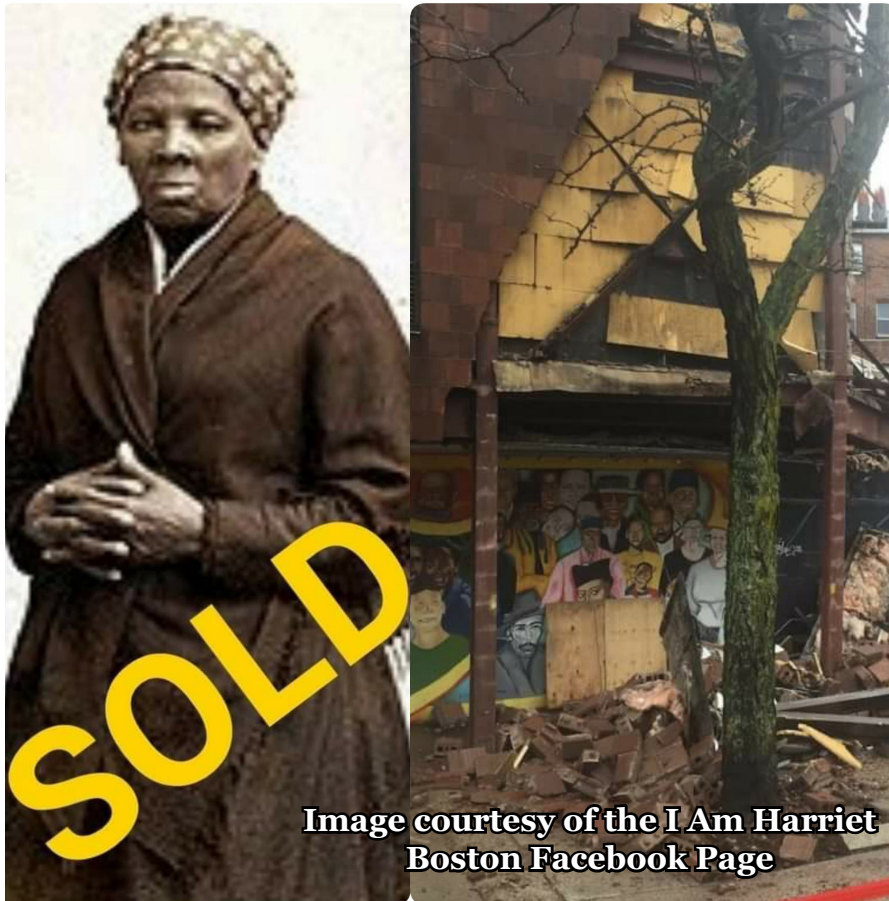


Image courtesy of the I Am Harriet Boston Facebook Page

So, the demolition wasn't the only way to finance the USES, just the most lucrative way.

It's important to note that, according to the city, the Harriet Tubman House does not qualify as a historic building. Yup, that's right, the 100+ years that the Harriet Tubman House has stood as a pillar in the South End/Lower Roxbury is a meaningless history in the eyes of the city. The Coalition said they believe that in 1983 the Historical Commission did a study of buildings with historical value and determined that the building qualified as a historic landmark. However, the Harriet Tubman House was never given official historical landmark status. The legacy

gentrification. The USES had a wide range of revenue sources, including through their relationships with Santander Bank and Zipcar. They were also a landlord collecting monthly rents from numerous non-profits, and had a robust amount of fundraising. Public tax records show that they had a healthy revenue stream, raising questions about the accusations that the USES was repeatedly misusing their endowment. Some have argued that USES was intentionally letting the endowment dwindle so that they could justify the Harriet Tubman House's sale.

But what was so lucrative about the demolition plan proposed by New Boston Ventures? USES claims that the demolition was the preferred bid, offering up enough money to "keep itself afloat." Although the information was not made public, there were other alternatives that would have preserved the house, one of which was comparable to the NBV bidding price.

of the building, and Harriet herself, should be enough to understand its historical and cultural significance.

Despite the city's refusal to label the Harriet Tubman House a historic site, the building was protected from demolition by way of an old Urban Renewal-era deed restriction on the building. The restriction—signed and approved by the USES and Boston Planning and Development Agency—stated that the Harriet Tubman House would be "for the [...] operation of a community facility to meet the needs of the residents in the Lower Roxbury section of the South End." Yet in the months leading up to the sale and demolition, the USES denied that this restriction existed. After being challenged by "I Am Harriet" and other community organizers, the truth of this restriction came to light. This discovery gave organizers some hope. If these restrictions meant anything to the City, people thought the

BOSTON Herald

Sale of Harriet Tubman House would most benefit community



BOSTON, MA – SEPTEMBER 19: A plaque is seen on the exterior of the Harriet Tubman House on September 19, 2019 in Boston, Massachusetts. (Staff Photo By Angela Rowlings/MediaNews Group/Boston Herald)

By **KIM JANEY AND JON SANTIAGO** |

December 10, 2019 at 12:02 a.m.

BPDA might rule against the sale.

In December, 2019, the Monday before the BPDA was set to vote on the sale in December, City Councilors Kim Janey and Jon Santiago released a public statement in support of the sale. The letter was titled: “Sale of Harriet Tubman House Would Most Benefit the

Community.” In it, Janey and Santiago, claimed that the demolition of the Harriet House was necessary to “save” the USES. They advertised NBV’s plans for luxury condos as “a socially responsible and viable plan” made with community input. To conclude, their letter asserted that keeping the “inefficient building” would be far more harmful than

**MAYOR OF BOSTON &
ELECTED OFFICIALS COULD
HAVE SAVED THE
HARRIET TUBMAN!**

**They received a
PRESS RELEASE
letting them know that there
were 3 bids that were IGNORED
and ONE that would have
SAVED USES (the owner of the
Harriet Tubman) AND the
Harriet Tubman House!**

**USES quickly TRANSFERED
the Harriet Tubman to the
LUXURY CONDO Developer!**

Image courtesy of the I Am Harriet Boston Facebook Page

demolishing the house, since the latter would keep the USES alive.

Kim Janey and John Santiago both knew that there were other bidders who wanted to buy and preserve the house, but they still backed New Boston Ventures' plan to demolish the Harriet Tubman House and replace it with luxury condos. They sided with the wealthy interests. The community was putting up a fight, but instead of supporting the people, they tried to convince everyone that the demolition was in the best interests of the community. Whatever "community" they were talking

about, it was certainly not the Black community in the South End and Lower Roxbury.

After the silence was broken, a domino effect followed. Even before the BPDA's ruling, our now interim Mayor Kim Janey was going around telling folks "it's a done deal." And former Mayor Marty Walsh gave the initial approval to have the restrictions on demolishing the house lifted. Although the mother of Congresswoman Ayanna Presley was a senior using services at the Harriet House, she remained silent on the demolition. Perhaps this was related to the fact that New Boston Ventures made significant donations to her campaign over the past few years.

So while Ayanna was in D.C. advocating to put Harriet's face on the 20 dollar bill, she remained quite silent about the destruction of the Harriet Tubman House right here in Boston. Michelle Wu, who has been campaigning with the slogan "Abolish the BPDA", could not even be bothered to issue a statement against their role in the demolition of the Harriet Tubman House. Boston's Chief of Economic Development, John Barros, actively advocated for NBV to win the bid, perhaps because of his ties to them through the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative. Despite promising some residents that she would oppose the sale, after Julia Mejia won her election and became a City Councilor, she turned around and backed the opinion of Kim Janey, then the City Council president. Just another broken promise from another politician who promised

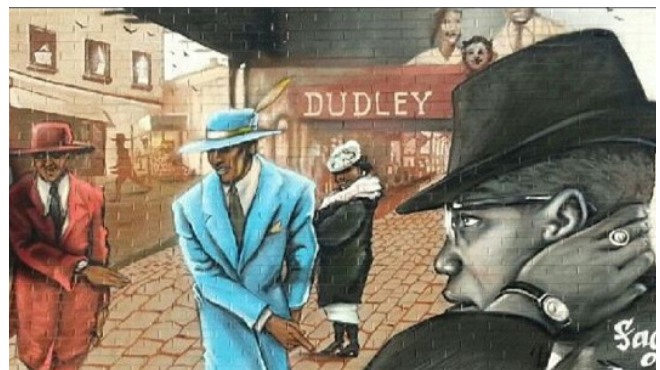
big during election season and then failed to deliver once in office.

With all these politicians lining up to support the demolition, it's no surprise that the BPDA eventually ruled to overturn the restriction in December, 2019. At the hearing, NBV developers took the stand to make their case for the sale, while members of the community who flooded the meeting were told that they were prohibited from commenting. The BPDA likewise turned a blind eye to a petition with more than 56,000 signatures opposing the sale. The BPDA voted 3-1 to lift the restriction on the Harriet Tubman House in order to approve its sale to NBV. This wasn't only to line the pockets of USES and NBV; the BPDA charged a fee for their approval of the sale. Once the condos go up, the BPDA will collect a 4 percent cut of each condo sale, and 2 percent of resales.

These actions all point to the collaboration that exists between elected officials, NBV developers, the BPDA, and the USES. This reaches far beyond the Harriet Tubman House. There's a reason people say that the real estate interests and developers run this town. Kim Janey, Jon Santiago, Andrea Campbell, and

Ayanna Presley each received a lot of campaign contributions of employees of the developers, New Boston Ventures. Some of them received well over \$10k from NBV. These campaign contributions began in large sums back in 2017-2018. This was the beginning of the USES' hunt for buyers, and likely when NBV submitted their bid for the Harriet Tubman House. These monetary donations, along with other efforts by NBV, seem to have bought the support of these politicians for the sale and demolition. The intimate ties between these developers and city politicians was on display this past March when NBV's former Chief of Operations, Kathryn Burton, was appointed to be Mayor Walsh's Chief of Staff. With all of this, it's easy to feel cross-eyed. The line between private businesses and our supposed public servants gets pretty blurry. So blurry that it really looks like these politicians serve the wealthy and powerful, instead of the people in the neighborhood.

With the BPDA's ruling, NBV cleared the final hurdle to acquiring the building. A few months later all six non-profits operating in the Harriet Tubman House were told they had 90 days to leave. As NBV worked to evict



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A 2020 march to save the Harriet Tubman House

these organizations, the people started taking to the streets. I Am Harriet started hosting community meetings and actions to raise the voice of the community against the sale. The largest of these protests took place in the summer of 2020. Their following had grown beyond the immediate confines of the South End/Lower Roxbury and had tapped into the broader masses of Boston. Chants and cries of organizers, advocates, and supporters demanded a halt to the gentrification instigated by the city and these luxury developers.

Despite this fight to stop the sale, memories are all that remain of the building. Reflecting on all of these events, it's important to see that many of the same politicians who destroyed a piece of Black history are running for mayor on campaigns of "racial equity." The United South End Settlements cried about

their financial woes, but their plight was a smokescreen to make millions off of the Harriet Tubman House. Now, they'll move on to renovating their Rutland Ave location to cash in on a lucrative tax credit "in the name of the community." The developer, New Boston Ventures, has claimed that their luxury condos will include "affordable" rentals to "serve the community", but there is no hiding who these expensive rents really benefit. The people know that no plaque or mural can make up for the demolition of the Harriet Tubman House, and the luxury condos that will soon go up will be nothing but a blemish on the community of the South End and Lower Roxbury. But the fight is not over, and as part of the larger struggle against gentrification, the people will continue to expose the city and the developers who pad the politicians' pockets.

MOTHERS WORKING TOGETHER TO SAVE THEIR HOMES AND COMMUNITY

By Haywood Fennell Sr.

Grant Manor is a place where a group of mothers and their supporters have been organizing for the restoration of their rights as residents of a property that many would like to see them not have. The development is a low income residence in a sea of gentrification. All around is the conversion of housing to luxury developments by developers and property management organizations with seemingly strong political connections.

This group of residents faced challenges, intimidation, and harassment when they first started asking for overdue elections for the Grant Manor Homeowners Association. The existing board maneuvered in many ways and broke a lot of promises. These included the board signing off on a major rent hike agreement with HUD and Wingate, the property management organization. The residents and mothers have noted that this whole process was not transparent and was done without their input. Slowly their organizing has brought political support and clarified the need to work closely with residents at places such as Lenox Street Housing (where the City of Boston sold out from under residents and has transferred ownership to a private developer). So, some of the Grant Manor mothers and other residents are working with the mothers at Lenox Street to advocate and challenge the issues there too.

The announced support of Boston Mayor Kim Janey is a stark contrast to former Mayor Marty Walsh, who expressed no concern about these efforts to drive so many mothers and their children from their homes. The mothers are



organizing by holding rallies and doing Zoom meetings to build support and bring awareness about what they believe. They are also working to plan court action to secure control of the Association from the corrupt board through long overdue elections. Mayoral candidate Andrea Campbell attended one of our rallies, as well as City Councilor at Large Julia Mejjia, and an inquiry was made by the office US Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley. However, the mothers know that it will be their hard work and organizing with more community support that will ultimately achieve the goal they seek: To have a safe place to live without the threats of being priced out or evicted. Fighting for real solutions and real fairness, that is what these women and their supporters are doing.

HUD AND GENTRIFICATION: THE UNTOLD STORY

By Ryan Costello

When people think of gentrification, they often think of developers, big banks, and rich people moving into the neighborhood. These are some of the major forces, and new luxury condos going up are often the tell-tale sign that the shoe is about to drop and the neighborhood is about to transform into a playground for the rich. However, long before people get evicted and construction on new units begins, the government (and politicians from both parties) work behind

the scenes to create new policies that open the flood gates to gentrification. In particular, over the past decades the department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has found new ways to drive more and more people from their homes and out of subsidized developments.

This is part of a long-term plan to shift everyone to more “market-conforming” housing options. AKA market rate. We can see it playing out right now with the massive privatization of public housing going on in every major city of this country. In some places, like Cambridge, there is no public housing left. In others, like Boston, there is still some but it is increasingly facing privatization, which is a key step in the process of gentrification. There are around 2.2 million people living in public housing in the United States, down from 4.3 million residents back in 1990. This



is because a huge amount of public housing has been demolished and replaced with luxury condos and “mixed-income developments.” And now, around 40% of the remaining public housing units across the country are slated for privatization through an Obama-era program known as Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) conversions. With privatization comes displacement, gentrification, homelessness, and the destruction of whole communities and neighborhoods.

At first glance it may seem strange that HUD is doing this. After all, part of HUD’s mission is to “create strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all.” But then, how many times have politicians and the government promised one thing and failed to deliver? That’s really nothing new. And how many times have they straight up lied to the people, and then turned around

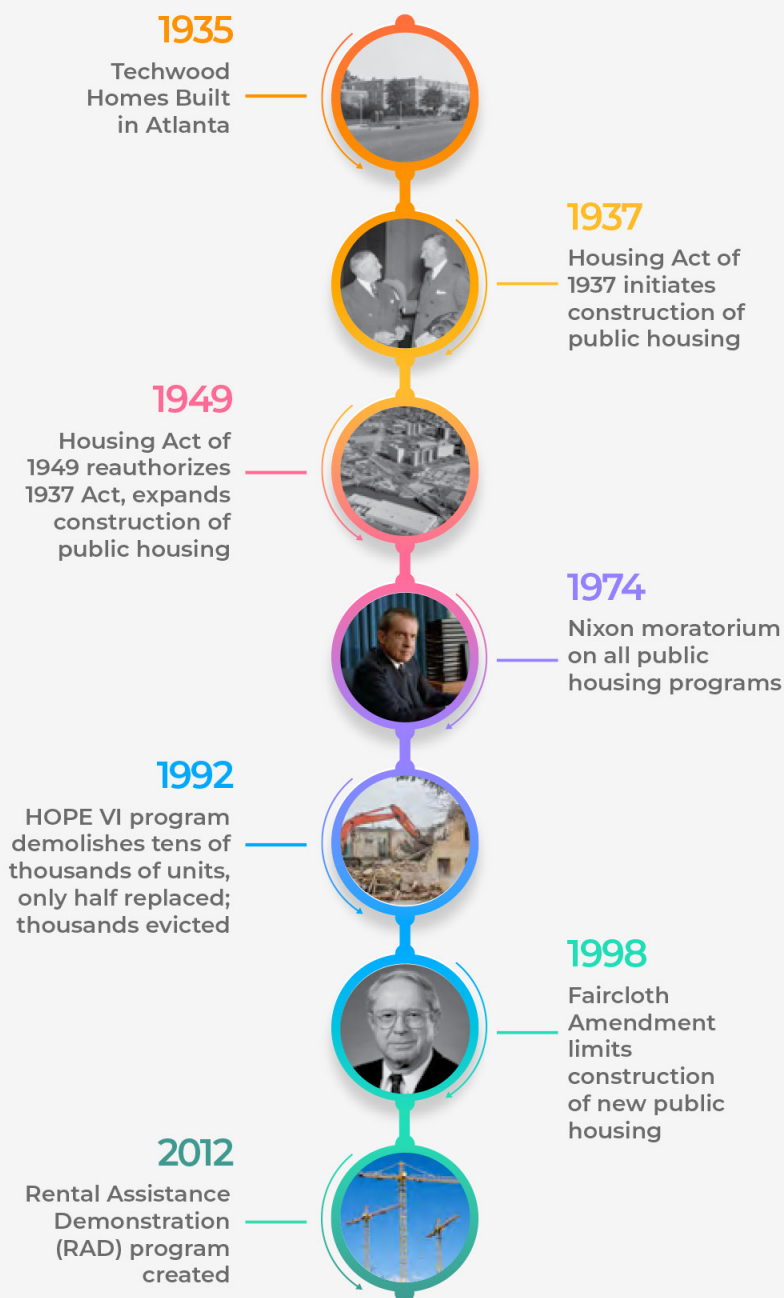
and stabbed us in the back? It's the way that they operate. They give nice speeches and have lots of marketing to make it seem like they care, but in reality, the government isn't "by the people and for the people." It serves the wealthy and powerful, despite what they may claim. And all one has to do is look at HUD's track record to see how true this is.

A lot of public housing sits on what is now prime real estate. With all the gentrification, once neglected parts of the city have fallen into the crosshairs of the big banks, universities, and developers. The process of eliminating public housing and selling it off to the highest bidder began in the early 1990s, under Bill Clinton's administration. Both parties worked together to pioneer a scheme called HOPE VI. Rather than bringing "hope and change" to people, this was a plot to dupe the people, steal their homes, and sell them off to private developers. Despite promises that the program would help residents, HOPE VI was used to destroy tens of thousands of public housing units. Only around 12% of residents were ever able to return to the new developments built in the place of their old homes.¹ In their place, more wealthy residents were brought in as renters in these new "mixed-income" buildings. HUD gave out over \$6 billion to developers through the HOPE VI program to help them privatize public housing.² This was a transfer of our taxpayer money to private developers. This is even more outrageous when you

1 <http://www.narpac.org/ITXFALSE.HTM>

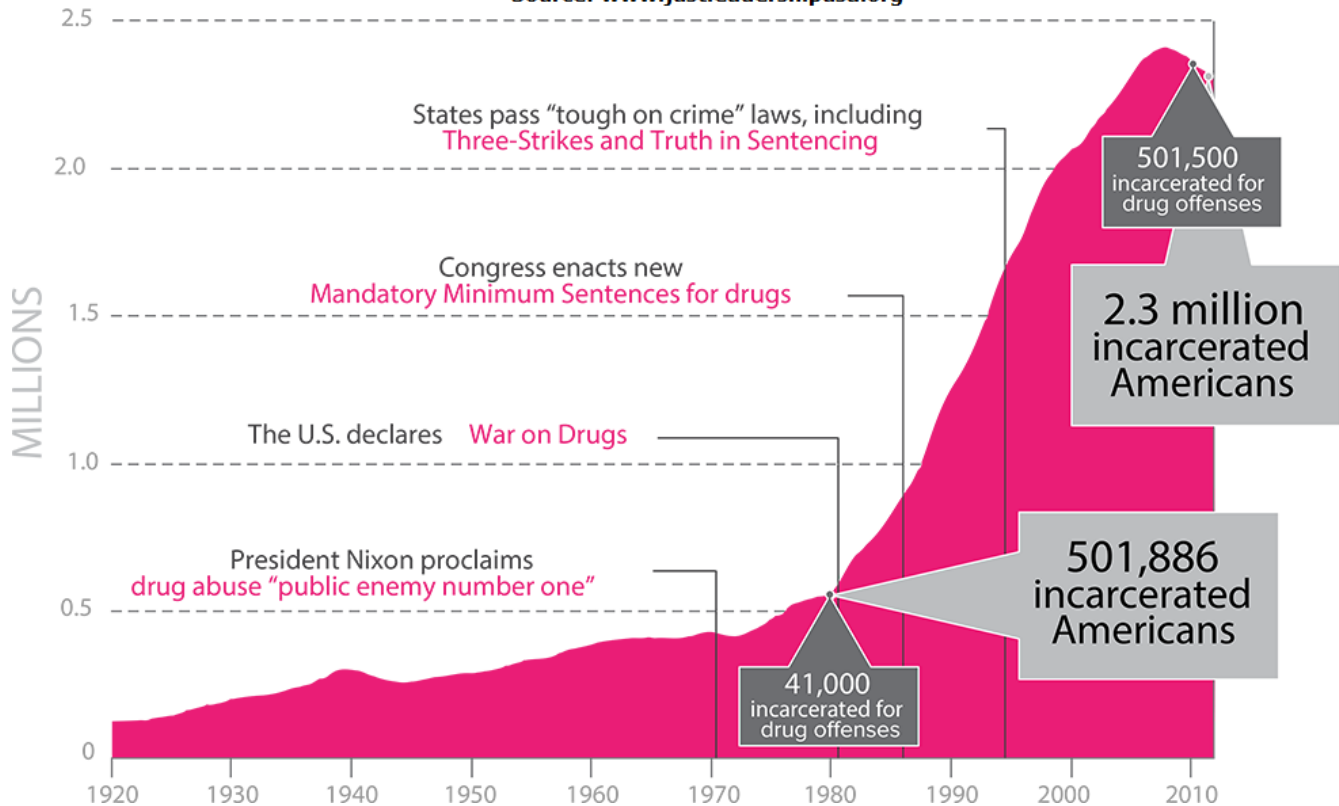
2 <https://bit.ly/3aiLaQl>

PUBLIC HOUSING TIMELINE



INCARCERATED AMERICANS (1920-2013)

Source: www.justleadershipusa.org



consider the fact that the private developers were already making boatloads of money off of buying (stealing) the projects and turning them into luxury condos. So instead of spending billions fixing up developments in need of repair, HUD transferred this money (our money, that we pay in taxes!) into the pockets of the big banks and developers who were engaged in a massive (legal) heist of poor people's homes in this city and all across the country.

And the discrimination and racism with the policy (which disproportionately displaced Black and Spanish-speaking residents) doesn't end there. HOPE VI was part of the "tough on crime" era of racist policing, which continues to this day. This was when politicians like Joe Biden, Newt Gingrich, and Bill Clinton all worked together to pioneer new forms of discriminatory policing practices that locked up millions for minor crimes or for no reason at all. The era where they created mandatory

minimums that ensured that so many young people were locked up. This led to the creation of "mass incarceration." In the 1990s there were 1,000,000 people in prison, which skyrocketed to ~2,200,000 incarcerated by 2010. This is the same period in which millions of people lost their access to affordable public housing. This is no coincidence.

In fact, the new developments built through HOPE VI were based on a racist urban planning philosophy known as "Defensible Space Theory" which was meant to enable more policing and to cut people off from each other. Many in the South End and Lower Roxbury area have noted how divided and isolated the community and developments are, compared to back in the day. These policies played a big role in all this division. They wanted people separate, divided, and isolated. The combination of these policy changes and the privatization of the projects were also key to spurring gentrification to



Image courtesy of the Defend Glendale & Public Housing Coalition Facebook page

new levels. A report by the National Housing Law Project and others noted, “While the scale of Urban Renewal clearance was larger than that of HOPE VI, both programs involve the displacement of very large numbers of low income households of color. The Urban Renewal program, concentrating as it did on inner-city areas, soon bore the informal title “Negro removal”, reflecting the fact that some two-thirds of displacees were minority, overwhelmingly African Americans.”

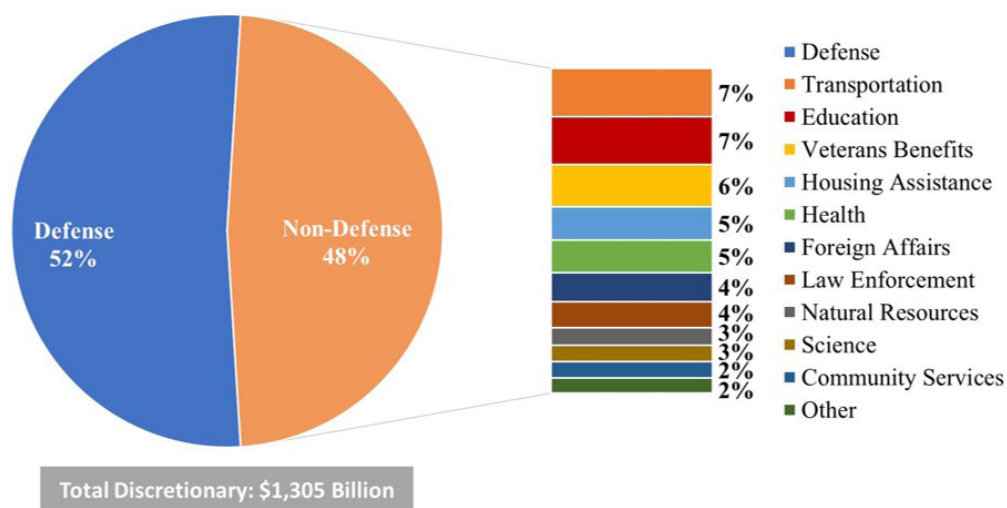
Starting in 2012, the Obama administration rolled out RAD conversions. The bill which created this new gentrification policy was opposed by only 2 Senators. The rest, from both parties, were in favor of it. There was and is a broad consensus by both the Democrats and Republicans that public housing should be privatized and replaced with more “market-conforming” housing. To justify selling out from under so many families, they claim that there is not enough money to repair

the existing public housing. *They claim* that the only option is to sell it all off to private developers.

However, we have heard from employees of different housing authorities in cities around the country that they have been instructed to let public housing fall into disrepair, and to ignore or go very slow in responding to residents’ maintenance requests. Anyone in public housing who has ever had issues with heat, hot water, mold, rodents, etc. can vouch for how long it takes to get anything fixed. Disrepair helps to create the narrative that there is no option but to privatize. What’s more, in the same act of Congress that created RAD (based on the claim that there is no money to fix HUD buildings), an additional \$14 billion was given to the Department of Defense, bringing their total budget for that year to \$703 billion. And we know that very little of that is going to helping veterans. Since then the military budget has expanded to \$740.5 billion, at

the same time the services for veterans continue to be cut. The government claims that some \$50 billion is needed to fix up the existing public housing. Looking at the budget it is clear that there is actually enough money to fix up and even create more public housing. But instead the government is spending it on bailouts for the banks and a “new generation” of nuclear missiles.

2019 Discretionary Spending Breakdown (% of Total)



The 2019 Federal Discretionary Budget. Note how little goes to housing assistance compared to “defense”

RAD was never really about fixing up the projects. It was always about selling off HUD properties at bargain rates to the big banks and developers who stand to make millions off of stealing people’s homes. While residents are promised that they will be able to return to their homes after RAD conversions, a look at the facts shows that this is far from the truth. Many people have been displaced in the process of conversion. After a RAD conversion, residents in Hopewell, Virginia were threatened with evictions and calls to Child Protective Services when their kids took out the trash. Residents in Baltimore, Maryland were evicted without any sort of grievance protections once their building

converted via RAD. In Spokane, Washington residents faced similar threats of eviction. In New York City, the Ocean Bay development in Far Rockaway underwent a RAD conversion in 2016, and since then the private management company has evicted more people than at any other New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) site. 80 families were evicted between January 2017 and February 2019.

Right here in Boston, the conversion of the Lenox Street Projects (originally through RAD, now through Section 18 of the Housing Act) has come with the imposition of over 50 new rules. These include a ban on children

PRIVATIZATION: JUST ANOTHER BROKEN PROMISE

They have given us the hard sell on privatization of public housing. They tell us that everything will still be the same and we will still just have to “pay 30%” and so we shouldn’t worry. But really they want to lull us into a slumber so they can steal our homes and deprive us of our rights. They promised selling our homes off to private companies would get them fixed up and improve our quality of life. This will go down in the history books as just another broken promise in a long chain of broken promises. People are still waiting for their 40 acres and a mule.

playing outside(!), a ban on air conditioners unless you have a doctor's note, and even a requirement to notify management if you are going to be away from the development for one week or more. Residents have noted that these rules seem designed to give the new management company (which has taken over for BHA) excuses to evict people for basically no reason at all. The rules are so ridiculous that everyone will automatically be in violation of one rule or another.

More recently, the government has made some changes to how HUD interprets the Housing Act. These make privatizing public housing even more profitable for wealthy developers. Basically, they made it possible to privatize almost all the projects through Section 18 of the Housing Act, which makes it easier for the developers to get more money per unit from HUD. This shift also eliminates many legal rights and protections that residents have, at least on paper, if their building is privatized under RAD. The crazy thing is that they didn't have to make a new law or issue an executive order to do this; all they did was change the "guidance" for Section 18 which opened up the floodgates.

Under RAD and Section 18 conversions, what was formerly public housing becomes privately owned and managed. Sometimes it is outright sold off and turned into luxury condos. Other times some residents (if they are lucky enough to return after renovations), get Section 8 Project-Based Vouchers. These

ATTENTION! ALL LENOX/CAMDEN RESIDENTS

Trash is not allowed to be left in the hallways, outside your apartment door or outside the building, unless placed in the dumpster! IF YOUR DUMPSTER IS FULL PLEASE USE THE NEXT AVAILABLE DUMPSTER! WE WILL LOOK THROUGH THE TRASH TO FIND THE OFFENDER!



**YOU WILL BE CHARGED \$25.00
PER INFRACTION (PER BAG)**

THANK YOU MANAGEMENT

Ever since BHA sold Lenox and Camden to Beacon Communities, residents have received notices like this posted on their doors

are non-transferable. They aren't like the mobile vouchers that you can take with you if you move. They are tied to the building. And while rent is still limited to 30% of household income, often residents will have to start paying for utilities and will lose many rights with privatization.

However, this is only half the story. Under RAD and especially under Section 18, private management companies can get rid of many Section 8 residents and replace them with

market-rate tenants if they can show HUD that it is “unduly financially burdensome” to keep people on subsidy. One way they can “prove” this is through evicting a lot of people and claiming that poor residents are too troublesome, so better to replace them with wealthier people. Based on HUD’s track record, they will be quite happy to accommodate these requests.

All this shows how HUD policies have laid the groundwork for the destruction of public housing and its sale to wealthy developers and their friends in the Big Banks. These policies are some of the main drivers of gentrification. For decades both the Democrats and Republicans have worked with the bureaucrats at HUD to gut public housing. These policies are not talked about in the corporate media, and there is a lot of

misinformation out there. So, sometimes people mistakenly believe that if we just let HUD know about the issues in a development, then they will come to our aid. But their track record tells a different story. With things like this it’s important to remember what Malcolm X said, “If you’re not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing.”

So, if we want to stop gentrification we need to figure out who are our friends and who are our enemies. We can’t rely on HUD to help us. They are actually the source of a lot of the gentrification we are seeing all around us. Instead we need to rely on each other, on the people, and keep getting organized so that we can fight back together to stop gentrification in its tracks.

POETRY FROM THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

CHILDREN’S RHYMES

By Langston Hughes

By what sends
the white kids
I ain’t sent:
I know I can’t
be President.
What don’t bug
them white kids
sure bugs me:
We know everybody
ain’t free.

Lies written down
for white folks
ain’t for us a-tall:
Liberty And Justice—
Huh!—For All?

OPPRESSION

By Langston Hughes

Now dreams
Are not available
To the dreamers,
Nor songs
To the singers.

In some lands
Dark night
And cold steel
Prevail
But the dream
Will come back,
And the song
Break
Its jail.

THE PRIVATIZATION OF LENOX STREET

By ALONSO ESPINOSA-DOMÍNGUEZ

While the government has been handing trillions of dollars to big banks and spending trillions more on weapons and wars, they have also claimed there isn't enough money to maintain public housing. They refuse to make necessary repairs in a timely way that respects resident's rights. Instead, public housing authorities like the BHA in Boston have been handing projects to private developers and banks, leading to displacements and gentrification. Lenox is one of the latest examples.



In 2014, BHA decided it wanted to get rid of Lenox as public housing and **convert** the public housing subsidy **into Section 8 “project-based vouchers” (PBVs)**. Their plan was to get a private developer to partner with some banks to renovate Lenox and take over management and ownership of the buildings. The land would still be owned by BHA, but would be leased out to the new private owners of the apartments via a 99-year ground lease. By 2016, BHA decided on Beacon Communities LLC as the developer and manager. Beacon has taken over other projects in Boston, such as Old Colony. For Lenox, they ended up choosing Bank of America as the main investor and co-owner of the buildings. **Beacon and BofA will profit immensely. But residents are facing terrible management, increasing rents, displacement, harassment from management, and the gentrification of the neighborhood as a result.**

From RAD to Section 18

There are several ways to privatize and convert public housing to section 8 PBVs. Initially, BHA and Beacon told residents they would apply to privatize Lenox and convert to PBV under a program called Rental Assistance Demonstration, or RAD. RAD was created in 2012, and has been used to privatize public housing all across the country. It is sold as a solution to the supposed “lack of money” for upkeep of the buildings, but placing public housing and renovations in the hands of private developers through RAD has led to wrongful evictions, botched renovations, and other injustices.¹ You can read more about RAD in the first issue of Urban Core and in the article on HUD in this issue too.

RAD is a terrible program, but it comes with a few protections and rights for residents that, *on paper*, go beyond the rights residents have under other privatization schemes. These include a **prohibition on rescreening residents** during the privatization, **automatic eligibility** for the new Section

¹ <https://www.dgphc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/What-is-RAD-Does-it-Make-Sense-for-Elliot-Twins-Public-Housing.pdf>; <https://citylimits.org/2019/08/14/nycha-ecitons-rad-oceanbay/>

8 PBVs at the time of conversion, **the right to return to the project** after privatization/renovations, the right not to be **permanently displaced**, and **rights to organize**. However, despite existing on paper, these rights and restrictions **have many loopholes** and are **often violated** by new private owners like Beacon. Many places see massive evictions. And overall 80% of residents never make it back to their development after privatization. See the article on HUD in this issue for more details.

Beacon and BHA **promised to uphold these RAD tenant rights** when they told residents they were applying for RAD. But at Lenox, Beacon and BHA have pulled a **bait and switch**. In 2020, they quietly ditched their plans for RAD and instead chose to dispose of the public housing property through what is called Section **18** (**not the same** as Section **8**).² This sketchy change was made behind the scenes. It is only mentioned in obscure documents buried in BHA's website. The BHA webpage for Lenox and the City government's press releases about Lenox don't mention Section 18 at all. And parts of the BHA Lenox page which haven't been updated since 2017 still say Lenox is under the RAD program. It's no surprise the government

RAD IS BAD

#KeepPublicHousingPublic
#StopRAD  **#DGPHC**

DEFEND GLENDALE: A SHINING EXAMPLE TO LEARN FROM

Residents in Minneapolis have been fighting back against privatization and gentrification. For five-plus years at the Glendale Projects have stopped the RAD conversion in its tracks. Developers, politicians, and the Big Banks are still trying to find a way to steal the people's homes, but they keep on fighting back. They have expanded their efforts beyond their own development and are focused on supporting others throughout the city and nationally. Their courage and perseverance is truly an inspiration to us all.

and Beacon have been secretive about this: as you'll see below, **Section 18 is even worse than RAD and doesn't have the same protections for residents.**

What is Section 18?

Here is the description by the Defend Glendale and Public Housing Coalition (DGPHC) from Minneapolis: "Section 18 of the 1937 United States Housing Act is a policy of the federal Department of Housing & Urban Development

² <https://www.bostonhousing.org/BHA/media/Documents/Annual%20Plan/annual%20plan%202021/ma002a01-Supplement.pdf>



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Chairman of the Board



DARA KOVEL
Chief Executive Officer



SAMUEL ROSS
Chief Operating Officer



DAVID GREENBLATT
Executive Vice President, Finance



TIMOTHY COWLES
Chief Financial Officer



DARLENE PERRONE
President, Beacon Residential Management

Beacon Communities, which now owns Lenox, has a board made up of the some of the most wealthy and politically connected people in Boston

(HUD) which **allows public housing authorities (PHA's) to demolish and redevelop their properties under certain conditions. This is a voluntary program that PHA's elect to pursue.** The specific terms used for this process are “**Demolition and Disposition.**” Demolition means the destruction of housing, simple enough... but what does “**Disposition**” mean? **Disposition is the transfer of public housing properties to private developers and authorities.** Disposition allows private developers and nonprofit corporation to take ownership of public housing properties.”³

After disposition, the former public housing properties can be **redeveloped into market rate units**, or into housing under the Section 8 PBV program.

At Lenox, the Section 18 privatization has turned Lenox into a PBV project. RAD also would have turned units into PBVs. But without RAD, the PBV program **does not have the same RAD tenant protections**, not even on paper. This just means among other things that residents are **more likely to be displaced permanently**, and are **not automatically eligible** to receive the

3 <https://www.dgphc.org/2019/07/10/section-18-demolition-disposition-a-fact-sheet/>

Section 8 PBV subsidy no matter how long they have lived at Lenox. That is why Beacon **is requiring residents to apply to stay in their own homes** and receive the Section 8 PBV. At Lenox, Beacon and BHA still promised the right of return even though Section 18 doesn't force them to promise that. But we've seen what little good these official promises are in practice.

Residents **were not consulted** about Beacon and BHA's change of plan to apply for Section 18. Insufficient resident meetings were held when planning to do RAD, and **no meetings were held** when that was changed to Section 18. Residents were given no chance to learn of the decrease in rights that comes with the change, much less to fight against it.

Rents Under PBV and the Myth of "Long-term Affordability"

Lenox is in need of basic maintenance and repairs. BHA and Beacon say that the privatization will finance repairs and keep Lenox affordable in the long term because of the 99-year ground lease the new private owners enter into with BHA. But this is just sweet talk.

After privatizations elsewhere in Boston and around the country, some renovations have

Bank of America



SM

WHAT'S IN IT FOR BANK OF AMERICA?

Bank of America paid \$92 million to become the main investor in the renovations. This investment makes them a co-owner of Lenox Street. Usually in these set ups, the bank takes as much as 99.99% ownership of the buildings. As co-owners, BofA gets a major chunk of new rental revenue. And also they get a huge \$49 million tax credit through the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit. The government is happy to fork over millions to banks and developers through these tax credits and Section 8 voucher programs but they don't want to spend money keeping public housing public while doing renovations themselves.

happened. But other buildings have gotten worse, including flooding, reductions in size, and continued mold and pests. For example, the West Newton project in Boston has been undergoing a privatization and renovations. So far, a former West Newton resident has shared with us that the **apartments have gotten smaller** and many other issues with **poor conditions have not been addressed**.

As for the affordability, let's take a look at what happens to rents after the privatization. As explained earlier, the public housing subsidy at Lenox was converted to Section 8 "project-based vouchers" or PBVs as part of the privatization. After a project converts to PBV, residents have to pay 30% of their income as rent. If they were paying less than

this before the conversion their rent will go up. BHA promises “permanent affordability” at 30% of income, but **this is nothing more than a promise**. Overall, many residents end up paying more in rent after privatizations and conversions to PBV. A federal government report found that **at least 57% of tenants** had faced a **rent increase** after a RAD conversion.⁴ Already, **many residents at Lenox have had their rents increased**. Some that have pushed back have been told that management “made a mistake.” If residents don’t fight back, management is sure to make many more “mistakes” of this kind.

The claim that the ground-lease preserves affordability is also misleading. Federal regulations about PBV allow owners like Beacon to turn some units into market rate, without any subsidy. RAD is more restrictive but even then, the ground leases with private owners often allow them to seek permission to turn some units into market rate. The current agreement between Beacon and BHA says units have to be either subsidized or if not, rents have to be restricted. But the original plan BHA had⁵ allowed for market rate units, and if BHA and Beacon decide that going back to that is better for them, there is no federal law stopping them from changing their agreement.

Also, with RAD, federal law requires owners keep a least some Section 8 PBV units for at least 40 or so years, but Section 18 they don’t have to. At Lenox, the specific agreement signed by Beacon and BofA with BHA requires Beacon to **“try their best”** to keep Section 8, but only **as long as BHA lets them charge the government high enough rents**. Once the contract expires, if Beacon doesn’t get a deal as good as they got now, they could weasel out of renewing it and **residents could face paying the full rent Beacon demands**.

This would incentivize Beacon to seek people who can afford more and more expensive rents, leading to **more gentrification** in the whole neighborhood. As gentrification progresses, market rates go up. This gives Beacon an incentive to convert more and more units to market rate. This is **a vicious cycle** going on across Boston and the whole country.

Is it Too Late?

Can the privatization be stopped? What can we do?

In the short term, it might not be possible to turn back the ownership transfer. **But residents can and must unite to defend each other from the consequences of the privatization**. This includes the messy renovations and displacements that come with them, rent increases, vague and intrusive new rules that treat residents like prisoners, harassment from management and security, unexplained hot water shut offs that take months to fix, and more. If residents band together and **increase their collective power**, residents will be in a better position to **take some control away from developers and banks**, including possibly **achieving resident ownership** of the development.

Residents and organizers are starting to come together. Join us to defend your neighbors and the community! For more information and to get involved, please contact us: concernedlenoxresidents@gmail.com

⁴ <https://citylimits.org/2018/03/27/federal-audit-demands-better-oversight-of-program-key-to-nychas-survival-plan/>

⁵ <https://www.bostonhousing.org/BHA/media/Documents/Departments/Procurement/RFP-1206-01-Le-nnox-Camden-INFORMATIONAL-COMplete.pdf>

LET AMERICA BE AMERICA AGAIN

By Langston Hughes (1935)

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

*Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the
stars?*

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!
Of work the men! Of take the pay!
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—
Hungry yet today despite the dream.
Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!
I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
That even yet its mighty daring sings

In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
That's made America the land it has become.
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
In search of what I meant to be my home—
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike?
The millions who have nothing for our pay?
For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung,
The millions who have nothing for our pay—
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again—
The land that never has been yet—
And yet must be—the land where every man is free.
The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's,
Negro's, ME—
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,
We must take back our land again,
America!

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
The mountains and the endless plain—
All, all the stretch of these great green states—
And make America again!



URBAN CORE: A NEWSLETTER FOR THE PEOPLE

Urban Core was created by residents of Lower Roxbury and the South End, along with organizers from the United Front Against Displacement. This newsletter was specifically created to keep residents informed about developments in the neighborhood and to connect ongoing struggles against gentrification. The purpose of this newsletter is to serve the people. In order for it to be a success we need your feedback, contributions, and even criticisms.

If you know about an existing struggle against evictions and gentrification, let us know. If you want to write an article for the next issue, send us an email. If you disagree with what we wrote, don't hesitate to reach out. This newsletter is only as good as we make it.



**HAVE YOU RECEIVED AN
EVICTED NOTICE?**

**ARE YOU FACING A RENT
INCREASE?**

**IS YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD BEING
GENTRIFIED?**

EMAIL US: Urban_Core@riseup.net

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