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Urban Redevelopment, Housing Loss and Class Segregation:  
A Case Study of Gentrification in Seattle

Scott Harding

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2000

School of Social Work

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Abstract

Urban Redevelopment, Housing Loss and Class Segregation:  
A Case Study of Gentrification in Seattle

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This dissertation examines changing patterns of spatial stratification by social class in downtown Seattle, Washington from 1960 through 1990, focusing on the loss of low-cost housing and displacement of low-income residents. During this period, the social and class composition of downtown Seattle underwent a significant transformation: the in-migration of middle and upper-income households occurred simultaneous to the dramatic loss of low-cost housing and a decline in the numbers of poor and working class residents. I examine the process of downtown redevelopment through two case studies utilizing critical theory and elite theory. I analyze how the relationship between elite interests, local government, and community life—especially the downtown low-income community—unfolds in the context of urban redevelopment in Seattle in a particular period of time. Utilizing interviews with local informants, Census data, city government archives, and other primary sources, I explore the processes and impacts of urban revitalization in Seattle, and the link between local elites, public policy decisions, and the displacement of low-income urban groups. I argue that changes in the housing market and the residential composition of downtown neighborhoods were not the result of neutral “market forces.” Instead, they usually occurred due to public and private efforts to promote a particular form of downtown redevelopment that served elite interests at the expense of the poor. Despite the promise of urban revitalization and the stated desire of city leaders to incorporate a mix of social classes into a refashioned international city, in reality the profit-making interests and class biases of local elites thwarted this vision.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Research Problem**

What happens when large cities seek to restructure their physical environment? What are the spatial impacts of “globalization” and the restructuring of the labor market on less-skilled and low-wage workers? The academic and popular literature is replete with stories about the rejuvenation of many formally distressed U.S. central cities, yet there remains a dark and hidden aspect to this tale. While the economic benefits and glitter of new convention centers, skyscrapers, hotels, and sports stadiums have been prominently touted, the human cost of these urban social experiments has been much harder to calculate. This research tells part of the story of the downtown transformation of one such city—Seattle, Washington—and how that process led to the near total exclusion of its most vulnerable and disenfranchised groups. Despite the promise of urban revitalization and the stated desire of city leaders to incorporate a mix of social classes into a refashioned international city, in reality the profit-making interests of local elites thwarted this vision. While civic and private leaders spoke of the pervasive benefits of central city growth and urban renewal, the wholesale abandonment and demolition of most low-cost private housing, along with global economic changes, made much of downtown Seattle off limits to the working poor, low-skilled workers, and low-income households. In this respect, the dream of social and economic justice has been denied to key segments of this population.

This case study examines changing patterns of spatial stratification by social class in downtown Seattle, Washington from 1960 through 1990, with a focus on the loss of low-cost housing and displacement of low-income residents. During this period, the social and class composition of downtown Seattle underwent a significant transformation: the in-migration of middle and upper-income households occurred simultaneous to the significant loss of low-cost housing and a decline in the numbers of poor and working class residents. As will be discussed, these trends are indicative of the phenomenon of *gentrification* that has occurred in other major U.S. cities in the past 30 years. As Seattle transformed into an international city linked to the “Pacific Rim” and the rising globalization of trade and capital, the downtown area—home to “Skid Road” and a high concentration of the city’s poor—lost one-third of its residents, more than half of its housing supply was eliminated, and the spatial concentration of poverty shifted away from the central city (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1962, 1992).

I document these changes and analyze the process of downtown redevelopment through two case studies utilizing a particular line of theoretical inquiry. Using critical theory and elite theory, this dissertation suggests that public policies—specifically, urban renewal projects linked to globalization of trade and capital favoring elites—played a key role in the loss of thousands of units of affordable housing for the poor and the displacement of low-income and working class downtown residents. I am most interested in the relationship between elite

interests, local government, and community life—especially the downtown low-income and transient community. This dissertation attempts to examine how that intersection unfolds in the context of urban redevelopment in Seattle in a particular period of time. Utilizing data collected from interviews with key local informants, the 1960-1990 Census, city government archives, and other primary sources, I explore the processes and impacts of urban revitalization in Seattle, and the link between local elites, public policy decisions, and the displacement of low-income urban groups. I argue that changes in the housing market and the residential composition of downtown neighborhoods were not the result of neutral (or inevitable) “market forces.” Instead, they usually occurred due to public and private efforts to promote a particular form of downtown redevelopment that served elite interests at the expense of the poor, while at times they were the unintended consequences of public policy decisions and non-decisions.

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the restructuring of urban space and economic functions has facilitated a new process of urban renewal (or gentrification) in the post-industrial city, which usually displaces low-income groups. These events vary within metropolitan areas—both in the United States and internationally—according to the extent that central cities are incorporated into the global economy and the international division of labor. Such practices are promoted by both the private (corporations, developers, financiers) and public sectors, which shape central city development to meet their interests

(Wilson, 1996). This research examines the role and influence of public and private elites in the growth and uneven development of downtown Seattle. I seek to understand how these processes, especially in the public arena, impacted the lives of poor and low-income households in downtown Seattle.

Although urban revitalization is often constructed as an unqualified good benefiting all members of society, this project highlights both the benefits and costs of this process, especially for low-income populations. This dissertation thus emphasizes the dual nature of central city redevelopment efforts. In this case, from 1960-1990 downtown Seattle witnessed a decline in poverty and unemployment, a rise in the socioeconomic status of local residents, and the growth of employment in the finance, insurance and real estate sectors. However, I highlight some of the most prominent negative effects of urban renewal and redevelopment: rising class segregation, a precipitous decline in the supply of downtown low-cost housing, and displacement of many of the urban poor. These processes in the downtown arena are placed in the context of trends in the larger metropolitan housing and labor market.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Social and Historical Context of Change in Seattle**

The following discussion places my dissertation within the larger context of Seattle's ongoing postwar transformation from blue-collar port city to a hub of financial and technological commerce. Both economic boom and bust mark the

period of this study. Driven by cyclical changes at the area's largest employer (The Boeing Corporation), decreased demand for blue collar and less-skilled workers, and the rise of the computer and "high-tech" industries, the Seattle metropolitan area underwent significant transformation in the years between 1960 and 1990 (City of Seattle, 1995). The city entered the 1990s as a key financial center and a leading source of trade and commerce for the so-called "Pacific Rim." Over the course of three decades, commercial development radically altered the downtown skyline as high-rise office construction soared, often at the expense of housing (like single room occupancy hotels, SRO's) serving low-income workers and transients. Many of the changes confronting Seattle during this period mirrored those of the U.S. economy in general. These included an economic transformation, in particular a decline in blue collar and manufacturing employment and a shift to a better educated, white-collar and service-sector workforce; fluctuations in employment levels, and a decline in wages for middle and low-income workers starting in the 1970s; and a growing gap in income distribution. Nationwide, these trends had the most severe impact on less educated, less skilled and low-income individuals.

Throughout this period, downtown Seattle became the scene of public and private urban renewal activities that pitted the interests of different social groups against each other. Of import for this study, economic change

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<sup>1</sup> I also compare changes from 1960-1990 in key indicators between downtown and the greater Seattle metropolitan area in an effort to trace changes in the spatial distribution of the city's low-income population.

exacerbated the housing situation of low-income groups, a phenomenon that also occurred in many other urban centers during the 1970s and 1980s (Hopper & Hamberg, 1986). Urban redevelopment in downtown Seattle produced dramatic neighborhood changes, facilitating the process of gentrification and changes in the housing market. This dissertation suggests that public policies promoting urban redevelopment throughout this 30-year period played a critical role in altering the downtown physical and social environment. Despite increased production of rental housing in the late 1980s, by 1990 low-income renter households paid the highest percentage of their income for rent in the city and faced a shortage of affordable housing units. Thus the “affordability gap” facing low-income renters in Seattle worsened due to rising housing costs, competition from moderate- and middle income households unable to afford single family homes, and a scarcity of affordable rental housing, a problem most severe for low-income downtown households (City of Seattle, 1995). This situation also reflected similar trends occurring in metropolitan cities across the United States, suggesting that the Seattle experience was not unique.

The loss of thousands of units of low-cost housing in downtown Seattle coincided with key changes in the national economy and housing market. Part of this process also occurred simultaneous to budget cuts and retrenchment in key government assistance programs (like federal housing and urban aid) serving low-income groups. During the 1960s and 1970s, urban renewal,

economic revitalization, and private development combined to reduce SRO housing in central cities nationwide (Lincoln, 1980). While community organizing and local housing preservation legislation sought to halt this process in various locales, the 1980s witnessed a continued loss of this crucial urban housing stock, though on a reduced scale. The experience of urban housing loss in Seattle also appears to match national patterns, with two distinct processes. During the first wave (from roughly 1960 to 1975) much of the loss of SRO's and other low-cost housing in Seattle resulted from building demolition, closure due to housing code violations, and urban renewal and freeway projects. Downtown housing loss in the second period (post-1975) appeared to result primarily from the abandonment of low-cost housing (often SRO's) resulting from speculative real estate practices, a process labeled "development-induced abandonment" by one scholar (Feldman, 1984), and to a lesser extent from publicly funded and financed redevelopment projects. In general, the widespread loss of SRO's was thus part of "a larger process of economic restructuring in urban housing markets" nationwide which most adversely impacted young, urban workers (Hoch & Slayton, 1989, p. 175).

Many of the social, economic and physical transformations common to other central cities also affected Seattle during this period. For example, between 1960 and 1980 the Puget Sound region witnessed strong population growth, while the city of Seattle lost residents. Embedded within this overall loss of population in the city was an increase in minority residents, and a decline in

the white population (City of Seattle, 1975). During this period of population loss within the city, downtown Seattle was also gaining an increasingly elderly population, the majority of whom were low-income. Other changes in the city and region help define the transformation that altered the socioeconomic character of local residents, especially in downtown. While the median income in Seattle in 1960 was higher than neighboring King and Snohomish Counties, this pattern reversed by 1970. Overall, according to the city's Community Development Plan, the period from 1960-1970 was marked by the

migration of white, middle class families to the suburbs. In the wake of this exodus, those unable to migrate or unwelcome in the suburbs are left behind – the poor, minority and elderly. They inherit a city which they lack the financial or social resources to preserve or upgrade (City of Seattle, 1975, pp. 9-10).

Some of these changes were no doubt a result of the severe economic recession that gripped the Puget Sound region following massive layoffs at The Boeing Company in the early 1970s. Fueled by contracts for the new 747 jumbo jet and federally subsidized work on the proposed SST supersonic jet, job growth at Boeing helped stimulate the entire Puget Sound economy during the late 1960s. However, reduced demand for new planes and the cancellation of the SST project by Congress in 1971 undercut economic growth. From a peak employment figure of more than 100,000 employees in 1968, Boeing laid off some 65,000 workers (including many engineers) between 1970 and 1971, about two-thirds of its work force. As a result, official unemployment in Seattle

soared to more than 12 percent in 1971, twice the national average and the highest jobless rate in a large U.S. city since the Great Depression (Sale, 1976).

As in other metropolitan centers, these demographic changes facilitated a significant process of downtown change that led to growing urban “blight.” The “loss of economic and social resources and opportunities” in downtown Seattle increasingly left behind a population of lower-income, less skilled individuals and families (City of Seattle, 1975, p. 10). These same forces combined to promote a lack of economic and social vitality in many downtown Seattle neighborhoods. “The resulting homogeneity of uses, such as predominantly office buildings, becomes as much a symptom of blight as physical deterioration,” city officials noted (p. 11).

The economic upheaval, which was reversed by the mid 1970s due largely to new hiring by Boeing, helped highlight the dependence of Seattle and the region on one large employer, a fact not lost on many would be civic reformers. Sale (1976) notes that the need for economic diversification, especially to help ensure Seattle became a “big league” global city linked to Pacific Rim trading partners and the international economy, was a key theme of public and private leaders. This belief emerges in both of the following case studies and highlights how private and public elites agreed on the need to transform downtown Seattle into a hub for tourism and corporate business activity. Urban Renewal projects initiated in the 1960s and other downtown renovation efforts exemplified this

inclination toward urban growth and redevelopment. Based on the theory that public planning and the private sector could remake deteriorated (and “blighted”) urban neighborhoods, the federal government embarked on an ambitious national effort to revive distressed central cities starting in the 1950s via urban renewal. In Seattle, the largest urban renewal project (in the form of the Model Cities program) occurred in the Central District and Yesler-Atlantic corridor in the late 1960s. This initiative targeted social services and housing rehabilitation for the largely poor, black community, which suffered from a high percentage of dilapidated and unsafe housing units. Other proposed urban renewal projects in Seattle, however, faced community opposition.

In a precursor of future struggles over downtown growth, by the late 1960s supporters of urban revitalization (especially corporate and business elites) began to encounter some resistance to their vision of Seattle from those more

interested in the arts, in the development or renewal of neighborhoods, in historic preservation, in stopping the construction of new big highways, in placing city offices in various old downtown buildings and not new ones (Sale, 1976, p. 225).

This schism was highlighted by a struggle over the future of Seattle’s well-known downtown Pike Place Market. Neighborhood groups eventually defeated the proposed renovation of the Market in 1971 that called for new office buildings and condominiums in a largely residential, mixed income community. Thus urban renewal plans were blocked when voters approved designation of

the Market as a historical district, thereby avoiding significant redevelopment activities to the area; a year later Seattle voters defeated a plan to build a new downtown freeway link between the Seattle Center and Interstate-5 (Sale, 1976). This level of community activism stands in contrast to the construction in the 1960s of a new interstate freeway (I-5) through downtown a decade earlier. That project encountered little organized resistance from community groups. It is also markedly different from what transpired in Pioneer Square, where conflict emerged in the 1960s over the *type* of redevelopment that should occur in that neighborhood, rather than whether or not revitalization activities would happen. As will be seen, competing plans emphasizing the historic preservation of buildings versus wholesale building demolition and redevelopment in Pioneer Square offered distinct choices for future downtown growth. Despite key differences, however, these proposals shared a vision of urban growth that offered little space for low-income residents, the traditional inhabitants of Pioneer Square and other downtown neighborhoods.

Despite increased community activism, interest in historic preservation, and Seattle's reputation for significant citizen involvement in local planning and politics, preservation of downtown low-cost housing failed to capture broad public support for most of this period. Indeed, it was not until the mid-1980s that the city formally adopted policies to preserve specific numbers of such housing. By that time, however, more than one-half of the downtown housing stock was destroyed, a casualty of urban redevelopment and speculative

capitalism. For example, as with similar freeway developments in other U.S. cities, the massive Interstate-5 construction project destroyed blocks of residences and retail businesses, displacing thousands of downtown residents (Seattle Department of Community Development, 1977). One often-cited estimate suggests that the freeway project destroyed approximately 5,000 units of downtown housing, most of it serving low-income renters (Skid Row Community Council, 1974).

Despite the delay by the city in enunciating more formal affordable housing policies, there was a growing awareness of the need for government intervention and policies in the downtown arena. Citing an ongoing reduction in federal funding for urban renewal and community development projects, by the mid-1970s city planners recognized the need to utilize federal aid on the city's most pressing needs, those where investments might have a "multiplier effect" on other problems. These were identified as largely related to the housing, community development, and economic/employment needs of an increasingly isolated, low-income urban population. Thus, aside from the underdevelopment of downtown and other low-income neighborhoods, the primary community development issues facing the city were seen as the "protection, conservation and rehabilitation" of existing community resources (City of Seattle, 1975, p. 24). Thus, city planners highlighted the need to protect low-density, transitional neighborhoods, to strengthen downtown by

increasing residential density and the diversity of land use, and to alleviate those social conditions that resulted from and fueled community deterioration.

City planners identified housing as an especially crucial need, in particular in downtown Seattle where a significant number of residential buildings (primarily apartments) had been either demolished or closed due to abandonment since 1960. Overall, rapidly rising housing costs and the growing concentration of low-income & elderly populations had created a critical need for assisted housing: 88,000 low-income households existed in Seattle by the mid-1970s, yet only 11,000 of these households received any form of housing subsidy (City of Seattle, 1975). This crisis in affordable rental housing for low-income families and individuals was compounded by the existence of more than 2,000 vacant residential *properties* in Seattle (containing an undetermined number of housing *units*) owned by the federal government.

Yet despite the stated concerns of city policy for low-cost housing construction and preservation, the interests of private elites—in particular, local business and corporate leaders—had the most significant impact on downtown housing. The period of this study is therefore crucial for understanding modern Seattle; 1960-1990 was an era when the city transformed. Within this 30-year period, economic restructuring presented civic leaders with key decisions about the future of downtown and the metropolitan area. Thus by the mid-1970s local officials were articulating a vision of Seattle, especially downtown, as having a

mixture of diverse social classes, including a sizeable proportion of affordable housing units. Yet by 1990 this egalitarian form of central city development had not occurred. Instead, fueled by public and private redevelopment efforts—building of the convention center, the “preservation” and economic revitalization of Pioneer Square, and a wave of downtown office construction—the central city had become conflicted space. As will be seen, public and private elites promoted a model of urban growth that largely ignored the needs of an isolated and largely powerless low-income population. Thus whether by explicit design or the result of unintended consequences, these groups became expendable to the larger goal of urban redevelopment.

### **Format of the Dissertation**

Chapter Two provides a review of the literature on several related and critical topics: the history of low-cost downtown housing, especially single room occupancy hotels (SROs) and other types of residence for itinerant workers and the working poor; housing and urban policy in the United States, and the ways these helped shape urban development in American cities; and gentrification and displacement in U.S. urban settings in the post WW II era. This chapter also presents my theoretical framework guiding the dissertation. Chapter three offers a description of the study design, data sources (which are linked to several key questions I attempt to answer), and the data analysis strategies employed in this dissertation.

Chapter four utilizes data from the U.S. Census from 1960 to 1990, and provides a statistical description of the significant demographic changes that occurred in Seattle, focusing on nine census tracts that comprise “downtown.” I also highlight changes in the composition of low-income groups throughout the metropolis in this period. Chapter five provides the first of two embedded case studies on urban development and gentrification in downtown Seattle during this period. Based on my theoretical framework about public policy and gentrification, I examine the impacts and processes of urban renewal and historic preservation efforts in the Pioneer Square area. I draw on interviews with key informants, as well as an analysis of archival and other primary data sources, to illuminate the conflicted process of urban revitalization over some 20 years in this downtown neighborhood. Chapter six utilizes similar research methods to analyze the political processes and the costs and benefits of the construction of the Washington State Convention and Trade Center in downtown Seattle in the late 1980s. My analysis of these two case studies provides an examination of evidence that supports my theoretical framework—that elite interests drive public policy decisions in the central city. At the same time, this research makes a conscious effort to be aware of those processes and events that may contradict my interpretation of events.

In both chapters I also briefly address the shifting ideology of the city’s housing policies, along with public attitudes toward the urban poor that emerged in this period. Such housing practices often arose at the behest of local housing

advocates and activists and community groups in an effort to deal with the massive changes and loss of low-cost housing that took place in downtown Seattle. This discussion demonstrates the linkage between events over time, and the evolution of local housing policies and their impact on displacement and the downtown housing supply. Chapter seven concludes with an analysis and summary of my findings, and attempts to place the dissertation in the context of the broader theoretical literature. Implications for social policy, especially housing initiatives aimed at low-income populations, are discussed as well as areas for future research.

Although this study covers the period from 1960-1990 in one specific city, the trends and political processes described here remain relevant today. As we enter a new millennium during an era of unprecedented economic growth and wealth, there are indications that the gentrification of central cities in the United States has intensified during the past decade. The fallout from this process in terms of lives altered or destroyed continues; the overall impact—in terms of homelessness, increased housing costs and burdens for poor households, and related social problems—has yet to be determined. It thus behooves those interested in contemporary urban problems to investigate and understand the complicated historical reality that has shaped our current situation. In this way, scholars and practitioners can help ensure that social and economic justice remains more than just a rhetorical fig leaf used to perpetuate systems of oppression and inequality. The following case study of

gentrification and displacement in downtown Seattle seeks to help initiate that process.

## **Chapter Two: Review of the Literature**

### **History of Low-cost Urban Housing**

Single room occupancy (SRO) hotels have historically housed many of the urban poor, and have thus provided a vital and affordable housing niche for low-income urban residents (Timmer, Eitzen & Talley, 1994).<sup>1</sup> The central downtown location—often in so-called “Skid Row” neighborhoods—of most SROs has usually allowed residents easy access to needed goods and services in the immediate area (Hoch & Slayton, 1989). This has led many to suggest that SROs have long provided a level of independent living, especially for elderly and disabled low-income residents without easy access to other services (Ovrebø, Minkler & Liljestrand, 1991; Jencks, 1994). Further, few, if any, low-cost housing alternatives have existed for SRO residents (Groth, 1994), a point highlighted by the growing nationwide lack of affordable housing for the lowest income members of society.<sup>2</sup> Rossi (1989) notes that the most destitute (persons who were often homeless, or so-called “hobos” and “tramps”) were often able to rent “cages” or windowless cubicles in “Skid Row” flophouses, often for pennies a night:

The cubicles they rented for 50¢ to 90¢ a night hardly fit any definition of home. They were called rooms by the hotel manager, but in fact were partitioned-off spaces in former

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<sup>1</sup> Rossi (1989) describes SRO hotels as “places that rent single rooms, usually by the week or the month, at very low rents. SRO rooms usually do not have private bathrooms or cooking facilities. Maid service is skimpy and erratic” (p. 11).

<sup>2</sup> From 1970 to 1990, the number of rental units affordable to poor renters nationwide decreased by 14 percent, some 700,000 rental units (Timmer, Eitzen & Talley, 1994).

factory lofts, typically measuring five feet by seven, that could hold a cot and little more (p. 30).

While this presents a picture of a rather loathsome living space, this shelter nevertheless offered a cheap bed for society's poorest and most marginalized individuals. An alternative view has also existed that SROs are dirty, dangerous, and the least desirable form of unsubsidized housing, suggesting that SRO residents cause or accelerate the economic, social and physical decline of downtown neighborhoods. Not surprisingly, such housing and its surrounding neighborhoods have long been targets for demolition and "cleaning up" (Hoch & Slayton, 1989; Burt, 1992). Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, SROs and "Skid Row" areas drew the moralizing attention of Progressive reformers including social workers who sought to "save" residents from the alleged sins of hotel and rooming house life (Hoch & Slayton, 1989). SRO hotels and their residents were thus widely seen as presenting a serious social problem, capable of spreading disease and vice throughout urban neighborhoods. Baum and Burnes (1993) note research that found "Skid Row" neighborhoods traditionally contained a high percentage of social outcasts—the poor, alcoholic, elderly, single individuals, and the chronically ill—cutoff from mainstream society in a seemingly self-perpetuating culture. Despite the demonizing of these areas and their residents, it is still generally recognized that SROs (and flophouses, etc.) have served as the housing of last resort for many so-called "undesirables" (Wright, 1989). Indeed, there is general agreement that those who utilized SROs, rooming houses and other cheap downtown housing were largely low-

income workers, often elderly, with a disproportionate number of single men. Timmer, Eitzen & Talley (1994) call SROs the “typical housing for poor single people” throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (p. 52). Historically, many SRO residents are believed to have experienced periodic episodes of homelessness, and/or suffer from alcohol and substance abuse problems and mental illness. Nonetheless, this population has generally been seen as having higher income, fewer chronic disabilities, and more consistent work activity than those constantly living in shelters or on the streets (Hoch & Slayton, 1989; Rossi, 1989; Burt, 1992; Timmer, Eitzen & Talley, 1994).

Because most SRO and other inexpensive downtown housing was built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the condition of most of these buildings deteriorated over time. Due to both age and physical neglect, during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century many SRO buildings in central cities fell into disrepair to the point of being out of compliance with local housing codes (Ovrebo, Minkler & Liljestrang, 1991). In many respects, this neglect reflected changing economic incentives, as building owners encouraged the abandonment and closure of SROs and boarding houses in order to reap higher financial returns from their property through redevelopment. This phenomenon became common in downtown Seattle by the mid-1960s, and led to the closure and eventual demolition of thousands of units of central city housing through the 1970s. In addition, the nationwide loss of SROs has occurred due to their conversion to more profitable tourist hotels or higher income residential housing, demolition

(often via federal urban renewal projects) in order to facilitate construction of commercial office buildings, and outright closure (Groth, 1994; Burt, 1992).

While SROs and downtown rooming houses have historically offered a relatively inexpensive housing option, by the 1980s many residents were believed to spend much more than the recommended 30 percent of their income for housing.<sup>3</sup> Rossi (1989) cites research that traces a shift between life in SRO hotels and homelessness, with many individuals forced onto the streets after running through their meager incomes, while others are unable to afford even the \$200-\$250 monthly rent for SROs. High rents for SROs and the lack of maintenance of these buildings has been attributed in part to federal housing policies which until the 1980s precluded SRO units from receiving any federal housing aid for rent subsidies or repair (Ovrebo, Minkler & Liljestrand, 1991). This housing squeeze also stems from declining incomes over the past 30 years for low-wage, less-educated workers, a gradual decline and restricted eligibility for welfare benefits, the elimination of many state General Assistance programs, and cuts in unemployment benefits. All these factors have had the biggest impact on low-income groups most likely to utilize SROs or urban boarding houses.

Although precise figures are difficult to ascertain, numerous studies have offered estimates of the loss of SRO housing since the 1950s. Many scholars

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<sup>3</sup> The federal government recommends that households spend no more than 30 percent of their income for housing to be considered affordable.

find that more than one million such units (approximately half of the SRO stock) were permanently lost across the country during the 1970s alone.<sup>4</sup> Other research found a dramatic loss of SRO hotels in major metropolitan areas between the 1960s and mid-1980s, with New York City suffering the largest decline of this housing stock—over 100,000 SRO units (Blau, 1992; Burt, 1992; Rossi, 1989; Wright, 1989; Timmer, Eitzen & Talley, 1994).<sup>5</sup> Groth (1994) finds that most U.S. central cities have been losing affordable hotel rooms of all types without replacement at a tremendous pace since WW II. A 1978 U.S. Senate Committee also found the nationwide loss of SROs to be extensive (Wright, 1989). Post-war urban renewal efforts (discussed below) appear to have targeted inexpensive SROs and other cheap downtown housing for demolition, especially in large cities where demand for less-skilled labor was declining (Burt, 1992; Rossi, 1989). Such efforts, carried out under the rubric of “slum clearance,” helped pave the way for the gentrification of former “Skid-Row” neighborhoods into “middle-class housing, restaurants, and shops in boutique neighborhoods, in large part to accommodate the recreational and housing needs of the middle-class aging baby boomers...” (Baum & Burnes, 1993, p. 159). This process accelerated during the 1970s and 1980s. Many large U.S. cities redeveloped their downtown areas, trading affordable housing serving the

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<sup>4</sup> This figure appears to be based on an article by Baxter & Hopper (1984), or a study by Hopper & Hamberg (1986). The latter used a study on homelessness conducted by the General Accounting Office to arrive at this figure (Wright, 1989; Jencks, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> A different view emerges from Jencks (1994). While recognizing that a significant amount of this housing was destroyed, he suggests that the loss of SROs and other cheap housing (like “cage” hotels) was grossly overstated by housing advocates. He also finds that the greatest loss of SROs and other Skid Row housing occurred in the 1980s.

urban poor for office towers, sports arenas and convention centers, hotels, parking lots and garages, as well as housing and services geared toward a more affluent population (Timmer, Eitzen & Talley, 1994).

The disappearance of SROs and other cheap urban accommodations has also been linked to increased public assistance benefits in the 1960s and 1970s for both the elderly and individuals with physical and mental disabilities (Rossi, 1989). Combined with expanded federal housing programs, in particular housing assistance targeting the elderly, the increased economic security of these groups is alleged to have led to less demand for inexpensive, unsubsidized downtown housing. This is believed to have created incentive to property owners to abandon or demolish SRO housing to gain higher profits from their property through commercial development or real estate speculation. Blau (1992) suggests a direct and somewhat related link between structural economic change—the loss of blue-collar industries (“deindustrialization”) and the transformation from a manufacturing to a service-based economy—and the loss of SROs. Because an expanding white collar workforce sought housing in and around the downtown areas where service jobs were being created, “real estate developers initiated a process of gentrification that often targeted single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels” for conversion into high-priced housing (p. 75).

Although SROs represent the most important and prominent form of downtown hotel living, various forms of (residential) hotel rooms have existed in central

cities for more than 200 years (Groth, 1994). Rejecting common stereotypes about Skid Row residents, Hoch and Slayton (1989) find that SRO hotels “offered a solution to the individual shelter problems of the urban single poor” (p. 8). Not only have SROs provided a critical form of housing—serving as shelter for a range of social groups, both rich and poor—Groth (1994) finds they have “challenged the dominant cultural values of how homes should shape American culture” (p. 1). Of more importance, he suggests that hotels (in particular, SROs) allowed industrial capitalism to flourish by housing an available supply of temporary and low-paid, less-skilled workers in concentrated central city environments.

Many scholars find that the wholesale destruction and loss of SRO units nationwide represents a major source of the dramatic increase in homelessness starting in the 1980s (Groth, 1994; Hopper & Hamberg, 1986; Rossi, 1989; Ovrebo, Minkler & Liljestrang, 1991; Burt, 1992). Thus, the destruction of SROs and other inexpensive housing found in most central city neighborhoods is believed to have pushed many tenants directly onto the streets or into homeless shelters, while decreasing the available stock of low-cost urban housing. Blau (1992) notes that a growing reduction in affordable housing units, combined with declining wages for less-skilled/educated workers, has dramatically reduced the ability of this population to secure lodging. For Baum & Burnes (1993), expanded federal initiatives of the 1960s aimed at improving cities and the lives of the urban poor ironically had a negative impact on its

most vulnerable populations. Their critique of a misguided liberalism finds that urban renewal

essentially razed skid rows, effectively displacing their residents but offering no alternatives. The result during the 1960s and early 1970s was the irreparable fraying of the well-established safety net that had been in place for the homeless for generations. State mental institutions for the “insane poor” and the entire panoply of public and private lodgings, missions, soup kitchens, stores, and other community amenities in place in skid row since the era of the hobo jungles fell victim to the Great Society. This series of developments set the stage for the increased visibility of homelessness in the 1980s (p. 106-107).

These trends help highlight the longstanding conflict over the function played by SROs, rooming houses and other forms of cheap urban accommodations: whether these units represent substandard housing for society’s most “undesirable” elements, or instead whether these are a crucial piece of the urban housing market for millions of low-income inner-city residents, or both. In essence, downtown housing has been a function of the need for particular types of labor in a capitalist economy. Thus during periods when the labor market required greater numbers of less-skilled, transitory, single male workers, central cities offered sufficient amounts of SRO hotels, rooming houses, and other cheap housing. In a changing economy in need of increasing numbers of white collar and better-educated workers, urban housing has become more expensive and more exclusive, and has often been produced at the expense of the older urban housing stock.

The “cultural bias” against (cheap) downtown hotels and their residents has a long history in the United States, fueled in part by a fear of the imagined dangers presented by SRO living (Groth, 1994). Citing a widespread “misperception of the hotels as breeding grounds for social disease,” Hoch & Slayton (1989, p. 9) find that such discourse served to legitimize middle-class values and morality; it has also helped to sanction policies that targeted SROs for elimination. At the lowest rank of urban hotel life (i.e., inexpensive lodging houses and SROs), the majority of tenants have stood in stark contrast to a growing middle (and upper) class housed in single-family homes. Most residents of SROs and boarding houses have historically had marginal and inconsistent income, lived in poverty, and had backgrounds and socioeconomic status distinct from middle and upper class norms. These class distinctions help explain the public condemnation often visited upon such housing as a “public nuisance,” an aberration from a narrowly defined mainstream form of residence (Groth, 1994, p. 23). Thus downtown hotels were often seen as “forbidden living” by urban planners at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. With an emphasis on order, less mixing of social groups, lower density and family privacy in newly emergent suburbs, downtown hotels were viewed largely as a “deliberate casualty of the transition between the old city and the new city” (p. 17).

Citing an historical lack of familiarity by the public with most SRO/hotel residents, Groth (1994) also notes how the emphasis on *family* (as opposed to

single individuals) in federal housing policy has further served to isolate a largely single, often male urban population. "Another barrier to understanding hotel life is based on the fact that so many hotel people are single and have developed social orders strongly differing from those in traditional American family units" (p. 14). While Progressive reformers and others often portrayed SRO residents as "deviants" who chose to live in Skid Row neighborhoods because of personal dysfunction, in fact most were simply seeking affordable accommodations close to sources of work (however irregular). "These men and women were far from being slaves of the industrial system, but much of their life was defined by whether or not they could find work, the kind of work they did, and what happened to them on the job" (Hoch & Slayton, 1989, pp. 44-45). In this sense, the "crisis" of SRO housing (marked by the loss of low-cost housing units and the gap between supply and demand) results in part from "cultural amnesia" about the role SRO housing has served, as well as misrepresentation about who has traditionally resided in such housing (Groth, 1994, pp. 8-9).

### **Housing & Urban Policy**

The history of the United States has been marked by an often informal alliance between public and private sectors. Though not without tension and contradictions, this partnership has been based on the notion that the primary role of government is to promote economic development, and to stimulate capital accumulation and private business initiatives (Squires, 1994). In this respect, public policies have often been designed to "help construct social

environments," and thus have greatly influenced the extent and distribution of economic and social inequality (Fisher, et al., 1996, p. 17). For example, in many urban areas, "government actions have intensified both the spread of poverty and the decline of formerly great cities" (Katz, 1995, p. 82).

Understanding that seemingly private "market forces" are in fact linked to active policy process can demonstrate how these actions have in turn impacted patterns of class and racial segregation and uneven urban development.

Importantly, corporate and public policies starting in the 1950s and 1960s that promoted structural economic transformation have also reshaped central city environments and had a disproportionately negative impact on low-income and minority residents. Urban and housing policies, which receive significantly less attention in the broader poverty debate between "structure" and "culture," have thus played a key role in facilitating and reinforcing class and racial segregation.

This implies that social and political actions often reproduce inequalities of class and race that are instead commonly linked to structural economic change or seemingly autonomous forces like "deindustrialization." It suggests that the post-war economic transformation and decline (and subsequent rise) of central cities is not simply the outcome of inevitable processes like "globalization," or the dysfunction of a "culture of poverty." Rather, it has largely been the result of the individual and collective decisions of privileged groups seeking to maximize their economic and political power. Their actions have fostered

selective economic disinvestment, as well as processes of gentrification, in many urban communities. In turn, this has reinforced the displacement and isolation of the urban poor and most racial minorities. In an analysis of urban inequality, then, events conventionally viewed as separate, independent occurrences or beyond the control of political and corporate decisions, are in fact linked to contemporary patterns of segregation by class and race.

Thus the dramatic loss of federal housing aid over the past 20 years has reduced the nationwide supply of affordable rental housing. At the same time, the private sector has failed to meet the increasing demand for affordable and subsidized housing (Paget, 1998). Because housing assistance is not an entitlement, a significant affordable housing gap exists for low-income households: less than 30 percent of all poor renters in the United States receive any form of federal housing assistance (Dreier & Atlas, 1996; Squires, 1994). While federal housing aid is provided to some five million households, the federal government estimates that approximately 13 million more families qualify for housing assistance (Timmer, Eitzen & Talley, 1994). By one estimate there exists an affordable housing gap of five million housing units for those with "worst case" needs, low-income households forced to pay at least half of their income for rent (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1998). The ongoing lack of affordable housing also stems from the loss of low-cost rental units due to gentrification and urban renewal, as well as conversion to market rate rental units. Between 1973 and 1993 (a period of rising income

inequality), more than two million unsubsidized low-cost apartments were lost, while the number of poor people increased (Dreier & Atlas, 1996). Without a significant increase in new subsidized rental units, the affordable housing gap has increased. During the 1980s the Reagan administration sought to dismantle many key federal housing programs, and significantly reduced federal housing aid. Key Reagan appointees were also directly responsible for the widespread corruption that plagued the federal housing agency and led to calls for the elimination of HUD and deep reductions in housing aid. The Reagan and Bush administrations were also responsible for massive cutbacks in federal assistance for cities and community development projects.

During this period federal urban aid was also drastically restructured. The free market orientation that marked President Carter's urban policies was implemented even more forcefully during the Reagan presidency. Driven by a laissez-faire philosophy, the Reagan administration sought to privatize many social welfare issues, while cutting aid to neighborhood groups that formed in response to urban unrest in the 1960s. States became the primary avenue for providing federal assistance, thereby reducing the role of local government (Thomas, 1990). So-called economic growth policies actually supported private commercial investment in urban areas at the expense of housing, social services and neighborhood development programs for low-income and minority populations (Mohl, 1993). Community programs were cut significantly during the Reagan-Bush era, a period when poverty became more concentrated in

central cities. Federal aid to urban areas (through CDBG, revenue sharing, and employment and training programs) was slashed by more than two-thirds in real dollar terms between 1981 and 1993 (Paget, 1998).

Federal housing policy has been radically remade in the past quarter century toward a greater focus on privatization and decentralization, a policy shift that has proven woefully inadequate in meeting the needs of low-income households. While federal initiatives have often neglected low-income housing needs, recent policies have further destabilized poor households, especially among the inner-city poor (Gotham, 1998). Importantly, federal policies have paid little attention to the impacts of urban redevelopment and gentrification, leaving many low-income urban residents to the whim of market forces. (Bratt, 1997; Dreier & Atlas, 1996; Massey & Denton, 1993). Dreier and Atlas (1996) conclude that the nation's housing situation has worsened over the past two decades, and is marked by persistent residential segregation by class and race, increased homelessness, declining home ownership, and a growing crisis of affordability for renters. With demand for affordable, subsidized rental housing far exceeding supply, rent inflation for this segment of the housing market is expected to increase, meaning fewer low-income households can afford rent or will spend in excess of 30 percent of their income for rent (Timmer, Eitzen & Talley, 1994).

In addition, the prospect of greater profit by raising rents and/or converting low-cost units to higher priced and luxury apartments has proven a strong temptation for landlords. Indeed, a recent report by the federal government found that despite the largest economic expansion in U.S. history, low-income renters are faring worst. A record number (5.5 million) of working-poor families spent more than half of their income for rent or were forced to live in substandard housing in 1997. In addition, the nationwide loss of affordable housing accelerated during the mid-1990s as the process of gentrification in central cities intensified (Irvine, 2000; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2000). Thus, as has occurred throughout the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, adherence to “free market” housing policies continues to facilitate the process of urban gentrification and displacement, and has the most negative impact on low-income households.

The following examination of housing in the United States, for example, demonstrates that the “free market” produces uneven urban development, while public policies perpetuate such inequality. Government actions favor the private sector, and largely fail to address the housing needs of poor renters. In fact, housing policies have most often created and sustained the spatial isolation and concentration of low-income populations in central cities, while simultaneously promoting suburban growth and private homeownership. Similarly, federal urban policy initiatives have also reinforced the economic and political hegemony of elites. Rather than seeking an equitable distribution of

resources and opportunities, government urban policies usually reward the private sector and promote the geographic isolation and containment of low-income and minority populations. Significantly, the goal of these political activities has often been contradictory: certain historical periods in the United States have been marked by active federal (and often local) efforts to resolve problems of urban poverty. As will be seen, however, "free market" ideology has formed the basis for key government initiatives like housing, and has thus failed to eradicate segregation by class and race (Dreier & Atlas, 1996; Bratt, 1997). Explicit public policies, as well as benign neglect, resulting from adherence to the "free market" have thus supported the uneven spatial development of central cities, and the displacement and isolation of many poor urban residents.

### **The Political Economy of Housing**

More than any other Western democracy, U.S. housing policy is oriented toward the "free market" and private sector initiatives, while offering minimal housing aid for low-income households (Dreier & Atlas, 1996). Housing policy is thus predicated on the belief that the key role of government is to support the market and private sector, to stimulate business policies deemed to be in the public interest, thereby maximizing individual choice and opportunities for homeownership (Squires, 1994). However, the housing market (like the labor market) has historically failed to provide for the basic needs of all citizens, in particular, poor and low-income households. The institutionalized segregation of low-income residents—especially racial minorities—in urban ghettos has

intensified as structural changes to the urban political economy have further excluded these groups from upward mobility (Bartelt, 1993). Rather than reducing these problems, federal housing policy and local lending and real estate practices have facilitated urban decline and the concentration of low-income populations within central cities. Thus the "spatial isolation central to the so-called "underclass" is a direct extension of the history of housing markets and housing policy" (Bartelt, pp. 122-123).

Squires (1994) notes the institutional (political economy) perspective on housing which highlights the "mutually reinforcing dynamics of housing and uneven development," and the ways in which housing policy reinforces class and racial inequality in urban centers (p. 40). Because the housing industry represents a political and economic elite and controls billions of dollars, it plays a major role in shaping housing policies and in the distribution of housing in the United States. Key actors in the housing industry (insurance, lending and banking interests, contractors, homebuilders, and real estate agents) therefore wield considerable influence over the political and economic decisions of housing. That these industries and their lobbyists have close ties with federal regulators and local, state and federal lawmakers helps explain "why housing-related industries have secured special privileges (e.g., government insurance of deposits and loan products, deduction of property taxes and mortgage loan interest payments from federal income taxes, exemption of the insurance industry from federal regulation)..." (p. 42). While the housing industry is

buttressed by policies that reward collective, corporate interests and capital accumulation strategies, the inequalities and unequal distribution of housing that result from free market policies are not afforded equal attention. Elite interests, including those in the housing and the lending-banking industry, have thus shaped U.S. housing policy to meet the needs of corporate interests.

It was not until the Great Depression that a federal housing policy was formally initiated. Yet rather than ensuring the provision of housing for the poor as a key federal goal, conservative lawmakers and business elites sought instead to stabilize the banking industry and provide an economic stimulus for private business (Bratt, 1997). In addition, the housing industry has historically influenced the scope of subsidized rental housing programs to support lenders and developers (Dreier & Atlas, 1996). While public housing was the first large federally subsidized housing initiative, the program sought to create jobs for the construction industry as much as to build sufficient affordable housing for the poor (Bratt, 1997). Rather than support both low and middle-income families, private-housing interests lobbied the federal government during the Depression and after WW II to ensure that only poor people would be served by public housing. "Public housing, owned by local governments, barely got started before it was sabotaged" (Dreier & Atlas, p. 349). As a result, the federal government in conjunction with the private housing industry helped create the apparatus to channel middle and working class housing aspirations toward the private market and individual home ownership. This quickly became the norm

for a nation recovering from the havoc of depression and world war, and served to stimulate multiple layers of economic growth.

Housing policy has further promoted uneven metropolitan area development by favoring suburban over urban growth, "and once these processes were set in motion, public and private sector housing has reinforced them" (Squires, 1994, p. 52). Favoritism to homeowners over renters through the federal mortgage interest deduction, as well as transportation, housing and tax policies, assisted the post-war urban outmigration of mostly whites to the rapidly expanding suburbs while continuing to subsidize private housing interests (Mohl, 1990; Dreier & Atlas, 1996). "...Federal housing policies substantively contributed to endless suburban sprawl, but did little for the low-income people trapped in the decaying central cities" (Mohl, 1993, p. 16). Federal and local housing policies following WW II also blocked efforts by blacks to integrate white communities, increasing the spatial separation of low-income and minority populations. Federal policies encouraged the redlining of poor black neighborhoods—refusing credit for housing and business development—by banks and insurance companies. Local lenders steered black homebuyers to minority neighborhoods as government officials largely ignored discriminatory lending practices (Massey & Denton, 1993; Squires, 1999). As a result, federal policy helped create a system of residential apartheid based on race (and to a lesser extent, class) that persists at the end of the 20th Century (Massey & Denton, 1993).

This was not always the case, and in fact the origins of federal housing policy highlight key contradictions between legislative aims and actual outcomes. Housing policy initiated during the New Deal and continuing through the 1970s was predicated in part on the ideal that the federal government could best solve the nation's severe housing problems and shortages (Squires, 1994). Conflict often arose over how much money to spend on assisted housing, and how best to regulate lenders, landlords and real estate agents. Political and class divisions also marked debate over federal housing policies, as reflected in the Housing Acts of 1937 and 1949.<sup>6</sup> Importantly, the housing industry, which dominated housing policy in the 1940s, had to accede to the building of some public housing in order to receive federal subsidies for future urban renewal projects. With the prospect of unimaginable profits from urban "slum clearance" and access to valuable inner-city property, business, real estate and housing interests gave their support to the 1949 Housing Act (Judd & Swanstrom, 1994). However, while New Deal liberals (Democrats, unions and big city mayors) supported an extensive program of public housing construction, Republicans (backed by business and trade associations) effectively blocked significant funding of new affordable housing to replace so-called "slum housing" in central cities (Flannagan, 1997). Federal housing policy was thus oriented towards addressing the large housing shortage during and after WWII, a problem exacerbated by the baby boom, the need to house

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<sup>6</sup> Of note, the 1937 Housing Act committed the federal government to help improve central cities through "slum clearance" and public housing construction (Judd & Swanstrom, 1994). The 1949 Housing Act offered a guarantee to all Americans of "decent, safe, and sanitary" housing.

returning war veterans and a housing stock in disrepair from the Depression years.

While the 1949 Housing Act was also intended to build affordable housing in urban areas cleared of "slums," political and economic elites manipulated the legislation to divert approximately half of the funds toward urban development and central business district projects. "Thus urban renewal was turned into a political pawn of the larger downtown businesses" (Judd & Swanstrom, 1994, p. 138). Nonetheless, for 40 years every presidential administration from Roosevelt to Carter increased federal housing aid, though the amount of new public housing never matched the sizable need. Public policies subsidized construction of low and moderate income rental housing; sought to combat housing segregation via the 1968 Fair Housing Act; and attempted to ensure decent housing and economic opportunity for low-income residents in poor neighborhoods through the 1974 Housing and Community Development Act (Dreier & Atlas, 1996; Squires, 1994). Overall, however, federal housing policy has promoted class and racial inequality, whether by explicit intent or the result of poorly crafted policy.

### **Urban Renewal and Central City Decline**

Flannagan (1997) suggests that the 1954 Housing Act bridged the liberal-conservative congressional impasse over national housing policy, creating a new consensus that promoted urban renewal and commercial development at the expense of low-cost public housing in poor central-city neighborhoods. In an

appeal to congressional moderates, the Eisenhower administration proposed legislation that emphasized the commercial revitalization of central cities. Their plan (crafted by banking and business groups) gave primacy to urban renewal projects and mortgage subsidies over public housing: only 35,000 new public housing units would be built each year, and would largely replace housing destroyed from urban renewal projects. Judd & Swanstrom (1994) suggest that urban renewal in effect dominated urban policy initiatives during the 1950s and early 1960s. With a belief that urban decline was a national problem, local business and political elites turned toward the federal government for aid to develop declining central cities. Ironically, while theoretically intending to assist and revitalize distressed urban areas, urban renewal programs "ultimately increased racial segregation and exacerbated racial tensions in urban areas" (p. 128).

Under the 1954 housing bill, "public housing was recast as the stepchild of redevelopment" (p. 282). Local governments gained new authority to devise commercial development plans with no requirement to develop new affordable housing. By siphoning support for the plan from the New Deal liberal coalition, federal housing and urban policy was remade. The immediate and long-term effects were a significant reduction in public housing construction. While nearly 50,000 new units per year were built nationwide in the early 1950s, from 1955 to 1988, an average of only 27,000 public housing units were built

annually, despite the need for many times more than that amount (Flannagan, 1997).<sup>7</sup>

By failing to provide equal replacement housing for homes destroyed by urban renewal, federal policy assisted the urban concentration and overcrowding of low-income families and racial minorities in segregated public housing or already declining neighborhoods with poor housing supply (Judd & Swanstrom, 1994). Thus some observers suggest that these programs were in fact intended as "Negro removal" initiatives, designed to move large numbers of poor black residents away from valuable central city real estate. As a result of urban renewal projects, the nation's affordable housing stock suffered a net decrease of 90 percent in the 1950s; the direct impact of urban renewal on affordable housing was a loss of four low-income rental units for each new unit built (Halpern, 1995). In many cities the repercussions were more severe than just the loss of housing, due to the simultaneous demolition of basic social and neighborhood institutions like shops, small businesses and churches. The complex social fabric of many urban communities, home mostly to black and Latino residents, was destroyed through urban renewal and federally financed highway projects. Halpern notes that many of those displaced were among the most fragile families in a community, as the more resourceful left poor neighborhoods before actual "slum clearance." For those poor families that remained, they were confronted with a bleak landscape of declining job

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<sup>7</sup> Between 1959 and 1961, President Eisenhower successfully eliminated public housing programs from the federal budget altogether (Judd & Swanstrom, 1994).

opportunities, a lack of services and neighborhood institutions, and a shortage of viable housing options. As many of these areas contained “Skid Row” neighborhoods, they became targets of public and private condemnation efforts; these neighborhoods were said to be in need of further renewal and revitalization projects. To make matters worse, only half of those displaced by urban renewal received financial assistance to relocate, and the average payment was just \$70 per household (Halpern, 1995). Thus the seeds of contemporary urban ghetto poverty—marked by isolated, concentrated poor and minority populations—were sown.

Responding in part to growing diversity (and political unrest) in central cities, much of the white urban middle class fled to the expanding suburbs where government backed mortgages allowed most to purchase a new home. Housing developers, banks and lending institutions, aided by federal policies they helped create, “used federal home loan guarantee programs to insure that new housing would be built in the suburbs and that it would be racially segregated” (Judd & Swanstrom, 1994, p. 12). As a result, suburbs grew more than four times as fast as central cities during the 1950s (Flannagan, 1997). Importantly, the destruction of central city housing also cleared the way for urban real estate speculation, and capital expansion and investment schemes centered on central city office construction, and the “redevelopment” of former working-class areas into higher-income, gentrified neighborhoods (Whiteis, 1997). Further, the housing stock in many older industrial cities decayed through abandonment by

landlords (Mohl, 1990), a process that often had the tacit approval of local and federal officials. As noted earlier, such practices had the direct effect of displacing low-income residents and providing the impetus for urban redevelopment and gentrification.

### **Gentrification & Displacement Literature**

An extensive literature on gentrification and urban development over the past 25 years is marked by divergent views about the causes, extent, and consequences of this phenomenon (Smith, 1996; Wyly & Hammel, 1998; Wittberg, 1992; Berry, 1985; Lees & Bondi, 1995; Wilson 1996, 1992; Hutchison, 1992; Bourne, 1993; Zukin, 1987). Some suggest that historic patterns of upwardly mobile groups moving from cities to suburbs (the process of neighborhood “succession” and “invasion”) was altered or reversed starting in the 1970s. At that time, some higher-income groups left “established middle class enclaves within the city for other inner-city neighborhoods occupied by poor or less affluent populations” (Flanagan, 1993, p. 68). This pattern of “upfiltering” has thus altered the traditional “trickle-down” flow of older housing to lower-income groups, thereby creating competition over limited urban housing opportunities (Wright, 1989). This process, which occurred in various forms in Europe and the United States and often led to the displacement of low-income residents by these upwardly mobile residents, came to be identified as gentrification.

Often known as urban renewal, *public* redevelopment is characterized by publicly funded and designed initiatives to upgrade downtown environments (often by eliminating urban “blight” in central cities), revitalize central business districts, improve housing conditions, and upgrade commercial and retail activity (Wilson, 1996). *Private* urban redevelopment plans (gentrification) often have similar, if more limited aims. Gentrification has thus been described as

...a process of urban redevelopment that occurs when middle-class families move into declining central city neighborhoods, and the housing in these neighborhoods is upgraded through rehabilitation and apartment conversions...gentrification has important possibilities of increasing homeownership, tax bases, reinvestment, ambience, historic and aesthetic values, and the social class and racial/ethnic diversity of cities (Wilson, 1996, pp. 142-143).

Summarizing much of the literature about this phenomenon, Hutchison (1992) found that while not extensive in all cases, gentrification was nonetheless present in most large U.S. cities. Flanagan (1993) notes that gentrification has affected U.S. cities of all sizes in every region of the country, with certain areas experiencing dramatic urban changes. Throughout the 1970s, at least some neighborhoods in most older central cities witnessed an influx of younger, often childless middle and upper-income residents who helped transform former urban “slums” into higher priced trendy neighborhoods (Teaford, 1990). New York, San Francisco, Baltimore and Pittsburgh were just some of the most prominent examples of this process. Some scholars suggested that the 1987 stock market crash and the 1990-91 economic recession may have halted or

actually reversed central city gentrification. However, Smith (1996b) finds these arguments premature, and notes that a temporary decline in land and housing values in this period may have actually spurred additional and perhaps more intensive reinvestment and gentrification in central cities.

One way of distinguishing these two processes is to view urban redevelopment as efforts involving new construction, while gentrification has often comprised new construction and the rehabilitation of older, existing housing stock (Smith, 1996). In the latter, less expensive rental housing is transformed to serve some segments of an affluent urban population choosing to move back to the central city. Ideally, both public and private urban development efforts will lead to economic revitalization and an increase in the socioeconomic status (SES) of area residents (such as higher levels of education and median income), thus signaling a commitment to urban life by more affluent groups (Flanagan, 1993). Despite these potential positive impacts, many have noted the negative consequences of both urban renewal efforts and gentrification (Mohl, 1993; Teaford, 1990; Hirsch, 1998; Wilson, 1996; Smith, 1996; Flanagan, 1993; Smith & Williams, 1986; Zukin, 1987; Harris, 1991). Of particular concern are changes that occur in the *private* housing market that adversely impact low-income and working class residents. These include a marked increase in the cost of housing, the abandonment and loss of rental housing, especially that serving low-income groups, real estate speculation, rising levels of homeownership, and the displacement of poor urban residents (Wilson, 1996;

Smith, 1996a; Legates & Hartman, 1986; Marcuse, 1986). While gentrification may initially increase the diversity of downtown neighborhoods, Harris (1991) finds that “directly or indirectly, gentrifiers displace lower income households” by driving up housing costs (p. 142). Gentrification thus ultimately leads to greater segregation by class and race, as mostly low-income and racial minority households are pushed out of inner city neighborhoods by an increasingly higher income residential population (Castells & Mollenkopf, 1991; Timmer, Eitzen & Talley, 1994).

Much of the debate regarding gentrification and urban restructuring has focused on the causes of this process. Some claim that neighborhood change reflects a renewed (starting in the late 1960s) middle class penchant for urban life, the so-called “consumption-side” (or cultural) theory of gentrification. An expanding professional class, along with local artists, are often viewed as creating demand for urban housing, thus leading to the renovation and redevelopment of older downtown neighborhoods and housing stock, or the construction of new condominiums and other higher cost housing (Mollenkopf & Castells, 1991). Conversely, critical theorists argue that “production-side” explanations offer a more valid explanation for gentrification. Smith (1996a) suggests that opportunities for gentrification result from a process of inner-city capital investment and withdrawal that shapes and replicates the uneven class geography of urban life. Thus gentrification is a process that serves the

interests of urban elites like financiers, bankers and real estate developers, with profit rates more important than consumer demand (Smith, 1996b).

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

This dissertation describes trends in the development and transformation of Seattle from 1960-1990, with a focus on demographic changes in the downtown core and the political processes creating these changes. The use of descriptive statistics and aggregate data can help identify important patterns in the process of gentrification, urban development and decline. However, while important to the task of describing processes that signal gentrification (and displacement), there are limitations to this more traditional urban ecology approach. Theories of urban ecology (pioneered by McKenzie, Park and Burgess [1925; 1926]) merge sociology, geography and neoclassical economics into an ecological explanation of urban space and land use patterns. Changes in the social and geographical use of urban space are largely seen as a normal, inevitable process that tends to promote the social good. Such events are said to stem from external factors like migration or changes in transportation, with the state serving as a neutral mediator helping to maintain a social equilibrium (Wittberg, 1992). Ecological theory holds that in the competition for limited resources, the spatial form of the city results from group invasion and succession, and competition for resources, with different groups finding their “appropriate ecological niche” based on their ability to withstand these various group incursions (Friedenfels, 1992, p. 65).

Until the onset of gentrification, this theory of invasion and succession was often used to describe residential change from more affluent to less affluent neighborhoods (Flanagan, 1993). Excluding entry to subsidized housing, the “normal” pattern of succession has been for poor and working class groups to access older housing and neighborhoods as it gets passed on from upwardly mobile (higher income) groups moving up the housing ladder (Wright, 1989). A key theoretical assumption of the ecological approach is that “social factors operate by influencing the demands of autonomous individuals seeking to maximize their utilities in an essentially free land market” (Wittberg, 1992, p. 20). This theoretical perspective is usually assumed, rather than articulated (Friedenfels, 1992). Hudson (1987), for example, suggests that the transformation of New York’s SoHo district starting in the mid-1970s represented a coherent revitalization effort whereby local artists, lured by large spaces and cheap rents, made rational individual decisions to move into (or “invade”) a former industrial warehouse area. Harris (1991) also suggests that gentrification in Manhattan and Brooklyn in the 1980s was driven by consumers; it was “initiated by impecunious pioneers, including artists and young professionals willing to invest labor on their own homes” (p. 140). While urban ecology may acknowledge some level of displacement and conflict during gentrification, this perspective suggests the need to understand these events as part of the broader process of social change and progress (Flanagan, 1993).

Critics of urban ecology note that this theory usually provides more description than analysis (Wittberg, 1992). For example urban ecology methods often obscure the key function of “land development and the role of class domination in urban restructuring” (Feagin, 1998, pp. 113-114). In this sense, gentrification and its inherent upward pressure on real estate and land values serves the interests of local public and private elites (banking, commercial and real estate interests) who largely control urban investment and development decisions. Thus, according to critical theorists, the urban ecology (or functionalist) model is limited by providing minimal attention to issues of displacement (Zukin, 1982) and class conflict (or racial and gender discrimination), instead suggesting that the “invisible hand” of the “free” market efficiently allocates urban resources and functions.

These restrictions highlight the need for a more critical and nuanced theoretical approach to the study of urban transformation. The use of the “new urban sociology” or paradigm (Feagin, 1998), for example, incorporates an explicit political economy approach.<sup>8</sup> My analysis of urban change and restructuring in Seattle assumes that economic and political power is inherently linked. Political decisions and public policy are largely influenced and structured by privileged economic interests and private pressure (Ferguson & Rogers, 1984). Because public policies usually reflect the desire of elites, politics as much as

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<sup>8</sup> The political economy perspective does not specify the identity of competing groups. It does suggest that public authority and political decisions are integrated with the private sphere, that state power and political action is conditioned by the primacy of economic accumulation and stability (Ferguson & Rogers, 1984).

“market forces” help define economic development. Rather than meeting the needs of all members of society, public policy perpetuates uneven economic development and benefits privileged elites.

Kasinitz (1984) suggests that so-called “private” urban revitalization and renovation has in fact been assisted by local governments, zoning changes, federal tax breaks, municipal tax abatements, and other government grants. Smith (1996a) also notes this blurring of public and private boundaries. He argues that by the late 1970s, the tendency to separate private (gentrification) from public (redevelopment) urban restructuring was mistaken:

Gentrification is no longer about a narrow and quixotic oddity in the housing market but has become the leading residential edge of a much larger endeavor: the class remake of the central urban landscape. It would be anachronistic now to exclude redevelopment from the rubric of gentrification, to assume that the gentrification of the city was restricted to the recovery of an elegant history in the quaint mews and alleys of old cities, rather than bound up with a larger restructuring (p. 39).

Mainstream analyses of urban change tend to be largely descriptive (urban ecology), or provide a cultural explanation for gentrification. The latter suggests that urban restructuring is primarily a “back to the city” movement representing consumer demand and consumption. Changes in the housing market and composition of urban neighborhoods represent the outcome of a natural “upfiltering” process whereby middle- and upper-income families migrate to low-cost inner-city communities to maximize housing value. By

stressing *individual choice* for housing and the rehabilitation of urban ghettos, the discussion of class (which is often absent) centers on the middle class who are seen as new urban pioneers reclaiming the city for a modern urban renaissance (Smith, 1996a).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> While this emphasis on cultural explanations has been tempered by recognition of “capital-centered” explanations, gentrification remains for many scholars an individual and cultural process (Smith, 1996a).

## **Chapter Three: Study Design**

### **Study Design**

#### *Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework informing this project adopts a critical social theory perspective. This is a study of how business and corporate elites act to secure community space for their own benefit, the relationship of these efforts to public policy, and the impact on low-income groups. This dissertation examines two specific case studies of redevelopment initiatives in downtown Seattle. I analyze these events and their related political processes from the perspective of critical theory and elite theory. I use critical theory to mean the attempt to engage in a critical analysis of the interconnection between politics and economics, and the ways in which economic and political power is concentrated under capitalism to perpetuate inequality. Critical theory seeks to expose the contradictions between rhetoric and social reality, to expose key assumptions and facades of social life that hinder a complete understanding of power and the way society functions. As Johnson (2000) notes, “a major goal of critical theory is to reveal how surface reality often contradicts the underlying reality” (p. 67). Moreover, critical social theory assumes that domination is structural, and that key social institutions construct people’s lives and reproduce domination in a variety of coercive methods. A key function of critical social theory, according to Agger (1998), is to illuminate these structures to allow individuals to understand the “roots of their oppression” (p. 4).

I have adopted this approach because it allows me to tell a more in-depth story about events in my two case studies. Thus, it offers the strongest and most persuasive explanatory framework for the story I want to tell. Agger (1998) notes the need to investigate and analyze power—“to explore and explain society” (p. 2)—in an effort to illuminate these very social relationships. My analysis assumes that the role of the state is active and crucial to the process of gentrification and the class transformation of urban space. Of equal importance, the displacement of low-income groups is viewed as inherent to this process, thereby raising the issue of a link between urban policy and class conflict. For these reasons, an analysis of public policy and the influence of power and local elites—the role of *human agency*—is critical to help understand changes in the spatial distribution of social groups that occurred in downtown Seattle. Conversely, the use of more traditional (or “conservative”) cultural and market explanations for these events would have obscured the way elites in Seattle manipulated the political system to their advantage in these case examples.

As Squires (1989) notes, uneven urban development is the result of a public-private partnership that often circumvents traditional democratic processes to direct public funds toward the redevelopment of central cities. Rather than a “natural” process of neighborhood succession that has displaced few residents, gentrification and urban redevelopment most often represent conscious choices made by public and private elites. These actions usually displace significant

numbers of poor and low-income residents. While decisions by families and individuals regarding housing location no doubt have influenced gentrification, Flanagan (1993) highlights the crucial role played by local decision makers in the displacement of low-income residents: “That is, government is not a disinterested bystander in the conversion of neighborhoods. It has an ability to command change, to intervene in any purely ecological working out of the use of local spaces” (p. 70). Thus, elite institutions and actors guide and control the market (consumption side) process and facilitate urban consumption in the housing market.

State power in this analysis is not a neutral force that brokers the interests of all segments of society; it is an active agent that maintains a social order marked by inequality, with the allocation of income and other resources determined by relative power (Wittberg, 1992). Political power and economic interests—for example, land-based interest groups—work together to structure urban neighborhood change (London, 1992). A relatively small group of actors shapes the uneven development of urban life, maintaining their control over finance, property and capital to maximize their political and economic power (Wittberg, 1992; Feagin, 1998; Smith, 1996).

#### *Elite Theory and Local Elites*

This view is consistent with the power elite theory of C. Wright Mills (1956).

Classic elite theory proposes that power is concentrated in a small group of rich and influential people—elites—who hold key positions in three interlocking

sectors: government, business, and the military (Mills, 1956). Elites are drawn disproportionately from the highest socioeconomic strata, have shared backgrounds, and represent a small segment of society (Goodman, 1992; Mills, 1996). As a group, elites share basic interests and values, such as support for the "free market" and private property, a limited role for government, and an emphasis on individual choice and liberty (Dye, 1992). In this view, public policy does not reflect the desires of society at large, but instead protects and advantages a corporate and political elite at the expense of the poor and a relatively powerless working class. In order to maintain their power and hegemony requires communication and coordination among elites, who are said to circulate among these various institutional sectors (Goodman, 1992).

In my analysis of redevelopment and gentrification in downtown Seattle, I make frequent reference to "elites," or more specifically "local elites." My definition of local elites differs from classic power elite theory, specifically by suggesting that most local elites possess less individual wealth and have fewer or no ties to national networks of economic and political power. Local elites thus represent less a group that exerts control over national political and economic processes; they are, according to Johnson (2000), "any group or social category of people in a social system that occupies a position of privilege or dominance" (p. 101). Local elites can thus be seen as members of elite (interest) groups that possess *influence* on the local political (and to a lesser extent) economic sphere. Local

elites therefore represent a convergence of individuals with at least one or more of the following traits:

- Economic ties with the downtown area;
- Some level of personal affluence;
- Political clout and/or political aspirations;
- Name recognition as “movers & shakers”;
- The ability to influence local events.

These persons can be elected officials, commercial developers, land speculators, financiers, and members of the board of directors of corporations (local, national or international) and/or the local chamber of commerce. Elites may be individuals with direct links to downtown development interests, persons who were elected with developer support, or some combination, but which above all have the ability to influence these processes. However, as noted in Chapter 5, local elites can also represent divergent interests, and may in fact not share the same personal backgrounds, or specific goals on every issue. This notion of “elite pluralism” (Johnson, 2000) suggests that a distribution of power exists among a larger group than power elites. Competition may be common between elite groups over specific issues, but a general consensus usually develops around ultimate ends, in particular whether to share power with non-elites (Johnson, 2000). As my analysis of redevelopment in Pioneer Square shows, while two competing elite groups had distinct outcomes in mind for the district, they shared a general consensus on the need to transform the downtown neighborhood at the expense of low-income residents.

While offering a specific definition of elites is no doubt important, my study is more interested in attempting to display the workings of elite power in its various forms—to make visible the mechanisms of class and privilege in this process—rather than providing a priori definitions of this group. Dye (1986) notes that while often difficult to specifically identify, elites “are the few who have power in society” (p. 2). The concept of power thus assumes central importance in defining elites, since elites “occupy power roles in society” (p. 4). Importantly, the *ability* to exercise power—defined as an attribute of social roles rather than an individual trait—is demonstrated in both specific actions as well as non-actions. As described by sociologist C. Wright Mills (1956), elites are thus

in positions to make decisions having major consequences. Whether they do or do not make such decisions is less important than the fact that they do occupy such pivotal positions: their failure to act, their failure to make a decision is itself an act that is often of greater consequence than the decisions they do make (p. 4).

### *Project Scope*

Given the long period covered by this research, several decisions were made to narrow the project’s scope. In an effort to organize this inquiry while capturing the complexity of the topic, I analyze redevelopment projects that demonstrate some of the critical impacts on low-income groups and the political processes involved in downtown development. This study attempts to highlight *public* policy decisions and procedures related to two specific redevelopment efforts in

downtown Seattle described below. I do not examine *private* decision making per se, and instead examine public policy processes that are more apparent and thus somewhat easier to analyze. However, the interplay and influence of private sector elites and private decisions affecting downtown development are also revealed from this research on public policies and decisions, and thus form a critical aspect of my analysis.

Despite a growing literature on case study research, few scholars have actually provided specific guidelines for utilizing this methodology. Robert Yin is a notable exception in that he has written texts on case study design and methods (1994), as well as particular applications of this research approach (1993). Yin describes four specific research designs for case study research. These include single case and multiple case studies. Both types can be either holistic design, utilizing a single unit of analysis, or *embedded design*, using multiple units of analysis. This dissertation, by analyzing two redevelopment initiatives, utilizes a single case (embedded) research design (Yin, 1994). The two downtown redevelopment efforts thus represent *embedded case studies* (or sub-units of analysis) within my larger single case study. Analysis of these sub-units is intended to provide significant and rich data, thus helping to strengthen the analysis and understanding of the overall single case.

The use of the single case design—in this case, an examination of gentrification and housing displacement in downtown Seattle—was chosen in large part

because it meets some of the key rationale for such a design (Yin, 1994). Specifically, these processes in Seattle represent an opportunity to examine the validity of my theoretical framework. Also, this particular case serves a “revelatory purpose” (p. 42). That is, the events described in this case study provide an opportunity to highlight and analyze in depth a phenomenon common to cities across the United States. As described below, this case study involves more than one unit of analysis and thus represents an embedded design. While my research is focused on the larger processes of gentrification and housing displacement, I analyze two specific embedded case studies (the sub-units of analysis) to illustrate the complexity of this overall process. As Yin notes, “the subunits can often add significant opportunities for extensive analysis, enhancing the insights into the single case” (p. 44).

In sum, the use of the embedded design was chosen because numerous sub units could be identified to help focus the inquiry and illustrate the large processes under investigation. Moreover, the two embedded cases were chosen to provide empirical evidence to support my theoretical framework. Yin finds that a common problem of the holistic (single unit of analysis) design is “that the entire case study may be conducted at an abstract level, lacking any clear measures or data” (1994, p. 43). The research framework employed here seeks to avoid such vagueness and instead provide extensive analysis of my embedded cases to provide greater depth to the overall study.

The decision about which embedded case studies formed the focus of the study stemmed largely from my own interest in segregation by class and race, urban growth and redevelopment, gentrification, and their impact on low-income groups. These cases were also chosen in part based on information gathered from key informants. My intent was to identify and analyze public projects or policies deemed most significant based in part on my theoretical framework and worthy of analysis. Thus I chose two redevelopment initiatives that could help answer my primary research questions (see below) and that address the main theme of my dissertation. Inclusion of these embedded cases was also done in an effort to select both a “best case” and “worst case” for analysis (Hammersley, 1992). In an effort to help ensure confidence in the efficacy (or validity) of a particular theory, Hammersley, (1992) suggests the selection of cases that can help put theory to the most rigorous test possible. Simply stated, he argues for an analysis of both a most favorable and least favorable case in a particular case study project, thereby providing evidence to support or reject a theory:

...by selecting cases in such a way as to open the theory up to maximal threat we can provide a basis for increased confidence in the theory if it survives such a test or a series of tests (Hammersley, 1992, p. 182).

Finally, the decision about which projects or events to include in this study was based on the following criteria:

- Public redevelopment projects and key decisions that displaced significant numbers of the politically powerless—in this instance, poor

and low-income downtown renters—and that eliminated low-cost housing in the downtown core;

- Public redevelopment projects and key decisions that fundamentally altered the downtown physical landscape and thus changed the residential distribution;
- Public redevelopment projects and key decisions that represent the commercial and political interests of the politically powerful (i.e., local elites), and which serve as markers in the development and transformation of downtown Seattle from 1960-1990.

### *Embedded Cases*

In sum, the selection of cases in this study attempts to meet several criteria. While there were numerous potential cases in Seattle from which to choose, my final decision reflected a desire to examine events of personal interest, as well as those that had not been previously analyzed critically (nor from my theoretical frame of reference). In addition, a key motivation for inclusion of particular cases was their expected explanatory power—their ability to help explain trends in downtown development—rather than (as in most quantitative study) their being “representative.” Based on these criteria, the following were selected as “embedded” (or individual) cases for inclusion and analysis in this project.

#### *I. The Redevelopment of Pioneer Square*

The focus here is on both public and private redevelopment initiatives from the 1960s and 1970s in a strategic downtown location (which includes what was known as “Skid Road”). Analysis of these activities helps illustrate the

contested use of downtown space that emerged in the 1960s between those advocating wide-scale urban renewal activities, and those promoting the historic preservation of buildings in the Pioneer Square district. This case thus highlights conflicting visions over how growth would shape the type of city Seattle would become (Miller, 1982). Redevelopment efforts in this area also underscore how deference to market forces serving the interests of local elites guided the transformation of downtown Seattle. Proposed urban renewal projects by business and civic leaders often mirrored similar urban renewal efforts in other large U.S. cities. Thus urban renewal and revitalization plans in the Pioneer Square area sought to “clean up” Skid Road and make this area “respectable” and safe for tourism and business investment. Further, private and public efforts to “help” local residents and to “rejuvenate” an economically depressed area of downtown were designed to facilitate a wave of intensive investment and produce significant changes to the character of the neighborhood. Urban renewal projects in this area could have led to the displacement of mostly low-income residents and the loss of low-cost housing. However, activism on the part of local architects, preservationists, and some civic leaders focused on historic preservation of Pioneer Square blocked these proposed projects. Taken at face value, the “victory” of historic preservation appeared to help avoid many of the adverse impacts of urban renewal and redevelopment. Hence the inclusion of an analysis of Pioneer Square represents a “worst case” that could offer little supporting evidence for my theoretical framework.

## *II. The Washington State Convention and Trade Center*

On many levels, this project, built in the late 1980s, fits the key criterion described above. It was a major public redevelopment effort located in the downtown core. Construction of the Convention Center led to the loss of low-cost housing in downtown Seattle and the displacement of low-income residents. This project also featured a high profile confrontation between local housing advocates and sponsors of the center; the latter argued successfully at the state supreme court that the Convention Center should be exempt from a city housing replacement ordinance designed to mitigate the impact of displacement and development on low-income residents. The Convention Center was long seen by supporters as the cornerstone of a downtown Seattle renaissance—it's proponents included local elites (financiers, business leaders, politicians, etc.), many of whom stood to gain directly or indirectly from the project. Indeed, backers of the Convention Center worked to ensure that the location of the project was changed from the Seattle Center (its original proposed site) to a more central business district site. This was done largely to capitalize on a strategic downtown location, which was envisioned to include future hotel and office construction to complement the Convention Center. Inclusion of the Convention Center for analysis thus represents a “best case” that would appear to offer strong evidence to support my theoretical premise.

### *Downtown Boundaries*

While placed in the larger metropolitan context, this research is most concerned with the impacts of development and displacement in a defined “downtown”

area (*see map*). The spatial boundaries where specific processes are analyzed roughly comprise the neighborhoods of Denny-Regrade, First Hill, the International District, Pike Place, Pioneer Square, and the downtown central business district.<sup>1</sup> The areas chosen for study either comprise what is commonly referred to as “downtown” Seattle, or are integrally related to this “downtown” area.

What makes downtown Seattle unique, an area worth investigation? More than any other areas, those chosen for this study were most likely the scene of public (redevelopment) projects that helped transform the form and function of the downtown core, as well as areas that contained a large percentage of the city’s low-income housing stock (in particular, single-room-occupancy hotels, SROs). In this sense, downtown offers the opportunity to trace the role and impact of public policy; in particular the links between policy decisions, housing loss, and displacement of the poor resulting from urban redevelopment appear to be most relevant in this locale. This suggests a need to examine decision-making affecting urban development and displacement, in particular *public* policy decisions, to help understand why these particular events occurred.

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<sup>1</sup> The specific boundaries analyzed are nine contiguous census tracts bordered on the *west* by Elliot Bay and Alaskan Way; on the *north* by Denny Way east to Seattle Center, north on Broad/5<sup>th</sup> Street to Mercer Street, east on Mercer to Interstate 5; on the *east* by Interstate 5 south to the intersection of Olive Way and Minor Street, south on Minor to approximately Broadway and Columbia, south on Broadway to Yesler Way, east on Yesler to 12<sup>th</sup> Ave, south on 12<sup>th</sup> Ave to S. Dearborn; on the *south* by S. Dearborn west to 5<sup>th</sup> Street, north to 5<sup>th</sup> Street to Jackson Street, east on Jackson to Alaskan Way/ Elliot Bay.

Seattle historically had a visible homeless population and well-established downtown districts such as Pioneer Square, with homeless and other “hard-to-house” groups (Blake & Abbott, 1989). This included significant numbers of itinerant and seasonal workers, as well as the working poor (Demirel, 1999). In particular, the corridor along First Avenue from Pioneer Square to Belltown, from the waterfront to the central business district—commonly known as “Skid Road”—was long a residential haven for a disproportionate number of low-income single men (Miller, 1982). Downtown Seattle has also contained a high concentration of SRO hotels and other types of low-cost housing serving working poor and low-income groups. As noted earlier, SROs, shelters, and rooming houses—while often socially reviled—have long served a vital niche in the low-income urban housing market (Groth, 1994; Hoch & Slayton, 1989; Timmer, Eitzen & Talley, 1994). Downtown renovation and renewal in Seattle, which has often reflected official public policy, thus created direct competition—and conflict—with SRO residents and other low-income urban groups.

### *Key Research Questions*

This research describes and analyzes the dramatic loss of low-income housing and changes in the spatial distribution of poverty in downtown Seattle, and attempts to identify the role of public policy and elite agency in this process.

The following questions formed the core of my research:

- 1) How has the spatial distribution of urban poverty and the availability and distribution of low-cost housing in downtown Seattle changed over

time? Is poverty more or less concentrated? Have the loci of poverty areas changed?

- 2) In what ways are changing patterns of residence by social class linked to specific public policies, such as housing and urban redevelopment?
- 3) To what extent have public funds for urban renewal and downtown area projects adversely impacted poor people through displacement and the loss of low-cost housing?
- 4) Did public decision making serve to exclude certain populations from the benefits of urban growth while serving the interests of the power elite?
- 5) Assuming (4) is true, what were the processes through which the power elite exercised their power to the exclusion of other groups?

#### *Implications of the Study*

It is hoped that this dissertation can help fill a research gap on the impact of gentrification and contemporary urban development and renewal in Seattle, and the role of elites in these processes. Housing in the downtown context—in particular, the loss of single room occupancy (SRO) hotels and low-cost housing serving itinerant workers, the working poor, and new in-migrant groups—represents a unique case, unlike housing issues in the larger community. The loss of thousands of units of such housing between 1960 and 1990, and its replacement by higher priced housing, condominiums, parking lots and commercial development, highlights how downtown Seattle became contested terrain and transformed from an area that was formally home to many low-income households. Toward the end of this period, public and private officials began to implement a range of policies and legal initiatives designed to promote elite interests by securing ownership of downtown space. Of note, these efforts

intensified during the 1990s, as the control of “place,” as well as individuals deemed socially undesirable, became a key social policy. As described in Chapter Five, increased policing and attempts to restrict liquor sales in Pioneer Square by the late 1970s thus represent the beginning of this continuum. Such public and private efforts would eventually include the following: the formation by the Downtown Seattle Association of a special taxing district with its own police force, laws restricting panhandling and sitting on sidewalks, and a protracted battle over the placement of a downtown hygiene center for homeless individuals. These policies and actions by local elites represent critical parts of the overall context of downtown redevelopment and gentrification that occurred (and continues) in Seattle.

A few studies have sought to chronicle the loss of low-cost housing in Seattle, in particular, SRO housing in the downtown core. There is some evidence to suggest that the loss of housing was most severe in downtown, especially between 1960 and the early 1970s (Timmer, Eitzen & Talley, 1994; Hoch & Slayton, 1989; Skid Row Community Council, 1974). Different figures on the loss of this housing appear in several sources, almost all focusing on the loss of downtown SRO housing. The most commonly cited data suggests that approximately 15,000 SRO units were permanently lost in downtown Seattle between 1960 and 1980 (Hoch & Slayton, 1989).

While this information is useful, there appears to be no analysis regarding the *cumulative* loss of downtown housing—especially the range of low-cost housing units—during the entire period of this study. In my analysis of demographic changes that occurred in downtown Seattle, I specifically seek to calculate the loss of all housing units affordable to low-income residents, not just the elimination of SRO housing. As important, in the existing literature on Seattle there is little attempt to locate the *human agency* (public and private actions) behind these significant changes, nor the various counter-efforts by local residents, housing activists and community groups to resist or mitigate these changes. These efforts are especially important for their impact on subsequent local housing (and to some extent homeless) policies in Seattle.

The literature on the loss of low-cost housing is thus notable for the absence of an analysis of the role of public policy in facilitating uneven development and gentrification in downtown Seattle. This dissertation attempts to reveal the impact of urban renewal and redevelopment projects, and their key role in shaping downtown development to meet the needs of elite interests. In particular, I attempt to determine to what extent public policy was responsible for gentrification and the displacement of low-income downtown residents. This inquiry accordingly highlights the social and human costs of urban revitalization projects, and the impact of central city redevelopment on Seattle's poorest and most vulnerable populations.

An analysis of the Seattle experience can therefore provide a microcosm of larger, national trends affecting urban development and low-income inner-city residents (Hopper & Hamberg, 1986). It is an opportunity to examine in depth the processes of gentrification and uneven development and attempt to sort out what happened and why. These events also preceded the national crisis of homelessness that emerged in the 1980s-1990s. Locally, this problem became most severe in downtown Seattle, raising the issue of a potential link between gentrification, affordable housing loss and rising homelessness.

## **Methodology**

### *Case Study Methodology*

My research strategy is based on the use of case study methodology. This technique has been broadly defined as “an in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single social phenomenon. The study is conducted in great detail and often relies on the use of several data sources” (Orum, Feagin & Sjoberg, 1991, p. 2). This method has a rich tradition in sociology and the social sciences, where it has sought to study and analyze the history and context of a particular case while avoiding the generalization more common to quantitative research (Stoecker, 1991). My dissertation uses case study methods to provide an analysis of the policy and decision-making processes and the impacts of urban growth and redevelopment in Seattle from 1960 to 1990. Using the embedded case study design noted earlier (Yin, 1994), I analyze two specific redevelopment projects that were instrumental in the transformation of downtown Seattle.

Case study methods are well suited to my research goals, since they offer the opportunity to provide an in-depth analysis of the social structures and events that comprise daily life. Indeed, proponents of case study methods note that this research strategy can help fill gaps that exist in quantitative science; for example, the inability to “ensure accurate explanation” of a particular phenomenon (Stoecker, 1991, p. 93). In this sense, case studies are better able to provide analysis of causation than cross-sectional research by affording greater attention to the various processes (the historical and political context) and content of relationships under investigation:

‘Process’ is both historical and idiosyncratic, and statistical analysis is unable to capture either of those. In fact, it is the case study’s ability to explain the idiosyncrasies which make up the ‘unexplained variance’ which is the source of its strength (Stoecker, 1991, p. 94).

Specifically, in this study I conduct a single, *explanatory* case study (Yin, 1993). I seek to analyze multiple data sources that help illuminate cause and effect relationships. In other words, my dissertation attempts to explain specific causes producing specific effects in the redevelopment and gentrification of downtown Seattle. A case study, by utilizing a variety of sources grounded in the dimensions of time and history, can thus help provide a rich and holistic analysis of complex social issues (Orum, Feagin & Sjoberg, 1991). In addition, by providing a comprehensive description of these events, this project also provides a *descriptive* case study (Yin, 1993).

This in-depth illustration allows me to examine multiple sources of evidence in an effort to answer several key research questions. The use of this explanatory framework requires a critical engagement with my theoretical framework through “a rich and extensive data collection effort” (Yin, 1993, p. 20).<sup>2</sup> This methodology will therefore allow me to examine the actual history of events under study against my assumptions about what occurred. I am thus seeking not so much to “prove” or disprove my argument, but to bring these events to life through my research methods and sources. Both explanatory and descriptive case study methods requires the development and use of theory prior to the start of research, either to elaborate hypotheses of cause-effect relationships (explanatory), or to identify the scope and depth of the case under investigation (descriptive). In this respect, Yin (1993) notes, case study research is similar to research methods used in experimental design.

#### *Data Sources*

Primary and secondary data sources are used in this study to assess the relationship between urban redevelopment and gentrification, the loss of low-cost rental units, and the displacement of low-income residents from downtown Seattle neighborhoods. In particular this data helps provide the *context* for

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<sup>2</sup> While some scholars have argued against “testing” (causal) hypothesis in case study research, Stoecker (1991) notes that others have responded to this critique by suggesting a test of multiple interpretations of a particular theory and comparing it to other alternative theories, thus increasing degrees of freedom; or strengthening a single case study by comparison to other cases (which can be seen as a sampling population).

analyzing these changes. Overall, this project attempts to investigate key political processes and outcomes that are expected to address my central research questions. These include:

- Public policy affecting urban development and downtown redevelopment activity;
- The loss of (affordable) housing and displacement of low-income downtown residents;
- The role of key actors involved in downtown development and local funding mechanisms (Schwartz, 1995).

These processes are explored in relation to the embedded case studies described above that serve as critical markers in the redevelopment of the central city. Groups affected by and/or influencing these processes included in this study are city officials, local elites (real estate and banking officials, commercial developers), low-income downtown residents (the working poor, and itinerant workers), and local housing and community advocates. Through the use of public documents, archival materials, and key informant interviews, I identify and highlight key events and the related decision making that was instrumental in the redevelopment and transformation of downtown Seattle. While Chapter Four draws on Census data to examine demographic changes in downtown, I utilize numerous other sources of data in my analysis of the embedded case studies (Chapters Five and Six). These include:

- City planning documents, internal reports and memos, personal correspondence and public records concerned with land use, redevelopment and housing policy in downtown Seattle;
- Local newspapers, in particular the Seattle Times and Seattle Post-Intelligencer, as well as the Seattle Weekly, the Seattle Sun, and the Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce;
- Interviews with key informants: city housing and planning officials, housing, homeless and community advocates, and others;
- Materials from local advocacy and community groups;
- Archival materials from the University of Washington.

A significant aspect of this research involved the use of interviews with key informants. These were conducted with decision-makers and others directly involved in city politics and urban redevelopment between 1960-1990.

Informants included the following:

- A current and long-time former member of the Seattle City Council;
- Several active and onetime community activists from organizations concerned about affordable housing and downtown development issues;
- A 20-year staff member of the city's Department of Community Development;
- A long-time member of the Downtown Seattle Association who served on the Board of Directors of the convention center.

The primary interview technique used was to conduct one-to-one semi-structured, in-person topical interviews held at the natural settings of informants (or a mutually agreed upon neutral setting). Interviews included open-ended questions to facilitate discussion about individual's perceptions of

the impacts of development in downtown Seattle, especially on low-income groups, and the process of decision making. Interviews lasted from one hour, to a series of meetings with individual informants totaling up to six hours in length. During the initial, exploratory phase of the project, interview questions included the following<sup>3</sup>:

- 1) Are there key events or projects in the development of downtown Seattle that should be examined for their impact on low-cost housing, and/or the transformation of Seattle?
- 2) What impact (both good and bad) did these projects have?
- 3) How did they affect low-income downtown residents?
- 4) How did key decisions get made regarding urban development?
- 5) What are the strengths and weaknesses of this method of decision-making?
- 6) How did this decision making process change over time?
- 7) Who were the key decision-makers for downtown development issues?

#### *Census Data*

While my use of case study methods and qualitative analysis emphasizes downtown gentrification and displacement, I also examine the spatial distribution of poverty throughout Seattle and those metropolitan housing trends affecting the context of politics and policy. I analyzed census data to investigate the spatial distribution of poverty, and change in the housing market over time in the context of the larger Seattle area, but in particular in the downtown core. The dissertation involved an analysis of select

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<sup>3</sup> See Interview Protocol and Human Subjects Exemption (*Appendix A*) for more information.

redevelopment activities to help understand the ecological context of the metropolitan area: changes in population density, the redistribution of demographic groups, changes in the spatial distribution of groups by social class, the availability of affordable housing, and processes of gentrification.

Attempts to observe and measure this phenomenon pose investigative challenges. While some researchers have favored the use of field surveys or other neighborhood focused methods, my research was based on the belief that the use of census data provides the most comprehensive and efficient source of demographic and descriptive information about central city neighborhood change. This data is also helpful for investigation of specific changes that occur over time, in recognition that neighborhood change is cumulative (Hammel & Wyly, 1996). However, census data also poses significant problems, in particular the need to identify *formal* boundaries for study. That is, the geographic areas containing the phenomenon of gentrification, housing loss or uneven development usually do not correspond exactly to census borders. Because census tract boundaries sometimes change, as was the case with several of the downtown tracts used in this study, the ability to make “definitive” comparisons across all areas is somewhat limited (Miller, 1982).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the census tract borders in two of the nine areas under study were not the same in 1970 as they were in the 1960 Census. Thus comparisons between these two census tracts should be seen as less than definitive.

I attempt to compensate for this by being more inclusive—by including those areas adjacent to the specific vicinity in downtown Seattle where I theorize key change occurred. One potential problem with this broader spatial inquiry is that some census tracts used in this research may contain areas largely unaffected by redevelopment, gentrification and displacement, they may have already been home to higher income populations, or they may have had a relatively small residential population. This is especially true in the northern areas of several census tracts included in this project. Still, the analysis of neighborhoods adjacent to a concentrated downtown core can help uncover the implication of uneven development on a broader domain; it can highlight the concentration effects of uneven development.

Hammel and Wyly (1996) note that disagreement also exists about which types of census data provide the most reliable indication of gentrification. Following their model and that of other scholars (Wilson, 1996, 1992; Friedenfelds, 1992), I used a range of measures to identify economic and social change over time: population, household income, educational attainment, white-collar professionals, median rents, and the availability of low-cost housing (as noted, housing that is affordable to low-income groups). I have included several baseline and percentage change variables (from 1960 to 1990) that describe the socioeconomic condition of census tracts in downtown Seattle. The choice of census variables is thus based in part on the understanding that gentrification largely represents a class phenomenon (Savage & Warde, 1993; Hammel &

Wyly, 1996). Finally, it should also be noted that an additional limitation of this data is that the information from the census is often dated (or out of date) in terms of making a contemporary analysis.

Aside from an analysis of demographic changes, this project attempts to highlight the ways public policies and intervention by elites in Seattle has directed patterns of urban growth and decline. A larger aim of this study, then, is to place these events into social and historical context, to illustrate the political processes that created uneven development, gentrification, and the loss of low-cost housing and displacement of the poor in downtown Seattle. As noted, this analysis of urban development focuses on how these processes affected the downtown housing market, especially for low-income households. To summarize, the theoretical framework of this dissertation suggests that the process of urban change and dislocations in downtown Seattle between 1960-1990 resulted largely from the deliberate actions of public and private elites. In this way, the interests of elites were served over the interests of a diverse city population.

#### *Data Analysis & Validity*

The use of case study methodology poses several potential problems, such as the relative lack of specific techniques and strategies for analyzing data. Yin (1994) notes that unlike quantitative methodology, case study analysis “is one of the least developed” aspects of this style of inquiry, with few generalizable

formulas available to researchers (p. 102). However, potential problems can largely be avoided, he adds, through the use of a specific, defined approach for the analysis of data.

This project is based on the premise that an analytic strategy is possible within a case study that allows for an evenhanded and rigorous treatment of data, and inclusion of cases for study that can support or reject my theoretical framework. Some suggest that, in regard to validity, case study methods in fact provide “a clear advantage over other methods of investigation” as researchers can accumulate overlapping and complimentary data from multiple sources about the same issue. These various forms of information thus help provide triangulation of sources, and can validate observations and provide evidence to support (or reject) specific theoretical propositions (Orum, Feagin & Sjoberg, 1991, p. 19).

Tactics for dealing with tests of validity are utilized throughout this study, thus helping to ensure that “research design” is ongoing. For example, my examination of embedded case studies using a similar logic and method of inquiry helps provide external validity. During the research design phase, this involved establishing the domain to which my study’s findings can be generalized (Yin, 1994). Unlike survey research where a sample is generalized to a larger group or universe (statistical generalization, or inference), case studies rely on *analytical generalization* (or logical inference). Hammersley

(1992) notes that case study methods have been criticized for making generalizations within cases studied to all “cases relevant to a theory” (p. 176). To avoid this problem, an effort is made to generalize specific results to a *broader theory*, rather than generalizing to other case studies (so-called replication logic) (Yin, 1994).

Although this research operates from a specific theoretical point of view, I attempt to examine alternative interpretations for the key events analyzed in this dissertation to help protect against threats to internal validity. In general, this underscores the importance of being inclusive of multiple data sources and even-handed in my overall interpretation. As Yin (1994) notes, this tactic is generally used for explanatory (causal) case studies. Explanation building therefore becomes a key method of dealing with this “logical test”—the data analysis phase of the research project. Generally, this involves establishing a causal relationship in which certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions (establishing that they are not spurious relationships) rather than a third (external) factor. This tactic is implicit to the ongoing issue of making inferences based on data (interviews, archives, etc.). Thus there is an ongoing need to consider all possibilities & explanations for the events being analyzed.

Specifically, my analysis is based on the theoretical framework noted earlier that informs the objectives, design and key research questions of this project. In other words, my assumption regarding the impetus behind development

patterns and gentrification in downtown Seattle informs my key research questions and data collection strategy, and therefore provides “priorities to the relevant analytic strategies” (Yin, 1994, p. 104). My primary proposition—that public policies and elite agency related to urban redevelopment projects facilitated the loss of low-cost housing and the displacement of low-income downtown residents—is traced in the embedded case studies of redevelopment in downtown Seattle. The two embedded case studies seek to demonstrate the extent to which the evidence used provides a compelling story that successfully answers my primary research questions. The use of my theoretical lens cannot “prove” that my explanation for events is correct; however, it can help build a case that supports my interpretation of events. As Hammersley (1992) observes, because a particular case study may offer competing (plausible) explanations, the researcher needs “evidence to show that it is the *most* plausible of those available and this it is sufficiently plausible to be accepted” given all the evidence examined (p. 177).

Yin (1994) describes four “dominant” methods of data analysis applicable to various case study designs, all of which provide the framework for an effective case study. Of these methods, *explanation building* is best suited to my research design and primary hypothesis. This strategy is primarily used for explanatory case studies, and literally seeks to analyze data “by building an explanation about the case” (p. 110) based on a specific theoretical approach. Explanation, in this case, refers to the attempt to explain particular events by

specifying causal links about this phenomenon; it is thus especially well suited to address “how” and “why” types of questions.

Explanation building usually occurs in narrative form in case study research (Yin, 1994). While this method of analysis has been perceived by some as “imprecise,” such an analytic strategy can offer a plausible explanation for phenomenon if based on “theoretically significant propositions” (pp. 110-111). As noted, my analysis of case study evidence is based on the overall theoretical perspective and key research questions guiding this dissertation. Importantly, the process of explanation building is iterative (Yin, 1994), that is, data is examined and the theoretical proposition is revised based on the comparison of findings against this proposition. An explanation for events under investigation may therefore be revised (often several times) during the research process through this gradual process.

The process of analyzing qualitative data is also seen as an open-ended, emergent method (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) that is created over time. While many strategies exist for developing analysis based on qualitative data, these are seen as guidelines, rather than routinized processes. This suggests that researchers be flexible and adept those practices that work best for particular projects (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Importantly, Strauss and Corbin (1998) note that these various “techniques and procedures

are tools only. They are there to assist with analysis *but* never should drive the analysis in and of themselves” (p. 58).

Material gathered from interviews with key informants was analyzed for thematic content related to my hypothesis and theoretical framework. This process of analysis and interpretation was based on those themes I defined and identified from interview data. Because much of the study (especially in Chapter Five) is presented in narrative description, the bulk of my analysis and assertions are based on direct interpretation rather than coded data (Stake, 1995). This analytic strategy was chosen in an effort to highlight the essential character of the events under study. Case study and qualitative research places a heavy emphasis on such methods of interpretation. However, Stake (1995) notes the inherent danger facing those researchers who use their privilege “to assert what they find meaningful as a result of their inquires” on the basis of speculation or a path of logic unclear to outside observers (p. 12). Thus, while interpretation is often based on personal knowledge and experience, rigorous case study research constantly seeks to understand multiple points of view:

“Ultimately, the interpretations of the researcher are likely to be emphasized more than the interpretations of those people studied, but the qualitative case researcher tries to preserve the multiple realities, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening” (p. 12).

In order to ensure “vigorous interpretation” then, I have sought to allow for multiple meanings or versions of events and data—to constantly examine differing meanings of the same events, and to refine or modify the study in progress to substantiate competing viewpoints. Interviews with key informants representing a range of perspectives also symbolize my attempt at inclusion of different points of view within this study.

Archival data (in this case primarily newspapers and government reports) was also analyzed in an effort to make inferences from this text. This process of “content analysis” involved a form of theme generation of the information to generate answers to the key research questions noted above. In other words, information gathered from these sources was used to examine my theoretical perspective. This, in turn, further aided in the process of developing analysis. Every effort was made to consider potential sources of bias that may have occurred in creating these types of data (Bernard, 1995).

In sum, the methodology for this project is characterized by the collection of in-depth and descriptive information about the impact of downtown redevelopment. I attempted to gather information from various perspectives, including interview participants and multiple other data sources. In all the strategies of analysis used, I sought to test and formulate propositions from the data examined—an emergent, inductive method. As Stake (1995) concludes, “good case study is patient, reflective, willing to see another view...” (p. 12).

Thus, through a process of immersion in the data, I have sought to constantly test emerging analytic themes in this study against my own theoretical framework.

## **Chapter Four: Demographic Change in Downtown Seattle: 1960-1990**

### **Introduction**

Between 1960 and 1990, central city redevelopment initiatives did produce positive benefits in Seattle. However, the negative effects associated with gentrification described earlier also impacted the downtown area most severely. An analysis of demographic data for nine census tracts comprising the downtown core finds that the following were among the key changes that occurred over the course of 30 years:

- The downtown population declined by approximately one-third;
- A significant change occurred in the human capital attributes of local residents, marked by a large increase in educational attainment and rising numbers of white collar professionals;
- Median household income rose substantially in three census tracts, while there was a corresponding large drop in unemployment throughout downtown;
- The area suffered a massive loss of rental housing units (a decline of more than 50 percent), and an even bigger loss in the net number of 1-2 room rental units, those most likely to house low-income residents;
- Median rents increased in all but one area throughout this period, and rose sharply from 1980-1990;
- The total number of rental housing units affordable to low-income households declined by more than 4,000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1962, 1992).

These demographic changes highlight a key contradiction of gentrification: rising socioeconomic status among local residents and higher rates of

homeownership versus the displacement of low-income populations and the widespread loss of low-cost housing. The changes in income during this period are adjusted for inflation, and thus in several downtown areas are indicative of gentrification and displacement of lower-income residents. The drop in unemployment is also notable since 1960 was a period of relative high employment, while 1990 was the start of an economic recession. One might not expect such a dramatic shift in employment levels without a corresponding upward change in the class composition of local residents. Finally, the rise in median rent is especially significant for poor households. Seven of the nine downtown Census tracts in this study experienced an increase in rent (adjusted for inflation) of at least 16 percent, and as high as 57 percent, thereby dramatically increasing the rent burden faced by poor and working class households.

As described below in more detail, on a variety of key indicators demographic changes in downtown Seattle highlight the fundamental transformation of the residential population. These shifts in the composition of the central city provide strong evidence that gentrification was a common phenomenon throughout most of the downtown area during this period, and had the most adverse impact on poor and low-income residents.

#### *Population*

Between 1960 and 1990, downtown Seattle (see *Figure 1*) experienced an overall population loss of approximately one-third, declining from nearly 29,000

residents to less than 20,000 people (*see Table 1*). Of the nine downtown census tracts studied, only one (Census Tract 80) gained population during this period. The biggest losses in population occurred in Census Tracts 73, 81, 82, and 92—all four areas lost more than half of their population over the 30-year span. These changes in the downtown population also reflect population change in the city as a whole. Like other large cities across the country, Seattle suffered a loss of some 10 percent of its residents between 1960-1980, dropping from 557,000 people to less than 500,000. However, the city's population rose nearly 5 percent in the 1980s, growing to more than 516,000 people by 1990.

#### *Education*

As might be expected based on the theoretical literature about gentrification, educational attainment (measured in the number of years of school completed) rose significantly from 1960 to 1990. While one would anticipate a large increase in the number of high school and college graduates due to a cohort effect over time—a general reflection of rising educational attainment nationwide—the changes in some downtown census tracts were particularly striking.

For example, in 1960 only one downtown area (Census Tract 83) had a high school graduation rate of more than 25 percent of the population (*see Table 2*). This compares to a high school graduation rate of approximately 56 percent for the entire city of Seattle. By 1990, residents in only two downtown areas (Census Tracts 91 and 92) had a high school graduation rate below 66 percent.

Not surprisingly, both of these census tracts represent two of the city's oldest and poorest neighborhoods, the International District and Pioneer Square respectively.<sup>1</sup> Three of the nine neighborhoods had high school graduation rates in 1990 approximating the population of Seattle as a whole (86 percent). College graduation rates (those graduating with a four-year college degree) reflected similar patterns (*see Table 3*). In 1960, there were only two downtown census tracts (82 and 83) where more than 10 percent of their population had earned a college degree. By 1990, only three areas (Census Tracts 85, 91, and 92) had a college graduation rate of less than 25 percent of the population. The two census areas with the highest incidence of college graduation in 1990 (Tracts 80 and 83) were slightly below the citywide rate of 38 percent. Of significance, Census Tracts 92 and 81, which comprise both Pioneer Square and the larger boundaries of "Skid Road," experienced some of the most dramatic changes in education. The percentage of college graduates increased approximately two-and-one-half times in Pioneer Square, and more than 600 percent in the northern portion of "Skid Road" (Census Tract 81).

Not only were these changes a result of the influx of better-educated residents to downtown Seattle, but they also reflect the gradual depopulation of traditional Pioneer Square and "Skid Road" inhabitants: less educated, low-skilled, poor and transitory single men. As discussed below, the displacement

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<sup>1</sup> Census Tracts 91 and 92 (the largely Chinese and southeast Asian-populated International District and Pioneer Square) had the lowest level of educational attainment at all levels at all times.

of low-income groups in downtown was due in large part to the loss of low-income housing units. Finally, in a pattern that emerges for other key indicators, changes in educational attainment in many downtown areas were most significant during the 1980s.

#### *Occupation, Income, Employment*

While changes in the larger labor market also fueled a transformation of the local work force, the dramatic pace of such change helps dramatize the fundamental shift in the residential composition of the central city. The largest changes in the percentage of white collar workers residing in downtown Seattle also occurred in the Pioneer Square and the "Skid Road" corridor (Census Tracts 92 and 81), as well as in census tract 80 (directly adjacent to the north of tract 81) (*see Table 4*). Census Tract 80 registered an increase of more than 229 percent in those working at white-collar jobs from 1960 to 1990, while the percentage of white-collar workers rose nearly 300 percent in Tract 81. By the end of this period, these were the only downtown areas with a white-collar labor force roughly proportional to the Seattle city average. Approximately 41 percent of the city's workforce were employed in white-collar professions in 1990.

Changes in median income in downtown neighborhoods during this period were less indicative of a widespread process of gentrification (*see Table 5*). For example, only five of the nine downtown census areas had an increase in median household income. Yet in some neighborhoods the upward change in income was especially striking: three census tracts (80, 82, and 83) had an

increase in median income (adjusted for inflation) between 30 and 80 percent. Residents in four other census tracts experienced a decrease in median income of between one and 20 percent from 1960 to 1990. The areas that did achieve a rise in median household income appear to offer further support that gentrification occurred in downtown Seattle, though on a somewhat uneven basis. One possible explanation for the fact that income did not increase (and actually fell) in the other downtown census areas is that for more than half of this 30-year period real wages (adjusted for inflation) dropped for most low- and middle-income workers across the country (Collins, Leondar-Wright & Sklar, 1999).<sup>2</sup>

Jobless rates between 1960-1990 further illuminate the transformation of the central city population. In 1960, only one downtown census area had an unemployment rate less than 10 percent; the jobless rate in Tract 83 was nearly identical to the citywide rate of 6.5 percent. Of the other eight census areas, seven had an unemployment level between two and five times higher than the citywide rate. During the 30-year period of this study, seven of the nine downtown census tracts experienced a significant drop in unemployment ranging from 17-81 percent (*see Table 6*). Only one area (Census Tract 82) had an increase in unemployment between 1960 and 1990 (up 4.6 percent). Finally, only one downtown area (Pioneer Square) had a jobless rate of 20

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<sup>2</sup> The real average hourly weekly earnings of production and non-supervisory workers (who account for more than 80 percent of all wage and salary employees) peaked in 1973 at \$13.61 an hour (in 1998 dollars). That figure began falling in subsequent years, and had dropped to \$12.70 an hour by 1989 (Collins, Leondar-Wright & Sklar, 1999).

percent or higher in 1990, compared to four such census tracts in 1960. In general, the unemployment rate should have been less sensitive to period fluctuations. Thus the changes in employment that did occur in downtown Seattle, in particular the unemployment rate, are significant: 1960 was a period of strong economic growth, with many areas of the country experiencing almost full employment. In contrast, 1990 was a period of economic recession and high unemployment nationwide. The experience in downtown Seattle further highlights the shift in the human capital attributes of local residents, who increasingly occupied white-collar positions that were in rising demand.

### *Housing*

Changes in the housing market provide some of the strongest evidence that gentrification was a relatively widespread phenomenon in downtown Seattle. All but two of the nine downtown census tracts (73 and 83) had an increase in the percentage of homeowners between 1960 and 1990 (*see Table 7*). Because the level of homeownership in downtown was relatively slight in 1960, the rate of increase is abnormally high. Nonetheless, by 1990 two areas (including the northern "Skid Road" district, Census Tract 81) had homeownership rates of approximately 16 percent, up from less than 1 percent in 1960. Simultaneously, the percentage of renter units increased in four census tracts (73, 81, 85, and 91), and decreased in the other five areas (tracts 72, 80, 82, 83, and 92).

Of more importance, the biggest change in the downtown housing market occurred in the number of rental units, including a large decrease in the number of *vacant* rental housing. For example, while the percentage of vacant housing units did rise in census tracts 72 and 92, the other seven downtown areas had a large drop in the amount of vacant units. Between 1960 and 1990 the number of vacant rental housing fell in these areas between 21 and 75 percent. Most of these vacant housing units were not put back into the rental housing market during this period. Instead, they were permanently lost due to demolition or conversion to higher cost housing or commercial uses. In addition, throughout the downtown area, there was a total net loss of more than half (50.9 percent) of both occupied and vacant rental housing units from 1960 to 1990 (*see Table 8*). This included the following:

- a net loss of nearly 12,000 occupied and vacant rental units;
- a net loss of 9,300 1-room rental units, more than 70 percent of the total that existed in 1960;
- a total net loss of more than 11,000 1 or 2-room rental units, representing a decrease of 60 percent of this housing stock.

As described earlier, the elimination of this private housing stock in downtown Seattle must be seen as a loss of those housing units most likely to serve single, elderly, poor, and low-income renters. Of note, only one census tract (number 72) had a net gain of 1-room rental units, and this was only an increase of 63 housing units over 30 years (*see Table 9*). In the other eight census areas, the loss of 1-room rental units over 30 years ranged from 45-89 percent of the

existing total in 1960. All nine census tracts had a loss of 1 or 2 room rental units of between 23 and 85 percent. Finally, the total number of rental units lost downtown corresponds almost directly with total number of 1 or 2-room rental units lost during this 30-year period.

Of further importance, a dramatically reduced supply of downtown rental housing was accompanied by a significant increase in the cost of rental housing. Thus from 1960 to 1990 all nine downtown census tracts experienced an increase in median rent (in inflation-adjusted dollars) of between 16 and 57 percent (*see Table 10*). Six of these areas had an increase in median rent of at least 25 percent, while the median cost of rental housing rose in three downtown census tracts by more than 50 percent. Upward changes in median rent are especially notable: an increase of even 16 percent is a significant rise in the cost of housing for poor and low-income households, representing a much higher percentage of their income than for other families and individuals. Yet median rents in all downtown Seattle neighborhoods rose by this amount or more during this 30-year period.

As a result of these events, the percentage of private rental units affordable to low-income households fell dramatically (*see Table 11*). In 1960, at least 20 percent of the available rental housing stock was affordable to poor renters in seven of the nine downtown census tracts. However, by 1990 in only one census area was at least 20 percent of the rental housing affordable for low-

income renters.<sup>3</sup> Based on my calculations of affordability, there was a net loss of more than 4,000 downtown private *affordable* rental housing units over 30 years—more than 75 percent of downtown housing affordable to low-income renters. Even when a more generous estimate was used in some census tracts—where data was more inclusive and higher rent income was included—most census tracts lost a sizable number of housing units affordable to poor renters.<sup>4</sup> The loss of housing that can be identified as affordable means that those low-income households remaining in downtown had to compete for a shrinking pool of low-cost private housing. As a result, many low-income and poor individuals were likely forced to spend in excess of 30 percent of their income for shelter. In fact, by 1990 the poorest renters in eight of nine downtown census tracts spent more than 30 percent of their household income for rent.<sup>5</sup> In five of these downtown areas these low-income renters were forced to spend in excess of 40 percent of their income for rent.

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<sup>3</sup> Percentages are based on occupied rental units only. They do not include vacant rental housing. These calculations are based on several sources. Low-income households are estimated as those earning approximately 50 percent of the median income for each census tract (Low Income Housing Information Service). I use the federal government's definition of housing affordability: housing that costs no more than 30 percent of household monthly income (Department of Housing and Urban Development). The calculations for the percentage of affordable units available to low-income renters may be an overestimate. Rent amounts in census data are grouped in increments (by \$20 in 1960, and by \$100 increments in 1990). Finally, these calculations do not include the small amount of renters who paid "no cash rent" (U.S. Census, 1960, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> More than 3,700 downtown housing units affordable to low-income households were lost between 1960-1990 using this more inclusive calculation.

<sup>5</sup> The 1990 Census identifies the poorest renters as those households earning less than \$10,000, approximately 34 percent or less of Seattle's median household income (U.S. Census, 1990).

### **The Metropolitan Context**

Census data was also analyzed to track changes in the distribution of the low-income population throughout the larger Seattle metropolitan area between 1960 and 1990. Several key variables (income, unemployment, and median rents) were examined for both 1960 and 1990 for each of the 121 Seattle census tracts in an effort to determine if and how the concentration of low-income populations changed.

#### *Low Income*

Because the 1960 Census does not contain information about the rate of poverty at the census tract level, I used a formula based on household median income as a proxy. Using the city median income (adjusted for inflation) of \$23,451, a total of 25 census tracts (out of 121) in Seattle were classified as “low-income” in 1960 (*see Figure 2*). This included:

- fifteen “low-income” census areas, those where the median household income was 80 percent or less of the city median income (\$23,482);<sup>6</sup>
- eight “very low-income” census areas, those where the median household income was 50 percent or less of the city median income (\$14,676);
- two “extremely low-income” census areas, those where the median household income was 30 percent or less of the city median income (\$8,806);

Among these low-income areas, four census tracts were in the University District where a high number of students with low incomes would be expected

to concentrate. Four others were in the largely African-American Central District (one of these areas included parts of Capitol Hill), and eight low-income census tracts were located downtown. Of the eight “very low-income” areas, four were downtown, and one was in the Central District. The two “extremely low-income” areas, the poorest in the city, were located downtown—Pioneer Square and the International District.

Using the same definitions, by 1990, there were 29 low-income census tracts in the city (*see Figure 3*). This included 20 “low-income” areas, six “very low-income” areas, and three “extremely low-income” census areas. There were also seven new “low-income” census tracts compared to 1960 (those not classified as low-income in 1960). Of note, three of these new low-income areas were located in the South part of the city: the east portion of Rainier Valley (Tract 103), the Georgetown neighborhood (Tract 109), and the South Park area (Tract 112). The city’s three poorest neighborhoods (“extremely low-income” census tracts where median household income was 30 percent or less of the city median household income) remained downtown, including Pioneer Square and the International District. Two census tracts from 1960 were no longer classified as “low-income.”

#### *High Income*

Eight census tracts were identified as “high income” in 1960 (*see Figure 4*), those where the median household income was 150 percent or more of the

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<sup>6</sup> Figures are adjusted for inflation to 1990.

Seattle median income (at least \$35,176 adjusted for inflation to 1990). These included three adjacent census tracts (39, 40, 41) in the north part of the city—the neighborhoods of Laurelhurst and Viewridge, and the east portions of Wedgewood and Ravenna. Three other high-income census areas were located in the far northern boundaries of the city. Only one area of Seattle south of downtown was classified as a high-income neighborhood, the waterfront neighborhood near Seola Beach (Census Tract 121).

In 1990, there were 11 “high-income” census areas in Seattle (*see Figure 5*). Of note, three new contiguous “high-income” census tracts emerged (62, 63, 64), representing the Montlake neighborhood, Madison Park, and the northern portions of Madrona and Capitol Hill. Two of these areas were among seven census tracts in the city with a median household income above \$50,000. Census tract 78 (directly south of Tract 63), representing the remaining portion of the east Seattle neighborhood of Madrona, was also deemed “high-income.” These last four areas are notable as they represent a shift in the concentration of wealth (as measured by income) in the city by the end of this 30-year period.

### *Unemployment*

Unemployment levels were also examined to help determine changes in those geographic areas with the highest concentration of poor and low-income households. Fifteen “high unemployment” census tracts existed in the city in 1960 (*see Figure 6*), those where the official jobless rate was one-and-one-half

times the citywide rate or higher (at least 9.4 percent in 1960).<sup>7</sup> This included 13 “very-high unemployment” areas, census tracts with double digit unemployment rates. The greatest concentration of high unemployment was in the Central District (three census tracts) and in most downtown neighborhoods (eight census tracts). This included the only four areas of Seattle with an unemployment rate above 20 percent. Only one area north of downtown (Tract 66) experienced high unemployment, the adjacent neighborhood of Eastlake.

Despite a relatively low citywide unemployment rate of 4.9 percent in 1990, all data for Seattle should be put in the context of the economic recession affecting the United States. Seattle had 22 “high unemployment” census tracts in 1990, including 13 “very-high unemployment” areas (*see Figure 7*). Once again, these areas were largely concentrated in downtown Seattle (including Pioneer Square, the only census tract with an unemployment rate above 20 percent, and the International District), First Hill and the Central District. In addition, there were five “new” high unemployment areas in 1990 clustered relatively close together in south Seattle, including Rainier Valley, Holly Park and the Georgetown neighborhood.

### *Housing*

In a final effort to calculate shifts in the spatial distribution of low-income groups between 1960 and 1990, I made estimations for high and low-income areas based on median gross rents. Thus “low-income” areas were defined as

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<sup>7</sup> The official unemployment rate in the city of Seattle was 6.3 percent in 1960.

those census tracts in Seattle where the median rent was 75 percent or less of the city median rent. “Very low-income” areas were those where the median rent was 66 percent or less of the city median rent. Conversely, “high” income areas were designated as those census tracts where median rent was 135 percent or higher of the median rent for Seattle.

Nine “low-income” areas (based on median monthly rents) existed in Seattle in 1960 (*see Figure 8*). Of these, six were located in the downtown core, including Pioneer Square and the International District, one was the census tract directly south of Pioneer Square, one was in the Central District, and one was in south Seattle. Seven of these nine low-income census tracts were “very low-income” areas (with median monthly rents of \$221 or less adjusted for inflation to 1990); all but one were located downtown. Based on my rent criteria, just five “high income” housing areas existed in 1960, including the neighborhoods of Ravenna, Viewridge, and Magnolia (*see Figure 9*).

In 1990, there were 11 census areas that met the definition of “low-income,” including eight designated as “very low-income” (*see Figure 10*).<sup>8</sup> In fact, in five of these census tracts median rents were less than half of the citywide level (\$232 or less per month). The majority of these (six of the 11 census tracts) were still located downtown including Pioneer Square and the International District, with two other low-income tracts located in the Central District and south Seattle each. Fourteen “high-income” housing areas were identified in

1990 (see *Figure 11*). These included the adjacent high-income areas noted earlier—Montlake, Madison Park, Madrona, and northern portions of Capitol Hill. There were also two adjacent tracts in Wedgewood, and three areas in the far northern section of Seattle. The area with highest median rent was in the west portion of Magnolia (Census Tract 56), where the median rent of \$940 was more than twice the citywide level.

Overall, despite the shifting composition of the downtown population between 1960-1990, poverty and unemployment remained a serious problem in many downtown neighborhoods by the end of this 30-year period. These areas remained those places in the city with the highest concentration of poverty and low-income groups. However, during this period two other areas of the city (the Central District, and south Seattle neighborhoods like Rainier Valley and Holly Park) witnessed a notable increase in the geographic clustering of poverty.

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<sup>8</sup> Seattle's median rent was \$463 in 1990.

**Table 1: Total Persons**

<b>Census Tract</b>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>% Change</u> (1960-1990)
72	2,324	1,710	-26.4%
73	2,507	758	-68.8%
80	2,267	3,039	-34.1%
81	3,737	1,844	-50.7%
82	3,718	1,668	-55.1%
83	3,949	3,255	-17.6%
85	4,655	3,950	-15.1%
91	3,416	1,598	-53.2%
92	2,286	1,675	-26.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28,859</b>	<b>19,497</b>	<b>-32.4%</b>

Source: U.S. Census, 1960, 1990

**Table 2: High School Graduates <sup>9</sup>**

	<u>1960</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>% Change</u> (1960-1990)
<b>Census Tract</b>			
72	25.5%	74.5%	192%
73	22.5%	80.7%	259%
80	18.3%	85.5%	367%
81	16.1%	68.8%	327%
82	22.7%	85.5%	277%
83	29.7%	87.2%	194%
85	20.0%	75.8%	279%
91	11.9%	53.2%	347%
92	12.6%	57.5%	356%

Source: U.S. Census, 1960, 1990

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<sup>9</sup> Percentage of population 25 years & older with a high school degree or higher. For 1960 this refers to those with four years of high school.

**Table 3: College Graduates**<sup>10</sup>

<b>Census Tract</b>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>% Change</u> (1960-1990)
72	5.8%	25.4%	338%
73	2.7%	23.4%	767%
80	1.8%	35.0%	1844%
81	3.8%	28.3%	645%
82	11.0%	28.4%	157%
83	13.6%	34.1%	151%
85	9.4%	13.7%	46%
91	2.7%	9.3%	244%
92	2.8%	10.7%	282%

Source: U.S. Census, 1960, 1990

<sup>10</sup> Percentage of population 25 years & older with a bachelors degree. For 1960, this refers to those with a four-year college degree or higher.

**Table 4: White Collar Employment**<sup>11</sup>

<b>Census Tract</b>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>% Change</u> (1960-1990)
72	21.0%	30.9%	32.9	57.0%
73	11.6%	8.7%	16.8%	44.8%
80	12.5%	19.3%	41.1%	229.0%
81	10.5%	31.1%	41.4%	294.0%
82	19.7%	29.7%	23.0%	16.8%
83	31.8%	30.2%	32.8%	3.1%
85	27.5%	25.8%	27.8%	1.1%
91	13.0%	10.8%	15.1%	16.1%
92	13.3%	21.8%	21.6%	62.4%

Source: U.S. Census, 1960, 1990

<sup>11</sup> Percentage of employed persons 16 years or older working in white-collar occupations: executive, administrative, and managerial; professional specialty; and, technicians.

**Table 5: Median Household Income**<sup>12</sup>

<b>Census Tract</b>	<u>1960</u> <sup>13</sup>	<u>1970</u> <sup>14</sup>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>% Change</u> (1960-1990)
72	\$16,373	\$15,455	\$13,026	\$15,498	-5%
73	\$12,699	\$10,789	\$16,558	\$10,133	-20%
80	\$8,425	\$8,909	\$9,536	\$15,211	80%
81	\$8,513	\$10,003	\$9,322	\$8,790	3%
82	\$11,626	\$13,440	\$13,202	\$15,020	29%
83	\$16,501	\$16,085	\$16,942	\$21,410	30%
85	\$8,451	\$9,762	\$8,216	\$8,902	5%
91	\$6,116	\$6,310	\$6,487	\$5,963	-2%
92	\$6,672	\$10,510	\$6,657	\$6,599	-1%

Source: U.S. Census, 1960, 1990

<sup>12</sup> All dollar figures adjusted to 1990 values using the standard consumer CPI.

<sup>13</sup> For 1960 income figures are for families & unrelated individuals (see Wyly & Hammel, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> For 1970 income figures are for families & unrelated individuals (see Wyly & Hammel, 1998).

**Table 6: Unemployment Rate**<sup>15</sup>

<b>Census Tract</b>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>% Change</u> (1960-1990)
72	12.4%	7.0%	-44.0%
73	12.9%	2.4%	-81.4%
80	23.5%	4.6%	-80.4%
81	31.5%	14.6%	-53.7%
82	10.8%	11.3%	4.6%
83	6.8%	4.7%	-30.9%
85	13.1%	13.1%	0%
91	25.9%	11.2%	-56.6%
92	24.5%	20.2%	-17.6%

Source: U.S. Census, 1960, 1990

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<sup>15</sup> Percentage of male and female civilian labor force considered unemployed.

**Table 7: Housing: Renter vs. Homeowner**

Census Tract	Owner Occupied		Renter Occupied		Vacant	
	<u>1960</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1990</u>
		<u>% Change</u>		<u>% Change</u>		<u>% Change</u>
72	3.1%	6.4%	100.6%	80.8%	-6.8%	25.5%
73	3.0%	1.4%	-53.3%	94.0%	20.4%	-75.3%
80	0.9%	16.0%	1677.8%	73.4%	-4.8%	-51.6%
81	0.2%	16.0%	79,000.0%	73.3%	14.0%	-70.5%
82	0.7%	4.7%	5714.3%	81.9%	-0.5%	-21.1%
83	0.8%	9.3%	1062.5%	82.4%	-1.0%	-48.1%
85	2.6%	0.7%	-73.1%	87.8%	7.5%	-27.2%
91	0.4%	1.2%	200.0%	94.6%	5.6%	-58.0%
92	0.7%	1.6%	120.0%	94.0%	-1.6%	15.8%

Source: U.S. Census, 1960, 1990

**Table 8: Total Rental Units** (occupied & available vacant units)

<b>Census Tract</b>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>Lost Units</u>	<u>% Change</u> (1960-1990)
72	1774	1479	295	-16.6%
73	1856	548	1308	-70.5%
80	2386	2097	289	-12.1%
81	3919	885	3034	-77.4%
82	3277	1405	1872	-57.1%
83	3347	2130	1217	-36.4%
85	2789	1342	1447	-51.9%
91	2288	555	1733	-75.7%
92	1632	985	647	-39.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23,268</b>	<b>11,426</b>	<b>11,842</b>	<b>-50.9%</b>

Source: U.S. Census, 1960, 1990



**Table 10: Median Rent**<sup>16</sup>

<b>Census Tract</b>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>% Change</u> (1960-1990)
72	\$305	\$353	16%
73	\$247	\$342	38%
80	\$199	\$307	54%
81	\$177	\$167	-6%
82	\$265	\$416	57%
83	\$313	\$447	43%
85	\$199	\$305	53%
91	\$128	\$162	26%
92	\$141	\$145	3%

Source: U.S. Census, 1960, 1990

<sup>16</sup> Figures are for median gross rent. All dollar figures adjusted to 1990 values using the standard consumer CPI.

**Table 11: Affordable Rental Units**<sup>17</sup>  
 (Available rental units affordable to low-income downtown households)

Census Tract	1960		1990		Lost Units
	Available Units	Affordable Units	Percent Affordable	Available Units	
72	1604	480	30%	1479	315
73	1558	409	26%	548	364
80	1885	735	39%	2097	282
81	2534	1264	50%	885	1217
82	2722	525	19%	1405	310
83	2843	858	30%	2130	557
85	2453	992	40%	1342	942
91	2118	239	11%	555	228
92	1573	40	2.5%	985	+26
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,290</b>	<b>5,542</b>	<b>28.7%</b>	<b>10,484</b>	<b>4,191</b>
				<b>1,351</b>	<b>12.9%</b>

Source: U.S. Census, 1960, 1990

<sup>17</sup> Figures are based on occupied rental units only—they do not include vacant units. For methodology, see Footnote #2.



Figure 1: Downtown Seattle Census Tracts

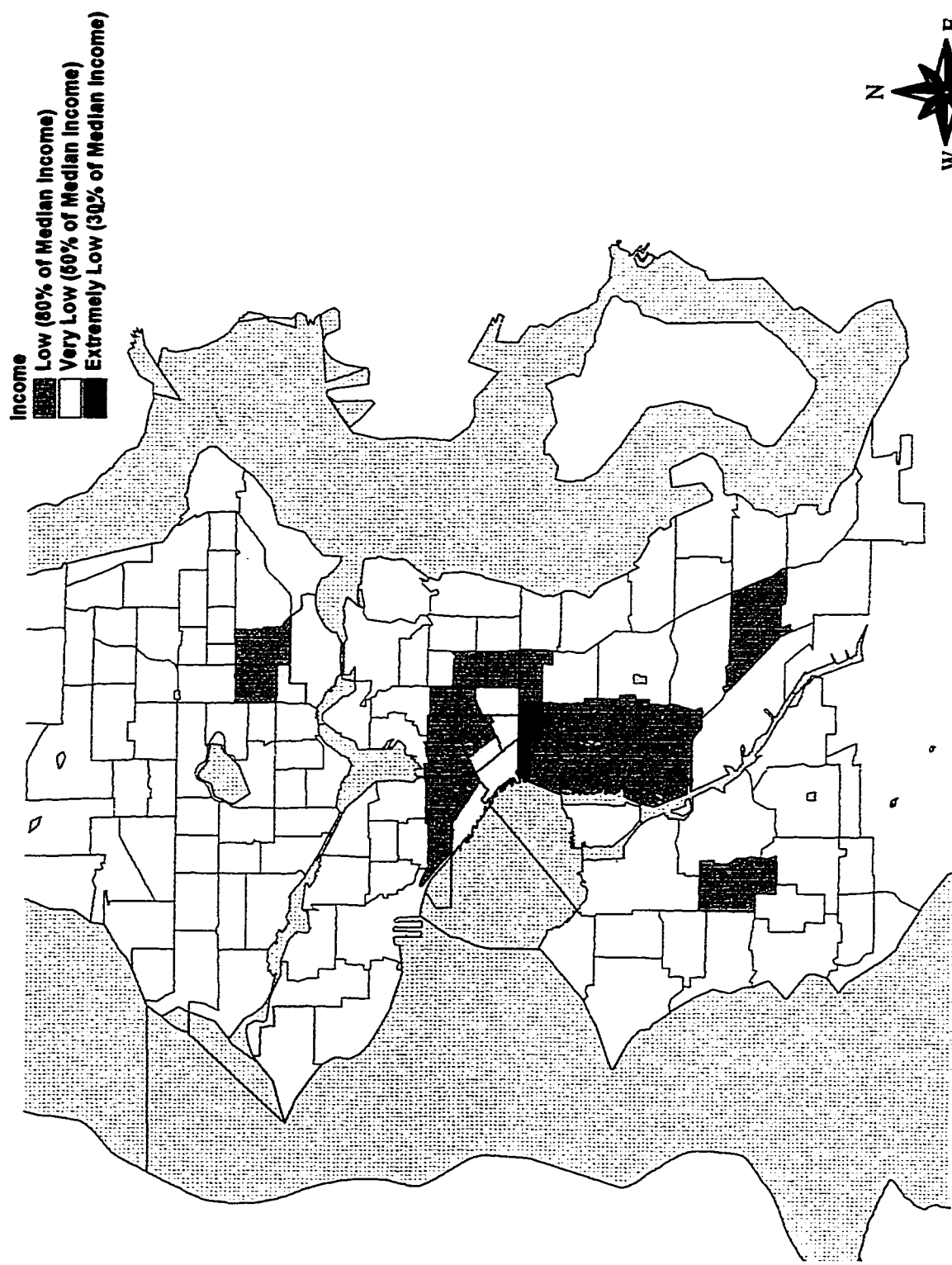


Figure 2: Low Income Census Tracts, 1960

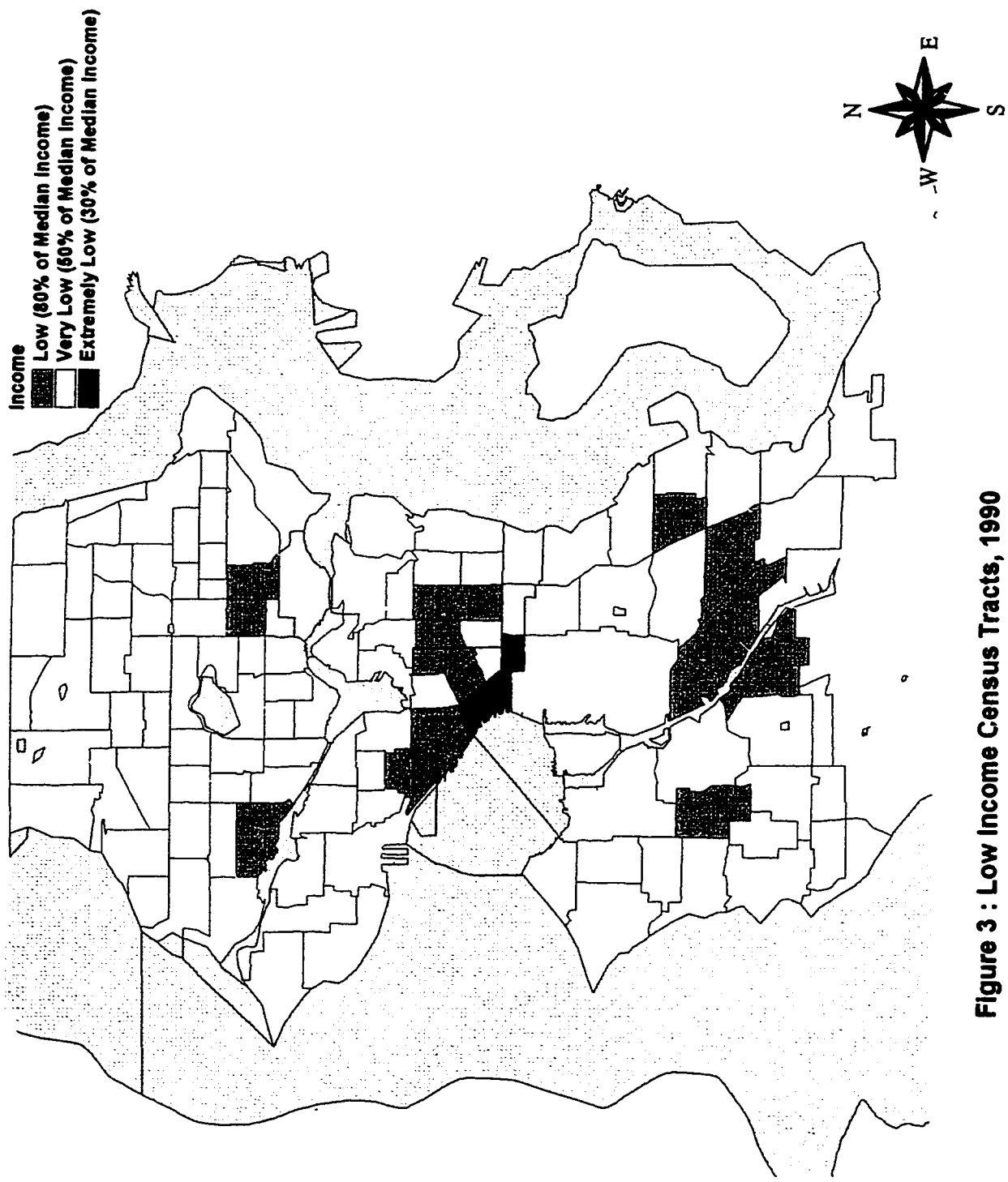


Figure 3 : Low Income Census Tracts, 1990

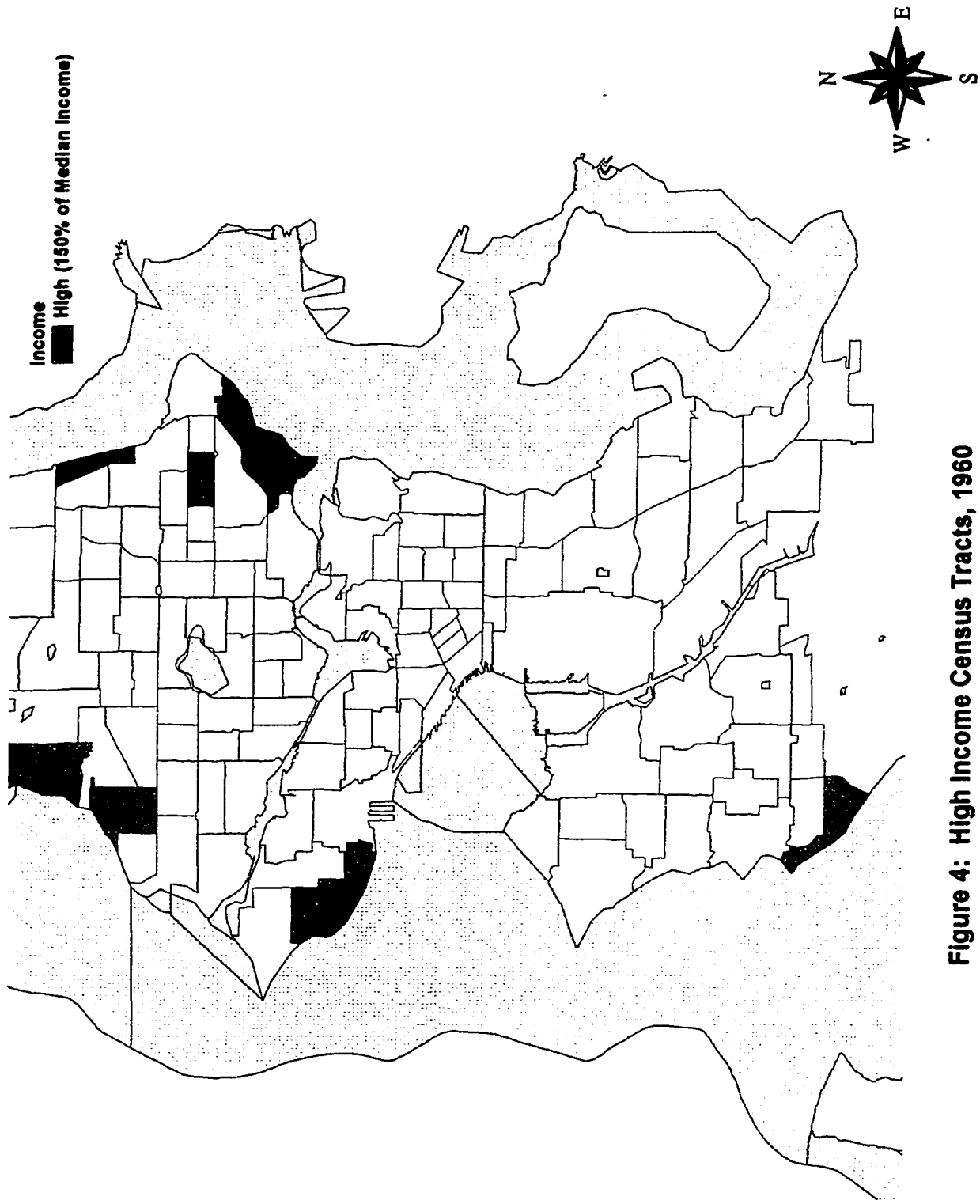


Figure 4: High Income Census Tracts, 1960

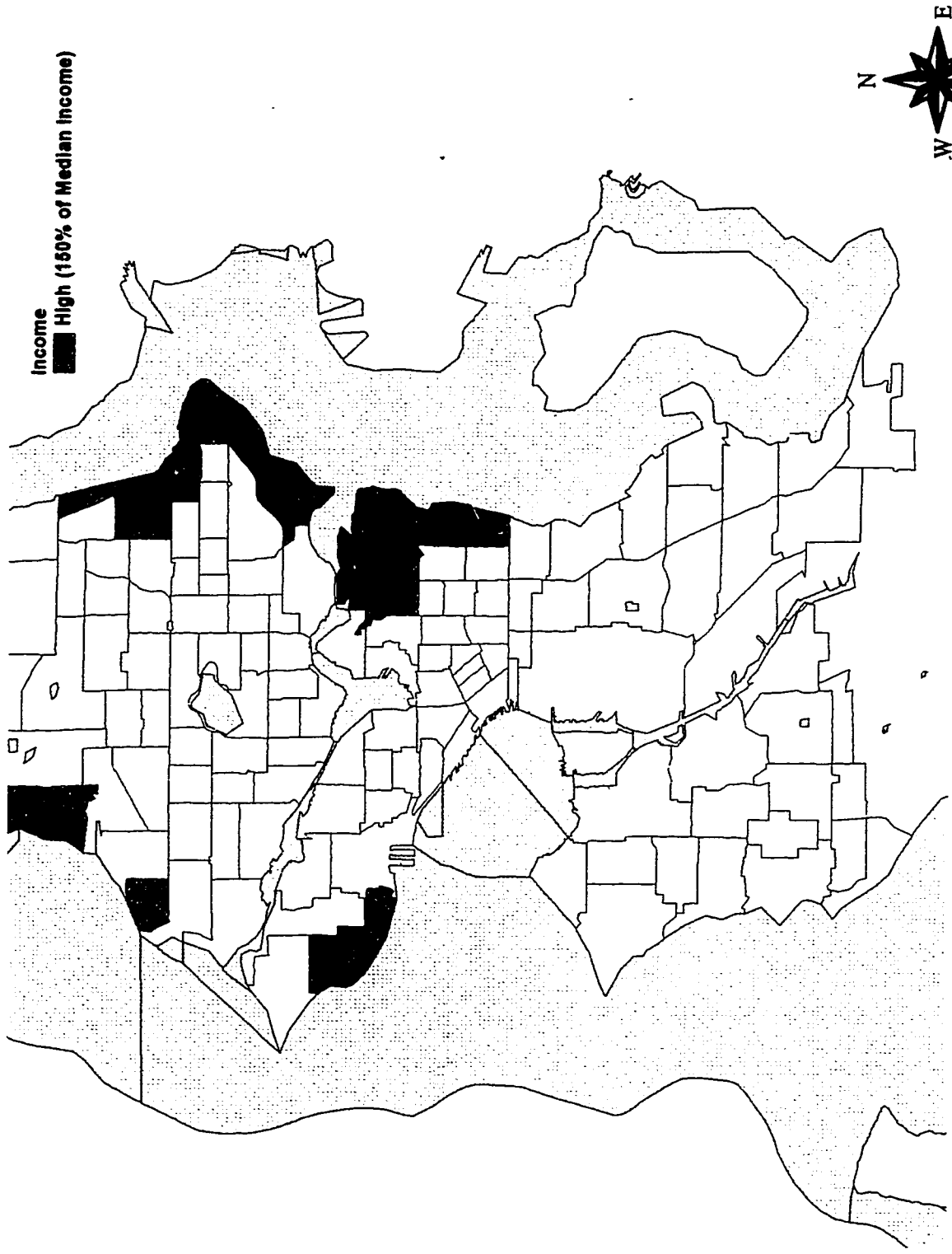
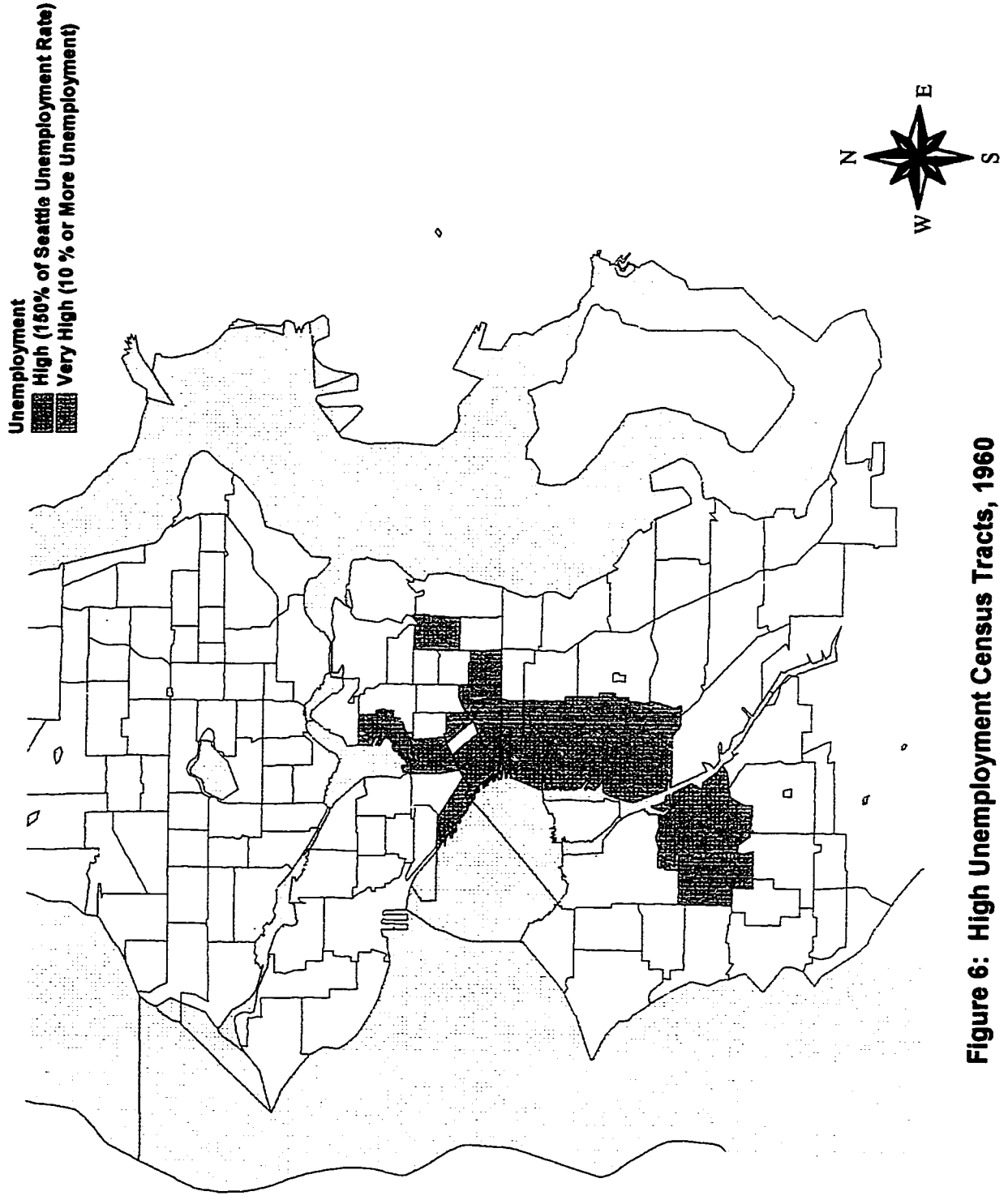
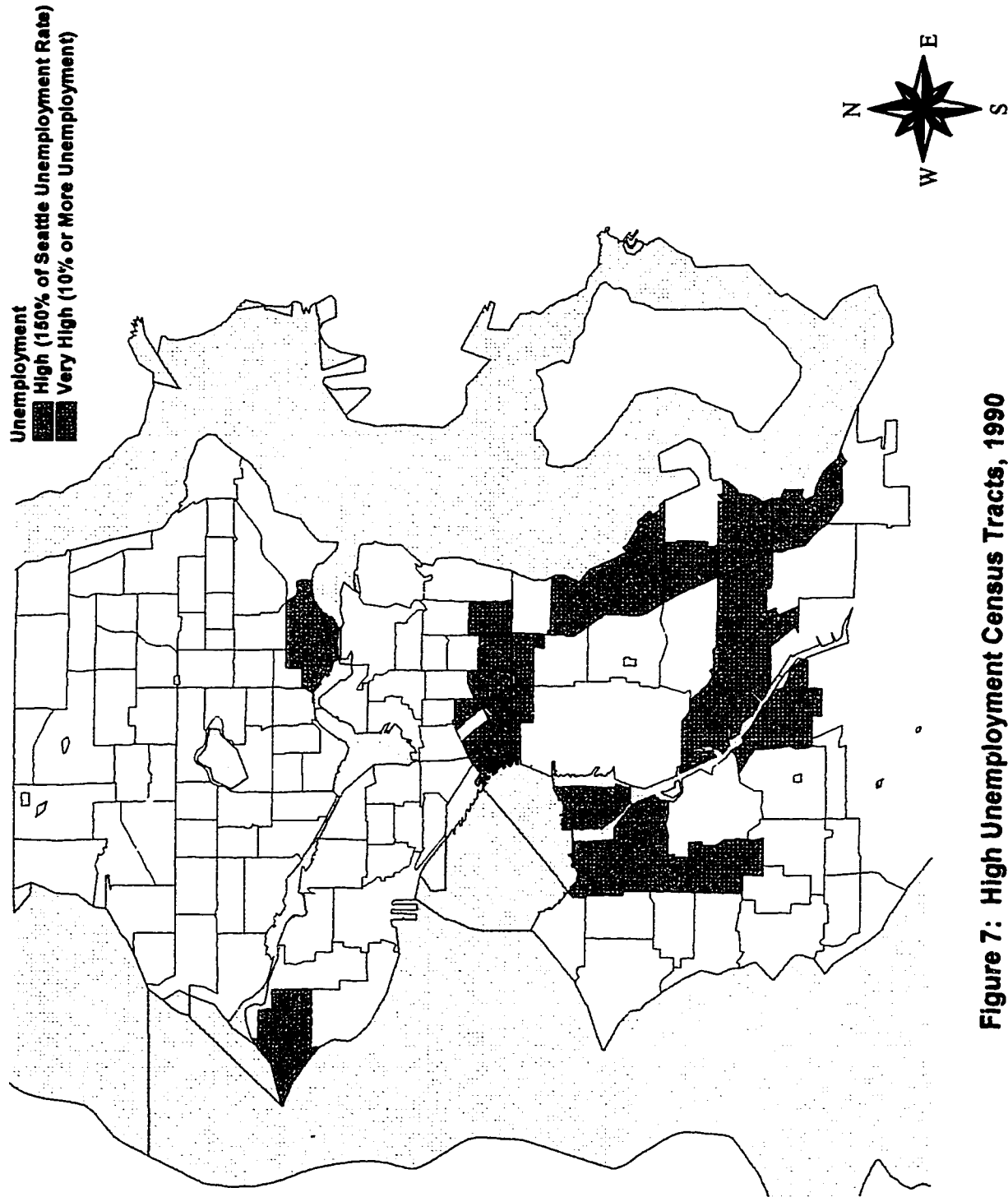


Figure 5: High Income Census Tracts, 1990



**Figure 6: High Unemployment Census Tracts, 1960**



**Figure 7: High Unemployment Census Tracts, 1990**

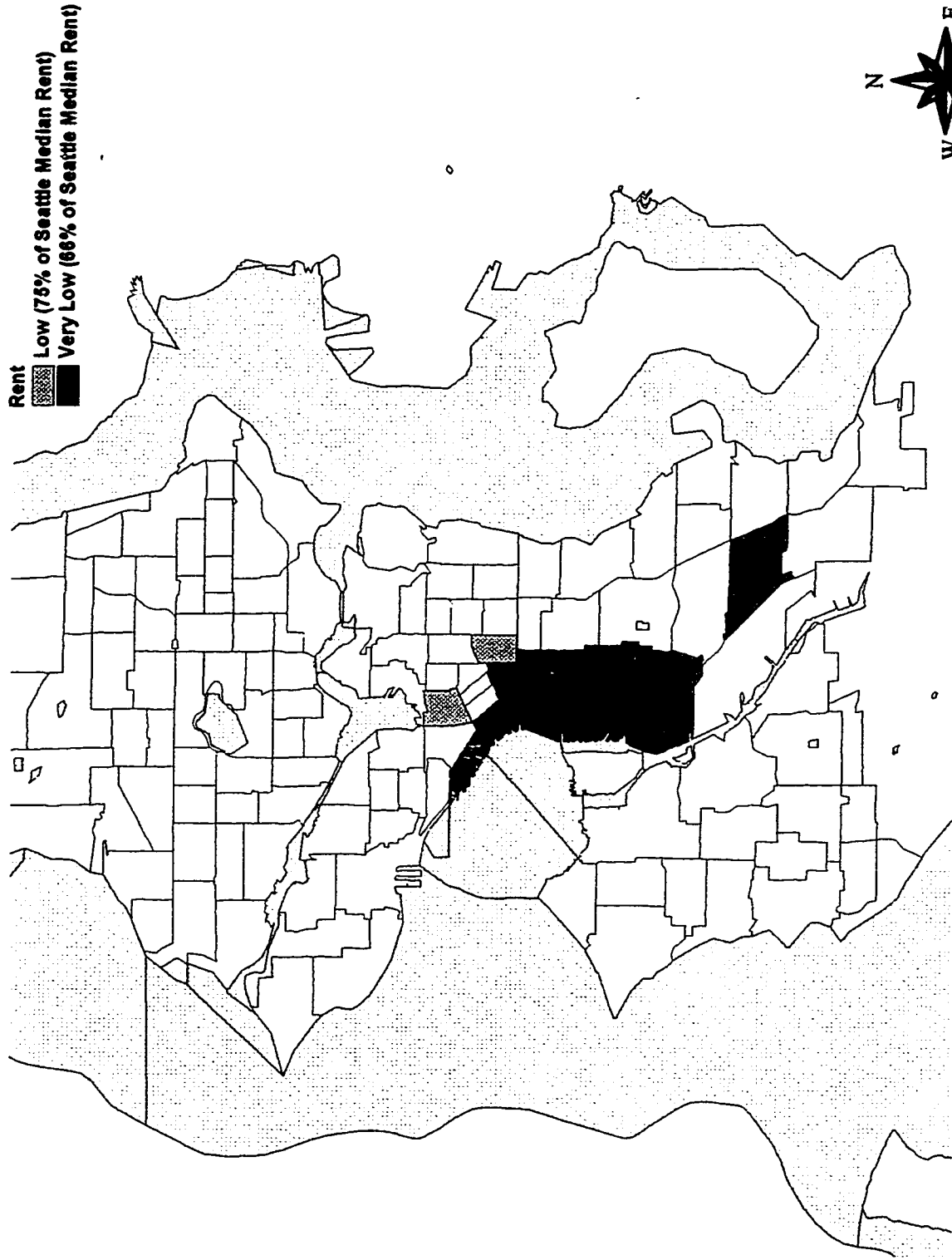


Figure 8: Low Income Housing Census Tracts, 1960

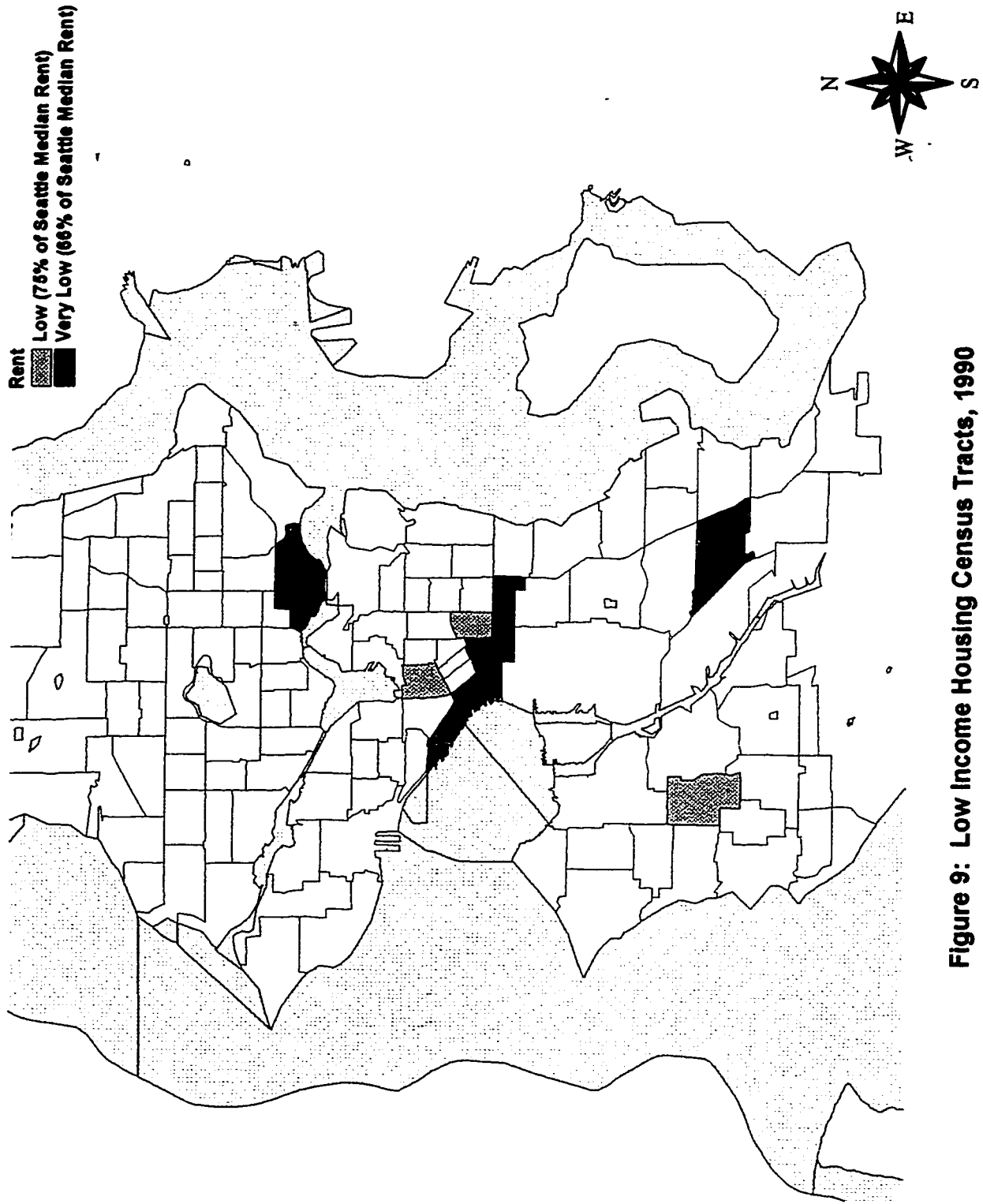


Figure 9: Low Income Housing Census Tracts, 1990

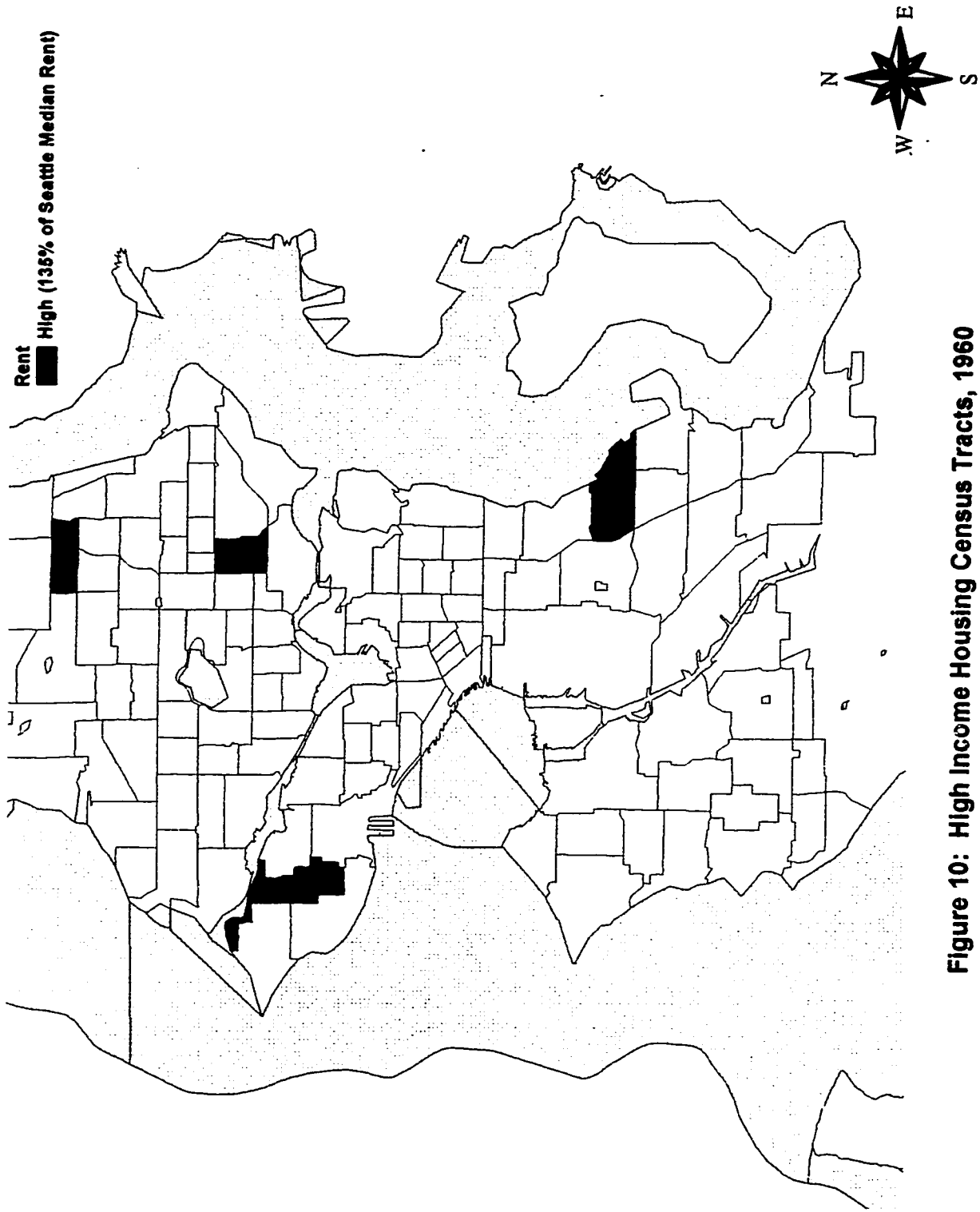


Figure 10: High Income Housing Census Tracts, 1960

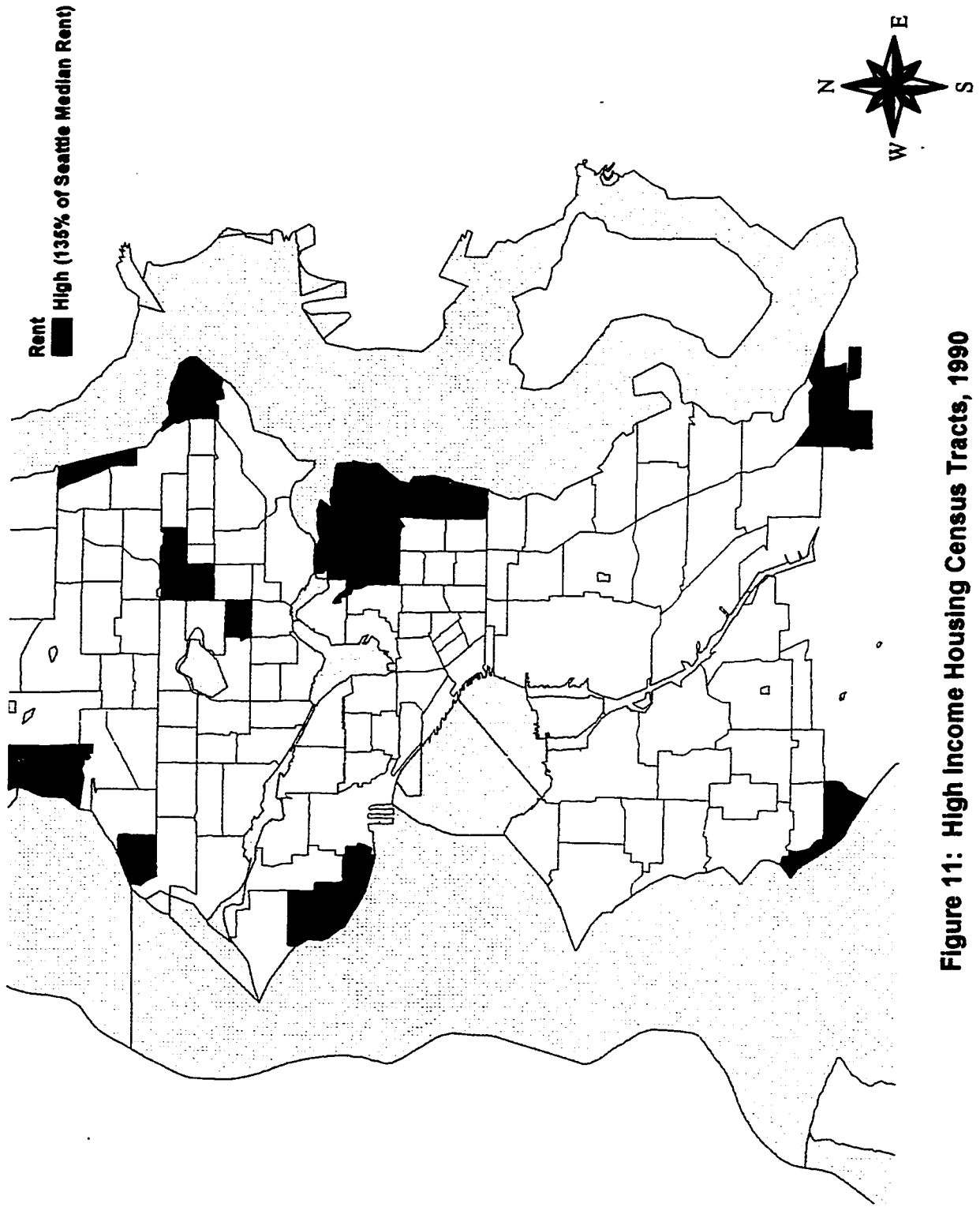


Figure 11: High Income Housing Census Tracts, 1990

## **Chapter Five: Decline and Renewal: The Cleansing of Pioneer Square**

### **Introduction**

From its heyday in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century as the economic and cultural hub of Seattle, by 1960 the Pioneer Square district had hit economic bottom. No longer a vital economic niche of the city, the area had instead gained notoriety for its designation as the nation's original "Skid Road."

Bordered by the central business district to the north, the waterfront to the west, industrial areas to the south, and the International District to the east, Pioneer Square was home primarily to transients, itinerant workers, homeless and poor individuals. The existence of dozens of cheap hotels and rooming houses, and numerous low-cost bars, restaurants, and retail stores serving the area's low-income population marked Pioneer Square's economic and social isolation.

By the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the widespread physical decline and neglect of the area—in many instances, intentional abandonment of buildings and disregard for health and safety issues—led to competing proposals for redevelopment of the district. On the one hand, prominent architects and civic leaders argued for the preservation of existing buildings and the economic renovation of the once glamorous historic area. Opposing them were influential business elites who sought, in the language of the era, to remove the pervasive "blight" afflicting the neighborhood through the wholesale demolition of some buildings and urban renewal. The newly formed Central Association of Seattle

would prove to be the leading advocate of these urban renewal schemes. This chapter traces the efforts of these groups starting in the late 1950s to revitalize Pioneer Square by re-integrating the district into the larger downtown economy. These plans included attempts to use public funds for renovation activities in order to reap an expected financial windfall from tourism and other business ventures. Of note, all competing redevelopment proposals emphasized the social control of the existing “Skid Road” population as a necessary component of renewal efforts. Here, too, conflicting goals emerged. Rather than ambitious redevelopment or historic preservation schemes, the local Model Cities program and community agencies instead sought to provide health and social services, along with economic “rehabilitation,” in an effort to serve local residents and stabilize this marginal population by promoting their economic independence.

As will be seen, several distinct events combined to facilitate the redevelopment and ultimate gentrification of this valuable city district beginning in the 1960s. First, like other cities across the country, Seattle’s economy underwent a fundamental transformation during the second half of the twentieth century from one based on industrial output and manufacturing to an economy geared toward global finance, “high-tech” and other service industries. As the city sought to become an integral link in the “Pacific Rim” regional economy that depended on better-educated and trained employees and a rebuilt downtown, scores of low-skilled and less-educated workers became redundant from reduced demand for their labor. Second, the designation of Pioneer Square as a

“National Historic District” in 1970 generated both public and private reinvestment in the area, and led to “preservation” efforts that significantly transformed the character and purpose of the neighborhood. Finally, enforcement of city fire and building codes starting in the late 1960s had a dramatic impact on boarding houses and other forms of low-cost central city housing. These efforts accelerated in the wake of the city’s deadliest hotel fire at the Ozark Hotel in 1970. The blaze, which killed 20 people, exposed widespread unsafe housing conditions and led to tougher fire and code enforcement efforts by the city at downtown hotels and apartments. As a result, scores of central city SRO hotels and other affordable housing for single persons were abandoned or demolished from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, including many in Pioneer Square.

In short order, the former home to thousands of low-income, itinerant and working class residents, most housed in cheap SRO hotels and rooming houses, was transformed into a new commercial and retail district and touted as one of the nation’s prominent historic-preservation districts. Pioneer Square thus became a haven for consumption and cultural activities by tourists and an increasingly upper-income population, many of whom sought housing in the neighborhood. As was the case in other “Skid Row” areas across the country, in the name of preservation and redevelopment, these processes displaced many of those low-income residents who made their home in Pioneer Square.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that throughout the 1990s, a significant low-income and homeless population remained in the Pioneer Square area. This continued to provide a source of tension between

These dramatic changes provide compelling evidence to support an analysis based on critical and elite theory. Rather than an organic process reflecting a “normal” pattern of neighborhood invasion and succession, this chapter demonstrates that the interests of business and civic leaders, and historic preservation activists largely drove the transformation of Pioneer Square. While these groups sought different outcomes and used markedly distinct rhetoric, they nonetheless shared class interests. Their similar outlook about the need for economic investment and growth in Pioneer Square led them to completely overlook the welfare of the area’s low-income and transient populations. In fact, the existence of these unpopular groups served an instrumental purpose for local elites—be they proponents of urban renewal, or those seeking economic revitalization through the resurrection of a mythic Pioneer Square past.

For years, those promoting the redevelopment of Pioneer Square used a discourse of urban decline and the threat to social order posed by low-income residents to justify their various proposals for renewal. Changing public attitudes toward transients and the poor help highlight the increasing marginality of these groups. As economic opportunity for itinerant laborers and low-skilled workers waned, their “vices” and “anti-social” habits became fodder

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social service and homeless advocates on the one hand, and merchants and civic and corporate officials. Due to the continued existence of shelters, soup kitchens and other social services in the surrounding area, Pioneer Square remains to some extent a neighborhood of heterogeneous uses.

for public and private officials. Tolerance for this often visible population thus shifted to blame and increasingly public calls for their removal from Pioneer Square. As shown, the “undesirable” characteristics of the local population thus provided ample justification for an urban land grab by competing elite interests. It was not until gentrification and displacement in Pioneer Square were well underway that social service professionals and others began to advocate for the needs and protection of community space for local residents.

This chapter illustrates how local elites successfully implemented a vision of urban redevelopment in Pioneer Square that included little space for the area’s low-income and transient residents. Historically, Pioneer Square was a district with high rates of often-visible poverty, homelessness, social deviance, and poor housing. It represented a “zone of transition” long tolerated by public officials. All that changed by the 1960s. For more than two decades, elite groups convinced local officials and the public that revitalization could produce both economic benefits and the elimination of these public signs of urban decline. This strategy ultimately succeeded because elites depicted the local low-income population as the social problem preventing the successful transformation of Pioneer Square. Rather than articulating a plan for urban renewal that included a place for low-income groups along with tourism, commercial investment, and affluent urban living, those promoting urban redevelopment consistently described indigents as an obstacle to progress. That this quest to render the urban poor invisible occurred with virtually no opposition highlights

how elite interests successfully influenced public opinion for years. Using inflammatory rhetoric and images of social deviance in Pioneer Square, local elites shaped perceptions of urban decline. Ultimately, they convinced Seattle residents that the proper solution to this problem was to carry out redevelopment activities that would simultaneously cleanse Pioneer Square and downtown of poverty, deviance and impoverished groups.

### **From Community to Urban Slum**

The Pioneer Square district was the former hub of Seattle and the area where initial commercial activity in the young city began: it contained the city's first bank, general store, church and saloon. Beginning in the 1850s, for more than 30 years Pioneer Square was the scene of planning and building activity for what was rapidly becoming the largest financial and mercantile district in the Pacific Northwest. In the city's early years, the prospect of increased logging, mining, fishing and the coming of the railroad seemed to guarantee economic growth for Seattle. A "boom town" of wooden hotels, homesteads and shacks quickly grew around the steep road for logs (now Yesler Way) leading to Henry Yesler's sawmill (now Pioneer Square) that helped fuel local growth.<sup>2</sup>

Most homes in the area were wooden hotels and boarding houses serving a largely male residential and transient population. For the thousands of sailors, loggers and longshoremen crowded into the district, most work was either

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<sup>2</sup> The term "Skid Road" originated from the use of Yesler Way by loggers who pushed their logs down Yesler Hill—along its "skid road"—to sawmills located along the Seattle waterfront.

seasonal or dependent on the city's thriving waterfront. All that changed with the "Great Fire of 1889," which started when a boiling glue pot was accidentally tipped over in a Pioneer Square shop. Within minutes the blaze grew out of control and engulfed the entire district. When the smoke cleared, approximately 30 central city blocks were completely ruined, allowing civic planners the chance to redesign and reinvent the city (Seibert, 1960).

All the pre-fire buildings were eventually razed or demolished, and the rapidly rebuilt and expanding Pioneer Square became the "crossroads of the Northwest." After the fire, the area around Pioneer Square became the site of a new building boom of brick and stone buildings and luxury hotels in the American Romanesque style.<sup>3</sup> Many of these structures later became the focus of historic preservation efforts (including the Pioneer Building, the Olympia Hotel, and the Mutual Life Building). The area also contained a large number of "workingmen's hotels" serving local laborers, which sat next to warehouses and various industries. A proliferation of bars, nightclubs, restaurants and other retail establishments served a vital and growing community (Schwartz, 1970b). By 1890, the city had grown to 60,000 people, one-fourth of whom lived downtown. Seattle's downtown economy prospered in the 1890s, serving as the gateway to the Yukon and the ongoing gold rush in Alaska. In particular, the Pioneer Square district flourished, with hotels, bars, stores and other establishments cashing in. The gold rush also brought with it scores of those

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<sup>3</sup> Most new structures shared an architectural unity due to the fact that one architect was responsible for designing more than 50 buildings after the fire.

more interested in gambling, drinking, prostitution, and quick money. The economic boom of the Alaska gold rush, which injected Pioneer Square with scores of brothels and taverns, also contributed to its demise. By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century “legitimate” businesses began moving north, away from “the bawdiness of Skid Road and the perceived undesirability of the Chinese district next door” (Seattle-King County Conventions & Visitors Bureau, 1976, p. 21).

Seattle’s central city was quickly changing, and would soon leave Pioneer Square behind. Lured by cheap land and the potential for more merchandizing space, “Seattle’s ‘respectable’ people took their profits and moved north to a new downtown area” (Schwartz, 1970b, p. D5). Few new buildings were constructed in the Pioneer Square area after 1910. While many people continued to pour into the district, others were less enamored. According to one historical account, “the lusty new lifestyle of the docks and pioneer Square failed to amuse some of our more refined citizens, and many refused to trade in the district any longer” (Seattle-King County Conventions & Visitors Bureau, 1976, p. 21).

The city’s commercial core had largely shifted north of the area by 1914, when the 42-story Smith Tower was built. As the new financial and central business district emerged, Pioneer Square began to experience years of disregard. “Pioneer Square was slowly being left to speakeasies, cribs, opium dens and bleary-eyed pensioners” (Pierce, 1996, p. 60). For the most part, the old

buildings in the area were left to neglect and abandonment. One report notes that “for half a century it would remain a refuge for the drunk, the disorderly and the deprived, and the beautiful buildings of Elmer Fisher and the golden years of Seattle in the 1890s would be home to flophouses, loan shops, cheap cafes and warehouses” (Seattle-King County Conventions & Visitors Bureau, 1976, p. 21). Over time, the once-proud nickname “Skid Road” became Skid Row, “implying its residents had fallen on hard times” (Pierce, 1996, p. 60). “Skid Road” thus lost much of its glamour, and the “Skid Rows” of other U.S. cities soon borrowed the term from Seattle.

Despite the physical decline of the area, Pioneer Square continued to serve a vital niche in the local housing market. From the literature and informant interviews, a picture of the Pioneer Square and “Skid Road” community emerges as a place where for decades the city’s poor and working class residents could rent inexpensive rooms and apartments from small and independent landlords (Spradley, 1970). Moreover, the local community provided residents easy access to jobs, affordable goods and services, local entertainment, and a network of friends and acquaintances (Market Foundation, 1987). Housing for this population was usually in rooming houses or modest studio and single bedroom apartments—often times SRO hotels—that were within the price range of workers, retirees, and those forced to survive on a marginal income, if any. According to Informant D, social worker,

a person who might be a skid road person would be able to walk into an apartment building or a hotel.... and just by presenting themselves and showing that they had the money to cover the rent, could actually get their own shelter and get a key and have a place to live (Informant D, social worker).

The area from Pioneer Square along First Avenue in downtown up into Belltown (the entire “Skid Road” area) was the site of numerous affordable stores, restaurants, and bars. One informant noted that many of the bars had nautical names, “because it was catering a working port, where sailors and seafarers of all stripes and fisherman plied their trade, and some of them were part of this waterfront community.” Reflecting on his own experience in Seattle, and conversations with many long-time downtown residents, Informant D, social worker, confirmed that Pioneer Square was indeed a vibrant and viable urban community.

It was a rather pleasant humanly scaled downtown, and one that accommodated, not only in terms of housing but in terms of services, and restaurants, and bars and clothing stores, and second-hand stores and all of that, accommodated a spectrum of low-income communities, from the skid road community to the working class folks, the blue-collar crowd, the retired elderly, male and female, senior citizen population. The downtown corridor accommodated all these folks in a kind of cohesive, organic economic mix (Informant D, social worker).

A 1949 city survey identified 1,861 hotel beds and 823 dorm beds in Pioneer Square (The Commission, 1949).<sup>4</sup> The study also cited a widespread lack of

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<sup>4</sup> A report from the Jackson Street Community Council found that approximately 1,500 homeless men were living in the area in and around Pioneer Square and the International District (The Commission, 1949). The city’s survey of the area noted that there were a substantial, yet

compliance with minimum health standards—lack of adequate bathroom and shower facilities, laundry facilities—at most of these residential buildings. This finding highlights how the city had long tolerated unsanitary conditions and the physical neglect of the Pioneer Square area, largely because it housed a disproportionate number of low-income workers, transients, homeless men, and other social outcasts. In this sense, Pioneer Square represented Seattle’s “zone of transition” in the classic urban analysis of the Chicago School of Sociology.<sup>5</sup>

According to Metraux (1999), at the time the meaning of persons who were “homeless” was distinctly different from modern definitions. Until the late 1970s, the word was applied to those (mostly male) individuals who lacked a permanent address or family ties. These individuals often moved from one location to another taking short-term work that demanded hard labor yet little in the way of “skill” or education.

As a way of life, it was largely defined by American industry’s demands for large numbers of casual, unskilled laborers willing to do hard, temporary work in such fields as manufacturing, construction, railroads, mining, and farm labor. (Metraux, 1999, p. 691).

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undetermined number of homeless men in Belltown, Denny-Regrade and other downtown neighborhoods.

<sup>5</sup> University of Chicago sociologists Ernest Burgess, Robert Park and colleagues developed a theory of urban growth based on an ecological systems approach (1925). They found that a series of concentric circles formed a city, with each circle (or ring) serving different land-use patterns. At the core stood the central business district, with both financial and retail/commercial uses. This was surrounded by the “zone of transition,” a formally residential area serving high-income groups which evolved into an area of mixed uses—both retail and residential—largely serving low-income populations (i.e., “slums”). The zone of transition was itself surrounded by other residential zones serving working class families closer to the core, with wealthier families residing in rings radiating further out from the center.

Importantly, because this type of day work was generally available in an industrial, manufacturing-based economy, tens of thousands of homeless men across the country were able to maintain a somewhat stable, if minimal, economic existence. Such was the case in Pioneer Square and downtown Seattle, due to its proximity to the city's port and nearby heavy industries. This lifestyle was also feasible, in large part, because of the widespread availability of a variety of forms of cheap urban housing like SROs and boarding houses geared toward this population of part-time and seasonal workers.

This would eventually change. Declining profits by large U.S. firms fueled a domestic and global process of economic restructuring by the late 1960s commonly known as "globalization." This often resulted in the relocation of production and heavy manufacturing from the United States to less-developed countries with much cheaper labor and production costs, and led to the loss of millions of blue-collar jobs. These production shifts, along with dramatic technological change at Seattle's ports, also reduced demand for the type of less skilled and blue-collar labor common among workers in Pioneer Square and the "Skid Road" area. Changes in cargo handling and technology—for example, the shift from cargo netting to containerized cargo—starting in the late 1950s severely limited the need for a ready supply of casual labor at the waterfront.

One way of measuring this change is to compare shifts in the local workforce between 1960 and 1970. While the percentage of workers living in Pioneer Square employed in blue-collar professions remained roughly the same—approximately 35 percent of the male in 1960 and some 32 percent in 1970—there was a dramatic loss of these types of jobs over this period.<sup>6</sup> While nearly 900 Pioneer Square male residents held jobs in 1960, ten years later barely 400 jobs were available to male residents.<sup>7</sup>

The 1949 city study found that sleeping accommodations existed in Pioneer Square for approximately 2,684 permanent and transient persons, and that some 2,500 people lived in the area; between 4,000-5,000 people—mostly men—frequented the area during the day and evening (The Commission, 1949). This helps demonstrate that Pioneer Square still served an essential function for thousands of Seattle residents by offering cheap housing, affordable restaurants and drinking establishments, along with cheap retail and commercial shops. By 1960, Pioneer Square still had nearly 2,000 low-cost SRO housing units, along with scores of other affordable housing units. Yet by 1974, most of this housing was gone, either demolished or abandoned by landlords apparently waiting for more financially lucrative uses for the property (Downtown Human Services Council, 1986).

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<sup>6</sup> Blue collar refers to those employed as laborers, operatives, and craftsmen, foremen and kindred workers (U.S. Census, 1960; 1970).

<sup>7</sup> Using a broader definition of those employed by blue collar *industries* rather than occupations, more than 60 percent of the total Pioneer Square workforce (male and female) was working in the following categories in 1960: mining, construction, transportation, communication, utilities and

**Early Efforts at Urban Renewal: 1960-1970**

Starting in the late 1950s, a series of reports called for the wholesale redevelopment of Pioneer Square. These public and private proposals help highlight the fundamental change in the way the district was viewed by this time. Led by the pro-business Central Association of Seattle, local corporate and civic leaders sought to enlist support for the proposed redevelopment of Pioneer Square. In seeking the total economic and physical overhaul of the “Skid Road” area, these documents signal a growing unwillingness by key civic leaders to further tolerate the concentrated presence downtown of a low-income, sporadically employed mostly male population distinctly outside the social norms of mainstream society. While the district remained home and provided a community to thousands of residents for several decades, in the words of the city’s local tourist bureau, at the time many people thought “Pioneer Square was just a slum and its presence near downtown Seattle was embarrassing. Something had to be done” (Seattle-King County Conventions & Visitors Bureau, 1976, p. 22). The existence of the Pioneer Square district and the local “Skid Road” population thus posed a visible and psychological barrier to urban renewal plans to make the area more attractive to tourists, downtown workers, and local investors. Despite dramatic rhetoric, formal redevelopment efforts in the district never matched the planning by the public and private sector. Nonetheless, these proposals helped lay the political foundation for the subsequent transformation of Pioneer Square by other methods.

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sanitary workers, and other industries. This more inclusive definition indicates that blue-collar jobs were disproportionately eliminated over this 10-year period (U.S. Census, 1960; 1970).

The first prominent effort to draw attention to the physical condition of the Pioneer Square area came in 1954. The Washington State Chapter of the Architects Institute of America, along with the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, conducted a design competition to come up with the best redevelopment and historic preservation plan for Pioneer Square. The contest was won by Victor Steinbrueck, who went on to become a leading preservation advocate in Seattle. Steinbrueck's proposal called for preserving and restoring the area's old buildings, closing the neighborhood to automobile traffic, repaving streets with cobblestones, and adding period incandescent street lights. However, while Steinbrueck and others expected local property owners to carry out such a plan, over the next five years they instead "did nothing at all," according to one report (Bloomberg, 1960, p. 25).

Several years later in response to a 1957 city council request for a rehabilitation plan for Pioneer Square, the Seattle City Planning Commission produced a detailed revitalization proposal. The 1959 plan—co-sponsored by the newly formed Central Association of Seattle—called for a cooperative venture between the city and the private sector to revive the historic heart of Seattle as a "prime attraction for tourists and residents alike" (City Planning Commission, Letter of Transmittal, 1959). In particular, the report cited the rich architectural heritage and historic value of the area as a key factor in making redevelopment a viable course of action. Unlike Victor Steinbrueck's earlier proposal, this new

plan was less interested in historic preservation and more focused on a traditional urban renewal initiative. Thus the city and local corporate elites called for a total rehabilitation program in Pioneer Square requiring the full cooperation of local property owners. Though the area was economically depressed, city planners and business leaders felt the possibility for economic growth was significant (City Planning Commission, 1959).

The dilapidated physical condition of the district and the presence of thousands of poor and transient residents would play a key role in redevelopment schemes. The Planning Commission report suggested that a key goal of any planned redevelopment was to economically restore the district and reap vastly greater financial returns from an increasingly blighted area. Importantly, blight was seen as a growing problem in Pioneer Square that helped create vacancies in many existing buildings above ground floor businesses. As a result, the report found that average property values in the area were 10 percent less than in the adjacent central business district. Declining property values no doubt also stemmed from the “numerous violations of building code and fire regulations” in the Pioneer Square area, resulting from a lack of building maintenance and “disregard for standards of health and safety” (City Planning Commission, 1959, p. 2). Again, the existence of such widespread conditions in a neighborhood adjacent to downtown can only be seen as resulting from the tacit approval of private elites and city officials. For years both shared a

willingness to tolerate a “transition zone” of cheap and substandard housing and a largely low-income, male population, many without steady employment.

The redevelopment proposal suggested two potential alternatives:

1. The continued deterioration of Pioneer Square with possible forced abandonment of additional buildings due to health and safety hazards. Over time this could result in “slum clearance by condemnation with redevelopment through urban renewal techniques...” (p. 3).
2. The rehabilitation of Pioneer Square as the historic heart of Seattle, including the immediate renovation of existing structures for commercial use. This proposal suggested a dual process of rehabilitation in Pioneer Square and the future redevelopment of blighted areas to the South via urban renewal, and would involve the razing of some buildings.

The study favored the latter option, mostly for economic reasons. First, it would provide the city with “a major tourist attraction” playing on the area’s historical interest (City Planning Commission, 1959, p. 4). Citing the lucrative financial windfall that tourism could bring, Robert Hill, manager of the city’s Convention and Tourist Bureau, suggested that through redevelopment, Pioneer Square “would be an invaluable tool toward expending the stay of the visitor” to Seattle (p. 4). Second, urban renewal would revitalize a valuable geographic area that could serve the city’s “permanent” downtown population, a reference to some 45,000 office workers and others using the adjacent downtown area daily. In the eyes of city planners, revitalization would attract many of these workers to restaurants, shops and other commercial activities in a redeveloped Pioneer Square. Currently, the report noted, due to existing blighted

conditions, the area held “little or no attraction for downtown workers or visitors” (p. 5). Third, planners believed that the latter course of action would lead to the rehabilitation of some existing buildings in Pioneer Square for commercial use as had occurred in other historic districts across the country. This, in turn, could help provide studio space for local artists and cultural activities. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, rehabilitation would increase property values in Pioneer Square, thus adding to the city’s tax base. According to the report, it would also lead to an increase in local business activity, and create greater sales tax revenue and expanded job opportunities.

An editorial in the *Seattle Times* supported the plan, calling the idea “one of the most interesting” downtown development projects (*Planning New*, 1959, p. 8). The paper was especially enthusiastic about efforts to increase tourism in the area, similar to historic preservation projects in San Francisco and New Orleans. Significantly, in describing the existing “downtown population,” city planners did not mention the current residents of Pioneer Square, a mostly low-income male and elderly population.

Efforts to remove blight, or so-called “slum clearance” via urban renewal activities in the United States have been well documented, as have the pervasive negative impacts of these activities on the local population (Mohl, 1993; Hirsch, 1993; Halpern, 1995; Squires, 1994; Mollenkopf, 1978; Walker & Boxall, 1996; Hartman & Kessler, 1978; Judd & Swanstrom 1994). As in other

cities, Seattle officials were explicit about the need to transform both the physical environment and the *human* character of Pioneer Square. Preservation and renovation of some existing historic buildings would achieve the former goal; the latter objective would require a virtual campaign of depopulation in Pioneer Square. City planners thus noted that implicit to proposed renovation activities was the removal of the majority of local residents, in part to attract nearby workers from the city's financial and government sector to the redeveloped area:

Experience in other cities indicates that when such an area as this is substantially rehabilitated, the former 'Skid Road' population—finding no attraction for its wants in this area—quickly moves out (City Planning Commission, 1959, pp. 5-6).

Representation of the decline of this area of downtown Seattle would prove to be a consistent theme for at least 20 years. It was thus a crucial component of efforts to remake the central city and thereby "save" Pioneer Square.

Beauregard (1993) finds that such rhetoric has served a critical role in how society interprets and acts upon the "proclaimed decline of cities" (p. ix). His work

assumes the discourse on urban decline to be more than the objective reporting of an uncontestable reality and pursues an interpretation of urban decline that considers how the discourse functions ideologically to shape our attention, provide reasons for how we should act in response, and convey a comprehensible, compelling, and reassuring story of the fate of the twentieth-century city in the United States (p. xi).

Initial aspects of a Pioneer Square redevelopment plan called for physical improvements to the area—benches, trees & landscaping, gas lamps, enlarging an existing park. These activities were important, according to city planners, because of the desirability of linking a rehabilitated Pioneer Square with the nearby downtown waterfront area that was undergoing renovation into a “major tourist attraction.” A key goal was to connect the two areas via sidewalk plantings and improvements, and thereby encourage pedestrian traffic between the two sites. The cooperation and participation of local merchants and property owners was seen as “key to the success of this project” (City Planning Commission, 1959, pp. 6-7). The extent of private rehabilitation efforts, the plan noted, would need to be large enough to “change the character of the area” (p. 7). Again, such language should be seen as code for a desire by local elites to rid Pioneer Square of most of the area’s transients and low-income residents.

The primary incentive for such private sector involvement and investment was the promise of increased income from higher property values in the wake of revitalization activities. The report listed numerous potential businesses that might emerge from renewal activities: theme restaurants, a commercial museum, a Northwest craft shop, art galleries, a flower stall, tourist gift shops, art/music/drama studios in above ground spaces, an Indian craft shop, nightclubs, off street parking. Once again, no mention was made in the redevelopment proposal of housing, in particular, efforts to preserve the existing

low-cost housing stock, nor to maintain a mix of socioeconomic groups in Pioneer Square.

As would occur with numerous urban redevelopment schemes in Seattle (including the convention center project described in Chapter 6), local media, especially the city's major newspapers, served to legitimate the claims on urban space by elite economic interests. Within months of the redevelopment plan, one local writer suggested that the time was ripe for action, since the "shabbiness of Pioneer Square has never been more apparent" (Bloomberg, 1960, p. 25). By this time the Central Association, along with the owners of a new office tower on the northern edge of the district, was taking an active role in promoting the revitalization of the district. While noting the increased cultural activity in Pioneer Square in early 1960—a few restaurant openings, theater and arts exhibits—the Central Association argued that "a few enterprising tenants won't restore Pioneer Square. If its potential is to be realized, it will require organization, direction, promotion and substantial investment" (Central Association of Seattle, 1960, p. 2). The group suggested such efforts would best be left up to local property owners, though the city did have a role to play in realizing the "opportunities of a restored, prosperous Pioneer Square."

Though less than one year old, the Central Association was already an influential power broker in the city. The group was comprised of Seattle's corporate, real estate and other business leaders, while hundreds of local

merchants formed the core of its membership. Importantly, local media shared the Association's economic development agenda for the city. An editorial in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer lauded the efforts of the newly formed business coalition, citing the "daring and imagination" of the group's numerous projects proposed in downtown Seattle. The paper also described its future vision of a close working relationship between the business organization and city government.

The Central Association means a great deal to you, to all of us. Operating with little fanfare, its personnel is made up of a number of far-seeking civic leaders. It has not sought, nor will it seek, to build a large paid staff. These are men dedicated to the maintenance of a strong, vigorous—and attractive—Central Seattle, and they are selflessly willing to devote a great amount of personal time to that end. The Association is a valuable adjunct to a municipal government forced to grow as swiftly as ours (Seattle Post Intelligencer, 1960).

Despite calls for urban renewal and the razing of much of Pioneer Square, others in Seattle took a decidedly different view of the future of the area. As early as 1960, some civic leaders were meeting to devise ways to preserve "historic" structures in the district. Historic preservation advocates planned a downtown rally in mid-1960 to draw attention to the need to preserve most buildings in Pioneer Square. The planned demolition of the Seattle Hotel into a parking lot provided a visible symbol of the rapid changes occurring in the area that threatened the city's oldest structures. Supporters of historic preservation also sought to persuade arts groups, architects and other organizations to move

back into the district to demonstrate their commitment to preserving the area (Guzzo, 1960).

### **Local Elites and Redevelopment**

Unlike the classic power elite model described by Mills (1956) which highlights the role played by national elites (top government, military and corporate officials), redevelopment efforts in Pioneer Square suggest that there also exist a cadre of local elites. Rather than being solely concentrated within a small group of wealthy and influential national individuals, local elites can thus be “any group or social category of people in a social system that occupies a position of privilege or dominance” (Johnson, 2000, p. 101). In this sense, local elite groups use their power to contest other local elites on specific issues. This model of “elite pluralism” (Johnson, 2000) is one where despite competing agendas, unity exists among local elites over fundamental issues such as whether non-elite groups should be allowed to exercise power. My analysis proposes that two primary groups of local elites can be identified in the contest over Pioneer Square: historic preservation advocates and local banking and corporate officials formed into the Central Association of Seattle (both groups included elected and appointed city officials). Unlike the power elite model, these competing groups did not necessarily share similar backgrounds; most historic preservation advocates were not drawn from banking, finance, real estate and other corporate sectors. Preservationists—architects, artists, shopkeepers, and young urban professionals—were less likely to have attended elite schools or have links to the corporate world. Indeed, not only were most

opposed to urban renewal schemes, but many may in fact have had ties to local community and neighborhood groups concerned over the *scale* of redevelopment. Despite different backgrounds and divergent agendas, however, these local elites ultimately shared similar views about the need to transform Pioneer Square.

While preservation advocates were often at odds with urban renewal supporters, both factions promoted visions of Pioneer Square that emphasized commercial investment, and physical space and structures. The Central Association and urban renewal advocates were simply more interested in razing many properties and initiating a redevelopment plan that emphasized new construction of office buildings and parking lots. Those in favor of historic preservation also sought commercial development, though on a much smaller scale, with the restoration of most existing Pioneer Square structures as the essence of their plan. Thus both groups were focused on buildings, rather than people. Of fundamental importance, at the heart of their competing proposals, either explicitly stated or implied, was a determination to transform the character of Pioneer Square by ridding the district of most of the existing low-income population. To the extent that either group suggested a role for a residential population in a refashioned Pioneer Square, they emphasized the need for upper and middle income housing in the district.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Proponents of urban renewal also highlighted the thousands of nearby downtown office workers who formed a relatively captive retail audience during the workday.

In mid-1961 a city council subcommittee endorsed an initial city-funded improvement program for Pioneer Square focused on improved landscaping, tree plantings and similar improvements, with an eye toward the preservation of most of the buildings in the neighborhood (Willix, 1961).<sup>9</sup> Tree plantings and other physical improvements like period lights soon appeared, and had the support of the city as well as local merchants formed into the Pioneer Square Businessmen's Association (Pioneer Place, 1961). Nonetheless, preservationists faced a determined foe. The Central Association of Seattle was waging a campaign in various local publications to enlist support for the sweeping redevelopment of Pioneer Square. An article in *Puget Soundings* by the Executive Vice-President of the organization cited the 1959 urban renewal plan (co-sponsored by the Association) as critical to the restoration and renovation of Pioneer Square. Since that report was issued, the city council had expressed a willingness to modify street use as detailed in the plan when requested by local merchants, and had also included \$225,000 in an upcoming bond issue for use in Pioneer Square (and other downtown) park improvement projects.

Despite blight conditions in the area, the Central Association argued that because of its proximity to the financial and business district, along with nearby government buildings, "the property has great inherent value." They

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<sup>9</sup> A 1961 proposed city ordinance to create a historic sites commission contained the key elements of the Pioneer Square National Historic District legislation passed by the city nine years later (Group Studies, 1961).

reiterated their call for the total restoration of Pioneer Square, citing the significant economic benefits that it would provide:

- It would give Seattle a major tourist attraction;
- Some historic buildings could be rehabilitated for commercial use;
- It would add a valuable commercial and retail area serving downtown workers;
- Restoration could provide facilities for arts and cultural activities;
- Renovation and redevelopment would increase property values, and in the process push out the existing “Skid Road” population (Seibert, 1960).

Importantly, key local officials shared the commitment to revitalizing downtown—and by extension Pioneer Square—promoted by the Central Association. At a 1961 luncheon, John D. Spaeth, Director of City Planning, called for the creation of “an environment and an image in the downtown that will really attract people” (Central Association of Seattle, 1961, p. 3). He also cited the need for a public-private partnership to ensure downtown Seattle remained “the community’s most substantial and important investment.” Similarly, Mayor Gordon Clinton spoke of the tax revenue generated downtown as “an ‘investment’ we must protect and nurture” (p. 3).

The city’s major media outlets maintained their support for such a development model, while also endorsing the role of the Central Association. A 1962 article in the *Seattle Times* noted that the business organization merely sought “to instill in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the ‘can-do’ spirit of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century,

when the pioneers opened the country and brought the first railroad to Seattle in 1884” (Johnston, 1962, p. 12). Lauding “what may well be the most aggressive downtown redevelopment period in Seattle’s history,” the paper noted that through the Central Association’s careful planning, the city could soon become “the finest, most favored headquarters city in the world” (p. 13). This statement was a clear endorsement of elite designs to transform downtown Seattle into a key site of corporate activity. Such plans would require the cleansing of “blight” in the area immediately adjacent to downtown.

At the behest of city officials, a team of urban “experts” from the Build America Better Committee toured Seattle in early 1964 to assess blight conditions and make recommendations for urban renewal. Their rhetoric highlights the continuum of opinion that existed among corporate elites seeking radical change in Pioneer Square. The group called for the razing of Pioneer Square—the “total clearance” of the area, in the words of group member John Dodds—to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive urban renewal program (Urban Renewal, 1964). Committee member William Ballard described the seemingly unlimited benefits available to business and civic leaders through such a plan.

This is a city of opportunity. Through judicious use of urban renewal, you could clear obsolescence, provide opportunities for new construction by private investment, provide new jobs and furnish a new tax base for the city (p. 32).

Like the other committee members, Ballard, a Boston real estate appraiser and consultant, was heavily invested in real estate and urban redevelopment

schemes. The Seattle Post-Intelligencer described each member of the visiting committee as “a conservative real estate authority” (Coughlin, 1964, p. 18). Not surprisingly, the group was unanimous in its appraisal of the deplorable living conditions in the Pioneer Square/Skid Road area. Committee member Lloyd Hanford, the former national president of the Institute of Real Estate Management, suggested that in Seattle

you have on your Skid Road the worst hotels and flophouses of any I have seen anyplace in America. You can only thank a good Fire Department and God that you have not had any calamitous fires in that area (p. 18).

Such claims led to more dramatic rhetoric by local elites about the threat posed by urban “blight” and low income and transient groups at odds with middle class values. In this respect, the population of Pioneer Square (and much of downtown Seattle) served an important purpose, providing a rationale for a claim on downtown space by elite interests. For example, by equating urban renewal with freedom and the American way of life, Hanford noted that “people most interested in communism thrive on the misfortunes of communities. If enough of these unfortunate situations prevail, you build the groundwork for ultimate destruction of those things we love the most” (Coughlin, 1964, p. 18).

Despite the committee’s urgent call for building demolitions and a total urban renewal program for Pioneer Square, such proposals remained

stalled. The potential impact of redevelopment was not altogether lost on local residents of Pioneer Square. One long-time resident who subsisted on social security and odd jobs warned in the *Seattle Times* against any proposal that emphasized the demolition of old buildings and apartments. "I guess old fellows like me are forgotten people. If they keep tearing down these old hotels we won't be able to get places to flop. Why don't these progressives consider our problems" (Cunningham, 1964, p. 8).

### **The First Wave of Change**

While not dramatic, the initial signs of the "rebirth" of Pioneer Square were beginning to occur. Some suggest this process started with the 1962 World's Fair, when several nightclubs and restaurants opened in the area. Yet most of these businesses disappeared soon after the tourists went home. However, other important changes were happening as well. While urban renewal efforts stalled, "in the meantime, architects, decorators and tourists discovered Old Seattle" (Schwartz, 1970b, p. D5). For example, in 1964, local architect Ralph Anderson restored the former Globe Hotel on South Jackson Street for use as offices. Later that year, a former newspaper reporter rediscovered the underground city that was formally old Seattle (buried over after the 1889 fire when downtown streets were raised to be above the tide line). He began leading tours of "Underground Seattle" and its preserved sidewalks, stairways and building structures, a venture that proved extremely popular with both locals

and tourists alike. The acclaim garnered by this business venture served to strengthen proposals for historic preservation of the area.

Nonetheless, the Central Association of Seattle had different designs for Pioneer Square. Suggesting that major redevelopment projects were key to rebuilding downtown skylines and luring people back downtown for “in-city living,” the Association continued to promote demolition and development in Pioneer Square. A 1964 article in the group’s newsletter noted that

property in the Pioneer Square and “South of Yesler” area offers an excellent opportunity for redevelopment of the City’s greatest concentration of blight. This area redeveloped can provide magnificent sites for office buildings, expanded commercial activity in a “green belt” setting” (Central Association of Seattle, 1964, p. 3).

For years, the Central Association and other private and public officials had called for a revitalized downtown Seattle in an effort to limit urban blight and maintain the area as the region’s financial and retail core. Thus in 1966 the Executive Vice-President of the association, Mechlin Moore, celebrated the “counter-trend” to urban decay that was emerging in Seattle and other central cities.

In those cities which discern this new role for the urban core, downtown can make a unique contribution to the life of the total community—and incidentally, enable those “special” and entirely proper private interests which built downtown in the first place to rebuild the central business district for a new kind of market (Moore, 1966, p. 4).

Yet while downtown growth and change was occurring in Seattle, by the mid-1960s the envisioned sweeping redevelopment of Pioneer Square had not materialized. In response, six years after the 1959 city-Central Association proposal, a new document (the “Smith Report”) detailed an updated vision of redevelopment opportunities for Pioneer Square.<sup>10</sup> Taking urban renewal rhetoric to a new level, the proposal explicitly called for ridding the district of its residential population. The study noted that prior rehabilitation efforts in the Pioneer Square area were largely unsuccessful because of the existence of these low-income groups. Thus, the plan emphasized the need to eliminate the largest impediment to urban renewal—the existing transient and low-income population.

The Smith Report suggested that “the ‘blighting influence’ of the sizeable ‘Skid Road’ population just one block south of the Square has tended to detract from the ability of this area to seek and obtain continued support for its ‘better’ nighttime activities” (1965, p. 23). Like the city’s earlier study, the report was based on a key assumption: redevelopment activities could not occur in Pioneer Square as long as the area’s low-income residential population was present. Thus, any revitalization efforts needed to include a heavy dose of social cleansing of local residents in order to proceed successfully.

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<sup>10</sup> The “Smith Report” provided the basis for the physical planning activities in the development of a general plan for the Pioneer Square area.

It is assumed that the “itinerant element” occupying the substantial number of existing “sub-standard” mission houses, boarding hotels, and other “Skid Road” facilities in this area, will be eliminated as a blighting environmental factor in the area through a program of relocation and rehabilitation. This environmental influence is acting as a serious deterrent to private efforts at rehabilitation or the construction of new facilities in this strategically located portion of the city. The elimination of this blighting influence is therefore an assumption of the highest priority underlying the conclusions of this report (p. ii).

The report noted that not only was nearly one-fifth of the total space of the Pioneer Square “Project Area” used for hotels or other lodging for Skid Road residents, but that 625,000 square feet of existing building space was vacant, approximately 22 percent of the total space in the area.<sup>11</sup> In describing a number of public buildings (existing and planned) in the adjacent area, it also made reference to the thousands of office workers and government employees who worked at the edge of Pioneer Square, yet for the most part avoided the district. The study also noted that Pioneer Square formed a “logical link” between the business/financial district and proposed urban renewal activities at the waterfront.<sup>12</sup> Pioneer Square was thus seen as a likely site for intensive downtown core uses, or the relocation of central business district-fringe area uses. It was also seen as a prime location for increased tourism: it was close to the waterfront and ferry terminals, adjacent to the planned construction of

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<sup>11</sup> The physical space of the “Project Area” comprised 16 blocks in Pioneer Square at the southeastern edge of Seattle’s central business district.

<sup>12</sup> A public-private venture was planned that would reconstruct the waterfront between Piers 50 and 61, develop a new park, major aquarium, hotel, new ferry docks, boat marina, dockage space for historical ships, and mixed retail, office and restaurant space (Smith Report).

“ring-roads” encircling downtown, close to rail terminals, and was geographically linked to the city’s financial district.

Significantly, the report discounted the potential for much retail and service uses, suggesting there was little expectation of a sizeable residential population in the renovated Pioneer Square. This demonstrates how the vision of Pioneer Square promoted by local elites did not include a place for most existing low-income residents. Indeed, the report concluded with a suggestion that completion of the project should occur over a 10-year period, “due to the complex inter-relationship between the large scale clearance and relocation needed throughout the Project Area early in the Project execution period to create the climate for new investment” (p. 38). The report reinforced an earlier point that the primary impediment to redevelopment was posed by the current residents of Pioneer Square.

It is essential that project execution and planning programs call for the removal of the major blighting influence of the ‘Skid Road’ character of this portion of the downtown through a program of relocation and rehabilitation. In our opinion, this is an essential pre-requisite to the success of any attempt to foster new construction or sizeable amounts of rehabilitation of older space in this area (Smith Report, 1965, p. 38).<sup>13</sup>

### **“Blighted” Housing and the Takeover of Urban Space**

If one were searching for “blight,” they wouldn’t have to look far.

Housing conditions in low-cost hotels and lodging houses—concentrated

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<sup>13</sup> Despite this mention of the “relocation and rehabilitation” of local residents likely to be displaced by urban redevelopment, the report failed to elaborate on this point.

mainly in downtown and Pioneer Square—were so bad that city officials created a new building inspection ordinance in 1965. The statute would force owners of unsafe and unsanitary hotels to correct health and safety violations or face condemnation of their property. According to a local newspaper, a recent city inspection had found “some 250 hotels and lodging houses that are unfit for human habitation as outlined in the new minimum housing code” (Halpin, 1965, p. 5). However, as noted by the chairman of the city’s housing authority, the new inspection program would take years to implement given the lack of low-cost housing for residents who might be displaced from unsafe housing. Vigorous housing enforcement would also be hampered by the fact that the entire state had only one hotel inspector. Without doubt, the new inspection statute had some good intentions, though it was clearly belated given the long-standing deplorable condition of much of this housing. However, the city’s inability to adequately monitor compliance with the new code, and its failure to provide financial assistance to building owners, would have dire consequences for the downtown low-cost housing stock.

At the end of 1965, the Pioneer Square Businessmen’s Association announced plans to change its name to the Pioneer Square Association, while also expanding its efforts to preserve and restore local buildings in the district. In the short term, however, the condition of most Skid Road hotels remained poor. Thus, months after the state’s lone inspector,

Arthur A. Wood, found substandard conditions in numerous low-cost hotels, the status of most of the buildings remained unchanged. Local media was suddenly interested in the plight of this long-neglected housing as well. Describing the results of its own investigation, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer found that “fire exits still have doors that open inward. Wiring is still overloaded. Gas cooking facilities still lack pilot lights. Sleeping rooms little more than half the legal minimum size remain occupied” (Works, 1966, p. 28). Nonetheless, the paper reported that a vigorous inspection campaign by the city was having a positive, yet slight impact: many building owners were voluntarily making minor and major improvements to their buildings.

As feared, however, the overall effect of the hotel inspections had dramatic consequences for low-income residents. By 1966 the closure of numerous substandard buildings was reducing the available number of cheap housing units for low-income residents of Pioneer Square and downtown. While these impacts may have been unforeseen, an alternative interpretation is that they were part of a deliberate strategy. Given the close ties between public and private elites, recognition that many dilapidated hotels serving transients and the poor would be closed could have provided motivation for a stepped up enforcement campaign. Further, since the poor condition of downtown SROs and low-cost boarding houses was largely a non-issue until these properties became of

interest to redevelopment proponents, enforcement of building and fire codes violations seems directly related to elite claims on this urban space.

In 1966, yet another Pioneer Square study, this one by the John Graham and Company, Architects, estimated that a well-crafted redevelopment project could generate nearly \$90 million in private investment in 15 years. Local tax revenue was projected to increase dramatically when the project was completed (Coffman, 1967). Referring to the sweeping plan, the Central Association enthusiastically endorsed the proposal using by now familiar language. Citing the projected 850 percent increase in tax revenues to the city from the completed project, the group noted that transformation of the “run-down” Pioneer Square neighborhood would provide “a glimpse into the future when the Central City will be developed increasingly in superblocks...” (Central Association of Seattle, 1966a, p.1). Because Pioneer Square was currently a significant financial drain on the city due to demands for police, fire, health and other services, the Central Association urged that “removal of existing blight would be the key to new development” (p.1). Citing the need for demolition of numerous dilapidated buildings, the group also noted that “the concentration of sociological problems in the Skid Road section adds to the blighted conditions” (p. 2).

Later that year, a group of 50 leading architects and planners produced a study of several Seattle neighborhoods to assess what was right and wrong with the city. They examined several “problem areas” in an effort “to find ways of bringing back to these areas economic health and public joy” (American Institute of Architects, Seattle Chapter, 1966).<sup>14</sup> One suggestion was to connect a redeveloped Elliot Bay waterfront to several areas of downtown, including Pioneer Square, via landscaped pedestrian walkways and open spaces from Second Avenue to the waterfront. The proposal also called for construction of major parking and residential structures on the edges of the Pioneer Square area.

The architects group also resorted to discourse that conjured up stark images of urban decline. Noting the “rare link with the past” provided by Pioneer Square, the report warned that leaving “the area derelict threatens it and cheats us of the continuity that history provides in the development of a city.” Their report cited the loss of the old Seattle Hotel to demolition as an event that raised civic awareness of the unique attributes of the neighborhood. Echoing the themes of the 1959 public-private report on redeveloping Pioneer Square, they cited three key objectives in the neighborhood:

1. The restoration of the historic area;
2. The creation of a major downtown park;
3. The establishment of a new economic base.

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<sup>14</sup> The actual planning of such efforts would be left up to the City Planning Commission.

However, rather than calling for widespread demolition of existing structures, the group encouraged the preservation of most buildings in the area. This proposal from such a prominent group provided a crucial stamp of legitimacy to those seeking redevelopment in Pioneer Square through *preservation*. The report suggested this could best be achieved by recognizing historic buildings as a group, rather than as individual structures. They also noted that historic preservation needed to be reasonable in scope and size so as not to “artificially block economic development.” The increased tax revenue that would derive from restoration and new commercial use would likely encourage additional city support. While noting that their proposals would ideally occur entirely with private sector support, they suggested that “redevelopment can be organized through urban renewal” programs (American Institute of Architects, Seattle Chapter, 1966).

In fact, despite competing designs for Pioneer Square significant changes in the district were already occurring. In early 1966 a weekly newspaper, *The Argus*, noted the ongoing redevelopment in Pioneer Square—22 buildings under restoration—and suggested that the area was in much better shape than its popular Skid Road image. Nonetheless, the paper found that obstacles to urban revitalization remained in the form of a low-income, transient population. “There are still about 200 human derelicts in the area,” the paper reported, “but

not as many as are in the Bowery. In fact, it's more reminiscent of Manhattan's Third Avenue, except there are fewer panhandlers" (Pioneer Square, 1966, p. 4).

Despite ongoing Pioneer Square building restoration, new shops, and increased interest in historic preservation, much grander urban redevelopment schemes continued to attract the attention of elites. Mayor J.D. Braman described the 1966 preliminary proposal by the Urban Corporation for a massive Pioneer Square urban renewal project as "practical and feasible" (\$89 Million, 1966, p. 1). Pacific Northwest Bell President Clyde M. Blair, the Vice-Chair of the Central Association, also offered his endorsement of the urban renewal proposal. With the company planning to build a new headquarters in Seattle, there was speculation that the building might be located in the Pioneer Square redevelopment area, a point emphasized by Blair.

We at Pacific Northwest Bell are most interested in seeing the city go ahead with an urban renewal study for this section of Seattle...our long-range plans have not been completed, but when we are ready to build a headquarters building, we certainly will give serious consideration to this urban renewal area (\$89 Million, 1966, p. 1).

The Daily Journal of Commerce suggested that while many parcels in the urban renewal area would be condemned under the plan, numerous historic buildings would still be saved. According to the Urban Corporation study, 98 of 108 structures in the urban renewal area were considered "questionable" or "dilapidated," while a city fire department survey found 58 percent of buildings

“hazardous,” and another 22 percent in “poor” condition (\$89 Million, 1966, p. 3). Echoing a common theme of economic elites, the paper noted that “removal of blight in the Pioneer Square area would open the way for new uses.” These included new office buildings, “colorful restaurants,” restored historic buildings, and a major parking garage to serve a new federal building planned for construction just blocks away. While the paper noted that “human rehabilitation programs” for affected residents were a key element of the proposal, it suggested that most Pioneer Square residents would face relocation. The newspaper provided no elaboration.

The Central Association Board of Trustees soon recommended that the city apply for a federal urban renewal survey and planning grant as a first step toward redevelopment of Pioneer Square. In a resolution, the board stated “that a practical renewal program would stabilize the south end of the Central Business District” (Central Association of Seattle, 1966b, p. 1). Noting that critical problems needed to be addressed before demolition and redevelopment began, the Board suggested that “the social problems of human rehabilitation and relocation require extensive additional analysis” (pp. 1-2). While this represented acknowledgement of the critical social issues associated with any urban renewal plan, the business group failed to articulate how they felt the city should deal with the area’s low-income population.

More evidence of the deplorable living conditions facing Pioneer Square residents was offered by the Seattle Times. The paper noted that the area was so run down by the mid 1960s, that the National Real Estate board called it “a flophouse district with living conditions equal to the worst ever observed” (Coffman, 1967, p. 14). Despite this shameful situation, local architect and civic leader Victor Steinbrueck rejected proposals for the wholesale razing of the area. He instead suggested that any revitalization activities needed to take into account the basic needs of residents of Pioneer Square and Skid Road. “Human renewal is first, and then comes the rehabilitation of buildings,” he told the Seattle Times (Coffman, 1967, p. 14). His position, while laudable, was noteworthy since it was one of the few public suggestions that the Pioneer Square population had a legitimate claim to this urban space.

In a marked change from its position eight years earlier, in late 1967 the City Planning Commission voiced its support for the creation of a Pioneer Square Historic district that emphasized the preservation and restoration of most buildings in the district. Reflecting the influence of local architects, the staff report emphasized the importance of preserving Pioneer Square amidst sweeping changes occurring downtown. This position offered a significant challenge to the Central Association and those promoting demolition and urban renewal projects in the district. Preservation could produce “an interesting and economically viable adjunct to downtown, and also (serve) as an opportunity for

the citizen to experience the character and scale of a virile era of Seattle's youth," the report noted (Pioneer Square, 1967, p. 16).

As private investment in Pioneer Square continued, retail and businesses catering to higher income households were beginning to appear in the remodeled district. For example, the Dunbar Furniture Corp. of Indiana opened a showroom in the former Union Trust Building.<sup>15</sup> The link between Seattle and other urban historic restoration efforts was made explicit at the opening of the furniture store. The president of the Dunbar firm was on hand in Seattle to celebrate an open house at the showroom. He likened the Pioneer Square project to the Jackson Square area of San Francisco, which had undergone extensive historic preservation and conversion efforts in recent years. Local media offered its support for these changes, lauding the initial wave of urban pioneers in the gentrification process. As noted by the Seattle Times, San Francisco's Jackson Square had become an "in place for interior decorators and designers, artists, and furniture showrooms. Seattle is already developing a similar colony in the Pioneer Square area" (Staples, 1967, p. 33). The paper reported that local art galleries, antique stores, and interior decorator studios were among the new tenants in several recently renovated historic buildings.

By mid-1967, in addition to prior renewal activities in the area, some 30 renovation projects were underway on existing buildings. While members of the

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<sup>15</sup> The move to preserve and restore historic buildings was also claiming residential properties, as the Baranof Hotel, built in 1910, was soon slated for renovation into office use.

Pioneer Square Association sought to gain federal survey and planning funds and include Pioneer Square within the city's urban renewal boundaries, Steinbrueck remained a voice of concern for residents of the district. "Urban renewal is a fine kind of thought, but the rehabilitation of people is the answer," he told the Seattle Times. He was especially wary of plans to reshape First Avenue into a more upscale retail and office district. He noted that the area had "about 450 itinerants along with pawn shops, cheap furniture stores and surplus-clothing outlets...if these are wiped out, where do the people move to and where does a guy go who wants to find a pawn shop?" (Coffman, 1967, p. 14).

After conducting a city-sponsored survey of the area, the Pioneer Square Advisory Committee suggested in early 1967 that a redevelopment project in the area should encourage the establishment of a "lively, 24-hour-a-day community" (Moody, 1967, p. 17). Citing widespread urban blight and decay, the group advocated the creation of housing and facilities for recreational activities similar to those in other "sophisticated" urban settings. The committee also urged the use of federal urban renewal funds for the project, noting the restoration efforts already undertaken by the private sector. Significantly, aside from encouraging private enterprise, the advisory committee suggested that the specialized needs of local residents—housing, jobs, and health care—should be addressed. The City Council Planning Committee endorsed redevelopment plans for Pioneer Square, recommending that the city

apply for a \$700,000 federal planning and survey grant. During its January meeting the committee also noted its intent to address housing conditions and needs among Skid Road residents (Seattle Planning and Redevelopment Council, 1967). Although the Pioneer Square aspect of Seattle's urban renewal project was in limbo for months following federal fund eligibility revisions, city leaders continued with plans for establishing the area as a historic district (Coffman, 1968).

### **Commercial Investment and Historic Preservation**

While no formal preservation protections had been enacted for Pioneer Square, by the end of the 1960s, a critical threshold of commercial activity had been reached. By now a range of public projects had been completed in the district indicating that the process of redevelopment and gentrification was well underway. These included the following:

- a new pedestrian plaza at Second Avenue and Yesler;
- a connection on Columbia Street to the Alaskan Way Viaduct, providing direct access from the central business district;
- the restoration of buildings on both sides of a full block of Occidental Avenue, providing space for art galleries, furniture outlets, antique shops, and interior decorators. Local merchants had also raised funds for the planting of a median strip of trees down the center of Occidental Avenue;
- the restoration of the Metropole Building at Second and Yesler for office and retail uses;

- the restoration of the former (residential) Baranof Hotel at the corner of Yesler and Alaskan Way for the new offices of the Pacific Banker and Business magazine

With a commitment to renovation and redevelopment, merchants and city officials next agreed on the need to move forcefully and “clean up” Pioneer Square. Local business owners complained to Mayor Floyd Miller that crime was so rampant in the district, that tourists and residents avoided the area. Citing an alleged increase in violent crime in the area, one local merchant told the Seattle Times that “the scum of the earth are roaming the streets down there all night long” (Suffia, 1969, p. 32). The intensity of such rhetoric belies the fact that local merchants and businesses appeared to be prospering. While the newspaper found others who disputed that crime was out of control, the city was too heavily invested in the newly created image of Pioneer Square to ignore the negative publicity. The protests by business owners drew an immediate response from the city’s police chief, who vowed to increase police patrols in the district. As will be seen, a merchant-initiated police crackdown on public drunkenness and other “social problems” in the area would intensify in later years.

Interest in formal historic preservation protections for Pioneer Square was gaining strength. Local architect Ralph Anderson was cited by a local magazine as a leader in the preservation and restoration of historic buildings in the district, many of which had been rented to “eager tenants.” Anderson began a

campaign to preserve and restore the area by rehabilitating many of the historic buildings in the district. He is often credited with initiating this process by moving his own architectural firm into Pioneer Square, while also encouraging friends and associates to invest in other buildings. As a result, a number of office buildings and retail stores now stood “where only slums had existed before” (Stenson, 1970, p. 10). The momentum for historic preservation helped stem the ongoing demolition of old neglected and abandoned buildings in the area, many of which had been torn down for parking lots. This later trend was accelerating, leaving little time to ensure the preservation of the area before most of the significant buildings were lost, according to preservation activists. While many of the destroyed buildings in Pioneer Square were considered architectural jewels, there was apparently little love lost for the demise of low-cost hotels and other establishments serving the area’s poor and homeless.

Dozens of flophouses in and around Pioneer Square have closed. Only a handful of the cheap hotels remain...the resident population of the area has dropped from several thousand to a few hundred. Numerous low life taverns and cafes have closed up. At the same time, quality eateries like the Brasserie Pittsburg have opened up (Stenson, 1970, p. 34).

According to the Seattle Times, the City Planning Commission and city council faced a decision on whether to create a historic district in Pioneer Square, “or allow its destruction by bulldozer and iron ball” (Hutchison, 1969a, p. 9). The Pioneer Square Association warned that “the wholesale destruction of many important buildings” in the district was imminent without swift action by the

city (Lane, 1969). The designation of Pioneer Square as an historic district would not only allow some federal funds to be used for preservation activities, but it would also prohibit destruction of more historic buildings via urban renewal. Despite intense lobbying for the proposal, in May 1969 the Planning Commission delayed a decision on the issue, referring for further study the seventh draft proposal to designate the area as a historic district (Hutchison, 1969b).

The proposal to establish a historic preservation district in Pioneer Square was initially rejected after strong opposition by the Central Association, along with some realtors and contractors. The group, made up mostly of downtown property owners and businessmen, “objected to any law preventing a property owner from demolishing his building if he deemed such action necessary” (Stenson, 1970, p. 11). The proposed ordinance would create a Pioneer Square Historic District, require city approval to demolish, remodel or build on the outside of any building in the district, and require that the Planning Commission, with advice from a new Historic Preservation Board, recommend to the city council any structural changes in the district. Supporters viewed this provision as a way to ensure that any building renovations maintained the architectural integrity of the area. The Planning Commission would also make recommendations on street lighting, paving and benches in the area, as well as whether the city should make repairs to neglected buildings (Schwartz, 1970c).

However, Central Association trustee James H. Todd suggested the historic preservation proposal established a “dangerous precedent” allowing the city to intrude into private property rights. The group thus claimed that the ordinance could permanently deny property owners the right to develop their property (Robinson, 1969). Mechlin Moore, Executive Vice-President of the group, claimed the proposal would prevent some property owners from reaping an expected financial windfall.

Pioneer Square is a commercial area that has been in transition. Some owners bought with a potential value in mind and planned to demolish and rebuild. The ordinance would decrease the land’s potential value (Hutchison, 1970, p. B1).

As the city council prepared to vote in the spring of 1970 on the eighth version of an historic preservation ordinance, divisions among local business owners and the Central Association deepened. Bill Speidel, a local historian who led underground tours of old Seattle, accused the powerful business group of seeking to turn Pioneer Square into a “colony for downtown, a place for cheap parking lots and warehouses” (Schwartz, 1970a, p. 1). Importantly, the business association was not opposed to the idea of historic preservation per se, but instead thought such efforts should occur without city regulation. The group also wanted to ensure that the city provided subsidies to property owners to help carry out restoration activities if any ordinance was enacted, or that the city itself purchased local properties (Lane, 1969). Referring to efforts to obtain federal urban renewal and park funds for use in Pioneer Square, Mayor Wes

Uhlman, urged support for the ordinance. “All these longer range steps will come to naught if the character of this area...is destroyed by indiscriminate demolition and intensive new construction or remodeling of buildings in the near future” (Hutchison, 1970, p. B1).

After months of lobbying and negotiations, on April 20, 1970, the city council unanimously approved an ordinance to create a Pioneer Square Historic District (Council Creates, 1970).<sup>16</sup> While the city rejected the Central Association’s attempts to subsidize all renovation activities under the ordinance, certain concessions to property owners were contained in the final measure. At the urging of Mayor Wes Uhlman, the city agreed it would respond within four months on any proposed renovation or remodeling request (the previous ordinance language gave the city eight months). Also, the city’s recommendations would be void if owners could prove that renovation would cause “undue and unnecessary hardship” to their business (Schwartz, 1970c).<sup>17</sup> Although the Central Association hinted that they might file suit to prevent the ordinance from taking effect—questioning the legality of the measure and claiming that the proposed district boundaries were outside of what was “old” Seattle—the group ultimately accepted the vote.

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<sup>16</sup> The proposal was based in part on Victor Steinbrueck’s 1954 architectural history study of the area.

<sup>17</sup> The newly created historic district boundaries were Columbia Street on the north, a line between First and Second Avenues and between Occidental and Second Avenue on the east, a line one-half block south of Jackson Street on the south, and Western Avenue on the west.

By now, renovation activities had brought more decorators, antique stores and new, expensive restaurants to Pioneer Square. Relatively low rents also helped attract lawyers, government offices, and other businesses to the suddenly chic neighborhood (Schwartz, 1970b). With the newly designated historic protections approved, the transformation and gentrification of Pioneer Square was in full swing.

### **Social Services**

As a new decade dawned, for the first time the special needs of local Pioneer Square residents were addressed in a serious and public manner. A local social service group proposed the development of a Neighborhood Social Service Center to coordinate the delivery of key public and private social services to the Pioneer Square district of Seattle's Model Cities Neighborhood. The project was designed to integrate local residents into a comprehensive state employment counseling, training, and job placement service. The project was especially needed, since the "Skid Road" area "has been in a state of transition for the past few years. In particular, the expansion of the city's central business district had "led to changing land use patterns in Skid Road and growing social dislocation for the area's residents" (Expansion grant application for vocational rehabilitation component of a neighborhood social service center, 1970, p. 2). Not only were living conditions in the area growing worse, but increased building code enforcement by city inspectors had also resulted in the closure of many older residential buildings. The common problems of the largely indigent

population helped define the area. According to the city-authored report, in Pioneer Square:

- The population was “highly transient,” numbering between 5,000-6,000;
- Most residents were older, single men—94 percent were male, with an average age of 43 years;
- A high percentage of residents were also elderly or disabled;
- Those who were employed were mostly seasonal workers or casual labor—thus unemployment in the district was high. There were also a growing number of young untrained and unemployed workers living in the neighborhood;
- Alcoholism, malnutrition and incidences of mental illness were common.

In general, the report found that extreme poverty, substandard housing, and high rates of crimes and other social problems combined to have a profoundly negative impact on local residents.

Most persons in Skid Road need vocation rehabilitation and other social services badly. Interrelated problems such as poor education, ill health, physical disabilities, and psychological disturbances separate these persons from stable employment (p. 3).

In response to conditions in the area, the Model City program proposed a project to improve social service delivery in the Skid Road area via greater planning and implementation. The project would not provide direct services, but instead create a one-stop intake and referral center to help meet the range of client needs without forcing them to go outside this system. The proposal

called for the creation of a Skid Road Community Council to conduct research and planning of a multi-purpose social service delivery system. The new project would rely heavily on citizen-resident involvement in planning, implementation and service coordination. A key goal of the plan was to ensure clients received sufficient services to “promote the development of financially, psychologically, and socially independent people” (Pioneer Square Rehabilitation, 1970, p. 3).

This would entail the following:

- Increasing individual motivation;
- Re-instilling self respect;
- Generating realistic aspirations;
- Developing the “commitment of clients to independence through employment or the securing of a sound financial base” (p. 3).

A key goal of the project was the vocational rehabilitation of transients and seasonally employed men in Pioneer Square and the “Skid Road” area. Noting that numerous public and private agencies and individuals held their own conception of what should be done for the area, the President of the SRCC, Rev. James Reynolds, articulated a different vision and function for the agency. Rather than seeking to *help* local residents, the council would instead act as a “listening post” for the neighborhood, and “serve an advocate role for the people and groups of the area.” Such a role was viewed as the best method to facilitate the coordination of services, and improve the economic self-sufficiency of local residents (Pioneer Square Rehabilitation, Bylaws, 1970).

A survey of local residents done by the Model Cities program organization highlights the distinctly different view of Skid Road held by the agency. Rejecting the stereotypical notion of local residents as the “undeserving” poor, they noted instead that

Skid Road is comprised of people with a broad range of skills, knowledge, experience, sensitivity and perception. The system which allows citizen input for program formation can only serve to bring these people back into the mainstream of society (Pioneer Square Rehabilitation, Report on Survey of Seattle’s Skid Road Residents, 1970, p. 1).

The group thus sought to place local residents on the newly formed SRCC, ensure that the Neighborhood Social Service Center Advisory Committee was comprised of local residents, and utilize the recently-completed survey of residents for initial planning of the project.

### **Transformation in the “Historic District”: 1970-1990**

By the early 1970s, a significant change was apparent in Pioneer Square. The Seattle Times found that many local residents were surprised when confronted by Pioneer Square’s new “elegance that sometimes surpasses the sophisticated shop areas further uptown...now elegant shops and restaurants are moving into renovated old buildings and changing the character of the area (Dale, 1972, p. 2). Indeed, more than 20 new businesses opened in Pioneer Square during 1971, with roughly the same amount slated to open in the first part of 1972. A string of art galleries and antique stores, designer showrooms, professional offices, restaurants and other businesses now graced formally abandoned

hotels and storefronts (Dale, 1972b). Although most hotels and boardinghouses in the district were closed or abandoned, the area was still a magnet for retirees and other marginalized workers who formally lived in the area.<sup>18</sup> Redevelopment in Pioneer Square had a profound impact on the district. A 1972 newspaper account found that “suburbanites are popping into the city on weekends to poke around in an area containing the highest concentration of art galleries, antique shops and novelty stores of anywhere in the state” (Clever, 1972, p. A3). While many local merchants and businesses were content with the scope of redevelopment, they were also worried about the impact on Pioneer Square of the Kingdome sports stadium, slated for construction just blocks away. The King County Design Commission, for example, noted that the likely effect of the stadium would be to “increase pressure for demolition of marginal buildings in favor of parking lots for interim use” (Clever, 1972, p. A3).

Aside from intensive commercial investment and support from local government for historic preservation and redevelopment, other significant changes were sweeping the greater Skid Road area. In particular, increased enforcement of building and fire codes radically changed the housing market for low-income residents. An arson fire at the downtown Ozark Hotel on March 20, 1970 killed 20 tenants of the low-rent apartment building. Ironically, as part of the city’s stepped-up hotel inspection campaign, the Fire Department had inspected the

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<sup>18</sup> According to the Seattle Times, redevelopment had also produced sharply higher rents for commercial space (Dale, 1972b).

building just hours before the deadly blaze. In the wake of the fire, the city quickly enacted stricter building codes and fire-prevention rules (Wyne & Corsaletti, 1970; Norton, 1970; Suffia, 1970; Tougher Fire-Prevention, 1970).

The Seattle Times reported that between January 1970 and January 1972, city code enforcement in the larger “Skid Road” area led to the closure of 40 hotels and buildings with 2,732 housing units, while another 532 housing units in 21 hotels were permanently lost to demolition. As a result, a majority of former “Skid Road” residents had been forced into other neighborhoods in search of cheap housing. Moreover, in Census Tract 92 (the area roughly comprising Pioneer Square) 61 hotels and apartment buildings with nearly 3,000 dwelling/housing units were demolished or vacated between 1965 and January 1972 (Ruppert, 1972). In a relatively short period, the majority of private housing in Pioneer Square was permanently lost, most of it low-cost units serving the area’s transients and low-income residents. Within a few years, the vast majority of beds in the district would be found in missions, shelters and other settings outside of apartments and boarding houses.

Not surprisingly, a 1972 report by the Skid Road Community Council found that the biggest issue facing the “Skid Road” community was shelter and the lack of low-cost housing. The group cited increased fire code enforcement since the late 1960s as responsible for most hotel closures in the area. As numerous hotel and apartment owners chose not to make repairs to bring buildings up to

code, many former residents were forced to relocate outside the Pioneer Square neighborhood. Reflecting the low socioeconomic status of the area, most remaining residents were dependent on free food and meals provided by local food banks, missions and private charities. While many Pioneer Square residents were unable to work due to retirement or disabilities, the study found that many others were interested in finding employment (Skid Road Community Council, 1972).<sup>19</sup> However, local job opportunities had not improved in recent years, leaving many able-bodied residents without steady work.

The concerns of the local population remained of little concern to many others however. Describing an array of changes in the neighborhood, a 1973 report in the Argus newspaper suggested that for the first time in nearly 70 years, “Pioneer Square is knocking at the door of respectability” (Can They, 1973, p. 1). The paper cited strong local leadership and public support as having made a significant impact on this “rejuvenating” area. Approximately \$1 million in federal aid, \$250,000 in city funds, and the designation of the area as an historic district had led to the addition of period street lights, cobblestone streets, a pedestrian mall, expanded park areas, as well as improvements in social services. Demand for renovated office and retail space was brisk and private investment remained strong. The only problem of significance, according to the paper, was the inability to attract a sizeable middle-class residential population to the district.

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<sup>19</sup> This finding was based on the number of people signing up daily at public and private job referral and placement offices in the neighborhood.

So the area has clearly arrived. Outside the Grand Central this summer there are probably more people than at any time since the anti-Chinese riots there in the 1860s. Within one block of Occidental Park, three new underground restaurants are under construction along with an arcade of 11 shops underneath Das Gasthaus restaurant. In 1972 building permits rose in value in Pioneer Square by a mammoth 800 percent, while in the rest of the city there was a 6 percent decline (p. 4).

Support among city officials for redevelopment of the district while preserving historic buildings remained strong. In an effort to protect Pioneer Square and the International District from unwanted development related to the nearby Kingdome, in August 1973, the city council established special review districts for the two areas. The legislation would ban some anticipated commercial activities in the area (such as new bars or fast food restaurants, parking lots) by allowing the city to control land use changes and the external remodeling of buildings (McCarten, 1973). The Skid Road Community Council remained concerned about growth in the area and pressures to demolish older, run-down buildings. Despite the loss of thousands of housing units, staff member Ric Locke emphasized the need to preserve the residential characteristic of the district. "I'm idealistic enough to think Skid Roaders and business can work side by side," he told the Seattle Post Intelligencer. "But planners have to recognize residents' unique nature and the role they've played in the area's history. If we don't do that we'll have lost somehow" (Temple, 1973, p. F5).

The city council voted in February 1974 to double the size of the Pioneer Square Historic District, while also extending a ban on building demolitions or

unapproved remodeling (Pioneer Square, 1974).<sup>20</sup> In an effort to stem the demolition of old and historic buildings, the council adopted a new minimum-maintenance ordinance in early 1974. While not specifically targeting the demolition and loss of low-cost housing, the measure was indirectly aimed at downtown landlords, many of whom lived outside Seattle and failed to maintain their buildings.<sup>21</sup> Whereas the city had previously given a “customary order to tear the structures down if they fail to meet city codes,” the new law required the preservation and maintenance of all buildings in the historic district (Lane, 1974a, p. C2). The measure was aimed primarily at code violations and hazards related to weak foundation, roofs, chimneys, ceilings, and wiring and plumbing systems. Failure to comply with the law would result in a \$500 fine and/or six months in jail.

Meanwhile, enforcement of the city’s other building codes—especially the Ozark Fire Code—was clearly exacerbating the low-income housing crisis. City council member Frank Soderling, chair of the council’s housing committee, suggested that the city was partly to blame for the ongoing loss of low-cost housing due to its policy *non-decisions*. He argued that by failing to provide any form of assistance to building owners to repair their buildings and bring them up to code, many low-cost downtown housing units had been demolished in

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<sup>20</sup> With the 20-acre expansion, the new boundaries of the Historic District were the Alaskan Way waterfront to the west, S. King Street to the south, 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. S. to the east, and Columbia Street to the north.

<sup>21</sup> Approximately one-half of the Pioneer Square real estate was owned by two families who, according to the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, “have allowed their buildings to deteriorate and refused to participate in the spirit of renewal” (Clever, 1972, p. A3).

recent years (Lane, 1974b). Thus, in spite of massive downtown housing loss since 1960, and a stated policy to encourage central city living by low- and moderate-income groups, the city appeared to be adopting a housing policy of benign neglect. Bruce Zielsdorf, the executive director of the Skid Road Community Council, also criticized city government for failing to take proactive measures and help prevent the further deterioration of downtown low-cost housing units. He claimed the city was moving too slow to prevent further assaults on the low-cost downtown housing stock. He suggested a way of life was quickly disappearing, as the plight of the area's traditional residents fell on deaf ears. Zielsdorf warned prophetically, "It probably won't become visible to the public until it's too late, until the cost to reverse it has become too great" (Ruppert, 1975, p. B2).

Despite the massive loss of housing for transients and low-income groups, by the mid-1970s city officials were proclaiming historic preservation efforts a resounding success. Citing increased construction permit activity, as well as much higher property values, Pioneer Square was cited as "one of the most desirable business locations in the city. It is also regaining its stature as an entertainment center, with restaurants, theaters and taverns catering to almost every taste" (Seattle-King County Conventions & Visitors Bureau, 1976, p. 25). While lauding the public-private partnership that had created "a crossroads and a melting pot for people of all ages and lifestyles" (p. 25), the city was silent on the human cost of redevelopment efforts. That task seemingly fell on the

shoulders of local social workers and service providers, and community advocates.

In spite of a decidedly hostile public climate toward low-income residents, service providers actually made significant strides in providing support for this population. While its primary focus was on other neighborhoods, the Seattle Model City Program was also involved in several projects in Pioneer Square and Skid Road (Model City Project, 1975):

- It renovated, staffed, and equipped the Pioneer Square Health Station between August 1971 and December 1974. The project served nearly 4,000 clients during this period (with over 12,000 individual visits)<sup>22</sup>;
- It helped renovate the Morrison Hotel for use as a temporary housing and shelter facility for 75 Skid Road residents. The building was operated by the Seattle Housing Authority;
- It provided funding (along with Forward Thrust municipal bonds and private monies) for the rehabilitation and expansion of Pioneer Square Park;
- It helped fund “upgrading” in Pioneer Square: tree planing, sidewalk, street, and alley paving, and the installation of historic motif street lights;
- It assisted in the creation of a pedestrian mall adjacent to Occidental Park.

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<sup>22</sup> Many of the residents reported that they had not received any medical care for 20 years.

In addition, the Model Cities program had utilized citizen participation from Skid Road residents to develop its health and vocational programs, mirroring the efforts of the Skid Road Community Council (Model City Project, 1975).

While increased commercial investment in Pioneer Square was being touted as a positive benefit for the city, the price of prosperity was starting to impact some local shop owners as well. Citing the “subtle benefits” of redevelopment and the newly built Kingdome, the King County Assessor announced that land value assessments in Pioneer Square—the first in three years—would increase between 300-400 percent in 1977 (Nalder, 1976). Mayor Uhlman suggested that such a sharp rise in property taxes could force some Pioneer Square merchants to move. He also noted that between 1966 and 1973, property values in the area had risen 450 percent, and questioned another significant increase so soon (Dunsire, 1976).

### **“Blaming the Victim”: The Push for Social Control**

Increased commercial investment and profits stemming from redevelopment posed other problems. Throughout the 1970s local merchants demanded an increased police presence in Pioneer Square to deal more forcefully with public drinking and aggressive panhandlers. The elimination of statutes criminalizing public inebriation was seen by some as a key factor in the alleged increase in public drinking in the district. Clearly, the continued presence of such activities was at odds with public and private efforts to modernize both the image and physical environment of the district. Responding to complaints by

merchants and tourists, a police crackdown on public drinking, panhandling and other violations resulted in more than 70 arrests in Pioneer Square during the last week of August 1975. The Seattle Times described these efforts as an attempt “to put the boot to some of the bums” in the district (Hinterberger, 1975, p. 1). The paper later noted that “police officers posing as bums made several arrests” (Birkland, 1975, p. A15).

Two years later Pioneer Square merchants complained to a local reporter that “the indigent population may be discouraging business” (Skid, Road, 1977, p. 5). Despite concerns that redevelopment was slowing, the Seattle Sun found that such efforts had already had a negative impact on many residents. As hotels and rooming houses were renovated into galleries, offices, and restaurants, “the older residents, often pensioners, are being forced out” to other low-cost neighborhoods (p. 5). In spite of what many viewed as successful redevelopment initiatives, by the late 1970s significant social problems remained to be dealt with in the eyes of merchants and public officials.

The Seattle Sun suggested that some residents were contributing to a feeling of “definite insecurity” in the area (Merchants Plot, 1977, p. 3). While numerous shopkeepers were intent on evicting or relocating all of the local residents, other inhabitants posed a more immediate threat. The paper reported that muggings, robberies, and violent attacks were becoming common around the first of each month, when public assistance checks were issued to retirees and public

assistance recipients. Local merchants appeared to be in agreement that over the last two years the area had been faced with both a safety problem related to this violence, and a nuisance problem posed by panhandlers, public drinking and other “anti-social” activities. Many shopkeepers were beginning to vocalize their grievances at such behavior with local elected officials (Merchants Plot, 1977). Still, others in the community were in agreement that the larger obstacle to redevelopment was the inability to increase the local residential population. Thus city officials planned “with both federal and private money, to try to mold Pioneer Square into a real neighborhood—not only one of transients, low-income working people, pensioners and winos, but of moderate, middle-income, and upper-income residents” (Merchants Plot, 1977, p. 3).

Despite such plans, the impact of gentrification continued to fall on Pioneer Square residents. The owners of the Travelers Hotel served eviction notices in late 1977 to approximately 50 low-income renters. The owners planned to renovate part of the building into a small number of town-homes for upper-income tenants in order to make more money. The Seattle Sun noted that this particular project dramatized an ongoing dilemma in the district: “how to encourage middle- and upper-income housing construction in Pioneer Square without forcing out the traditional residents—the low-income, the transient and the inebriated” (Rich Vs., 1977, p. 3). A recent report from the Mayor’s Task Force on Pioneer Square had explicitly encouraged residential development for middle- and upper-income households, while also calling for the maintenance of

some 1,000 existing low-cost rooms and housing units in the area. However, by this point nearly all of this “low-cost” housing was either in shelters or missions; only two SRO hotels continued to operate in Pioneer Square as private housing.

The committee was asked to provide the mayor’s office with recommendations related to housing and social service needs for downtown residential neighborhoods. During a 1978 meeting, the task force noted that larger economic forces were having a negative effect on low-income central city residents. In particular, public and private redevelopment efforts, like those in Pioneer Square, were creating upward pressures on real estate and in turn forcing low-income households out of the area. The group found that these activities

have resulted in actual reduction of low-income housing units. Concurrent increases in land and housing values over the past few years have led to a turnover of low-income units into high and moderate income units, and increased rents in remaining low income units (Mayor’s Task Force on Urban Core Neighborhoods, Meeting Minutes, April 4, 1978).

Public statements to the contrary, local merchants and the private sector continued to target low-income Pioneer Square residents. By 1980, the Seattle Times noted an ongoing conflict in Pioneer Square “between those who want the area ‘sanitized’ and those who want drunken indigents left alone on what was their home ground no so long ago—and still is” (Mahoney, 1980, p. F14). Thus

10 years after historic protections were granted, Pioneer Square was both “polished and raw, entertaining and appalling, renovated and, unfortunately, with buildings owned by a couple of landlords still deteriorating” (p. F14). Later that year, two separate agencies—the Pioneer Square Historic Preservation Board and the Special Review District Board—passed a unanimous resolution calling on the city to increase police patrols in the district. Both groups suggested the area was beset by an “increasingly deplorable, ugly and dangerous situation” from “drunks, passed out and diseased persons” in parts of Pioneer Square. Although policing efforts did exist, the two groups suggested they were inconsistent and ineffective for what was at stake. “Both the city and private citizens, property and business owners, have invested too much in Pioneer Square to warrant its neglect,” they claimed (Sweeney, 1980, p. A2).

Public drinking and intoxication in the district was so bad, according to local merchants, that by mid-1981 they unanimously recommended expedited public hearings on a proposed downtown ban on over the counter sales of fortified wine. While recognizing that such a measure “will not cure alcoholism” among Pioneer Square’s “street alcoholic population,” the Pioneer Square Community Council nonetheless pressed local officials for the ban (Letter to City Council, 1981). In fact, Arthur Skolnik, Executive Director of the association, suggested that the ordinance would actually have more positive benefits for local shopkeepers.

We do expect, however, that by removing the source, two things will happen, first this population will be dispersed, and secondly, the illegal sale of fortified wine to individuals who are already intoxicated, would most likely be reduced drastically (Letter to City Council, 1981).

City government was under increasing pressure to deal more forcefully with the alleged breakdown of social order in Pioneer Square. In a letter to Mayor Charles Royer, Robert M. Walsh detailed a host of incidents witnessed by employees of his Pioneer Square firm in a three-week span. These included being accosted and threatened, being “slobbered on” by drunks and witnessing “derelicts” urinating or vomiting on their premises. Walsh alleged that unlike in past years when “harmless individuals” (alcoholics) created most of the area’s problems, the current source of trouble was “coming from area residents who seem to be more serious with their threats.” While lauding the efforts of the police, especially the detox wagon, Walsh suggested that Pioneer Square was “no longer a nice place in which to carry on business.”

The Seattle-King County Convention Bureau is worried. Merchants in Pioneer Square are worried. I am sure the Mayor’s office is worried. But being worried is not enough, we need action....Perhaps your hands are tied. I realize the laws of this land have not helped the situation. But all the excuses in the world, no matter how valid they may be will do no good, when historic Pioneer Square becomes a ghost town. And while that is happening, a lot more people are going to get hurt. (Letter to Mayor Royer, 1981).

While no public record exists of the mayor's response to this letter, given the continued hostility toward area residents, the concerns of Pioneer Square merchants no doubt caught the attention of city officials.

After more than 10 years as an officially designated National Historic District, preservation and redevelopment activities had produced numerous retail and private commercial sites in Pioneer Square. By the early 1980s, changes in the residential housing market were also becoming a significant factor in the transformation of the neighborhood. More than 100 new market rate residential units were expected during 1983 via building renovation projects, including housing in the Olympia Block Project (Pioneer Square Preservation Board, 1983). This area had included the residential Olympic Hotel, which was destroyed in 1972 due to neglect and physical deterioration of the building. Another former housing source for low-income residents, the Luck Hotel at 213 First Avenue, was also undergoing renovation into the Fire House Antiques building with eight residential units, along with retail and commercial space.

Restoration of the Seattle Quilt Building (316 First Avenue South) would soon bring 22 market rate housing units on line. However, rents at the building were slated to be drastically higher than median rents in the neighborhood, reflecting the ongoing *residential* gentrification that was now occurring in Pioneer Square. Rent for small one bedroom units would be \$425, compared to median rents of approximately \$125 in Census Tract 91 (adjusted for inflation); penthouse

apartments would rent for \$850 a month. The story was the same at the 80 South Jackson Building, where rents for 24 private apartments would range from \$330 to \$830 a month (Pioneer Square Preservation Board, 1983).

The 1981 creation of federal investment tax credits for historic preservation, which provided investors accelerated depreciation on their property, brought a new wave of commercial and housing investment in Pioneer Square (Crowley, 1984; Lane, 1984). Yet most new private housing in the district was aimed at upper-income households. In 1984, for example, the 16-unit Merrill Place Apartments rented for between \$770 and \$1,330 per month.<sup>23</sup> A 1987 Seattle Times article noted that of the 150 new and renovated housing units in Pioneer Square, rents ranged from \$500 to \$2,000 monthly (Hayes, 1987). Two young professionals who worked out of their expansive apartment with views of Elliot Bay told the newspaper what lured them to in-city living.

We both like the excitement and energy of living downtown....People ask me if I am scared, but I'm not. It's fun to be able to walk out your door and have restaurants, shops and everything right there. It's a kick, it really is (Hayes, 1987, p. E1).

### **Conclusion**

Despite the glow of new investment, higher profits and upscale housing, by 1990 the problem of homelessness and "aggressive" street life emerged as a

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<sup>23</sup> Although the city created some affordable housing in Pioneer Square starting in the mid-1980s, much of it was targeted at senior citizens. Further, the number of new subsidized units paled in comparison to the massive loss of low-cost housing in prior decades (Anderson, 1982; Crowley, 1984).

major social problem in Pioneer Square. A series of violent incidents in 1988, including the murders of two Pioneer Square workers, raised issues of public safety to new heights (Haberstroh, 1989). The district was clearly taking on more than its fair share of the homeless issue: four homeless shelters and social service centers were located in Pioneer Square, with another three in adjacent neighborhoods. Some civic leaders and merchants had long suggested that these facilities served as a magnet for homeless individuals and those with drug or alcohol problems (Lilly, 1990; Crowley, 1984). With the city's homeless population expanding as a result of reduced casual labor, the deinstitutionalization of mental health patients and a national economic recession, the Pioneer Square Preservation Board had forced the city to adopt a moratorium on locating additional social service operations in the district (Lilly, 1990).

Like other large urban centers, public and private agencies struggled to find compassionate social service solutions to the myriad of problems tied to the broad issue of homelessness. Yet for the Pacific Northwest Executive magazine, one aspect of this problem was largely being ignored.

The sociological dimensions of this massive waste of human resources has been studied, probed, and documented, but the flip side of the problem—the economic losses traceable to homelessness—hasn't gotten the same attention. Putting the hidden economic costs of the problem on the table alongside the more obvious social ones certainly complicates the issue and may sound crass or heartless (Roth, 1990, p. 2).

The magazine interviewed Pioneer Square landlords who lamented the fact that property values—and hence rents—were lower in the district than in buildings with similar amenities in other parts of downtown. The visible presence of homeless people was cited as the primary cause of this phenomenon. While the magazine admitted “putting a price tag on this image problem is next to impossible” (Roth, 1990, p. 5), it nonetheless sought to make a direct link between homelessness and lost business activity. Vacancy rates were alleged to be significantly higher in Pioneer Square, and many merchants voiced anonymous threats to leave the area unless police protection was noticeably increased.

Scores of attorneys, accountants, and consultants have left because, as one property manager put it, “Clients complained that they just didn’t want to come down because they didn’t want to be corralled by street people.” One giant midtown law firm reported that the number of job applications it receives from Pioneer Square attorneys is much higher than the number from other parts of town, and that almost all the job-seekers say they feel that they must get away from the Pioneer Square street scene to keep clients, staff, and a sense of personal safety (p. 5).

More troubling for civic leaders, the article noted that tourism and convention business was also threatened by the rise of visible homelessness in the central city. “Promoters of Seattle’s \$250-million-a-year convention industry concede that they must lead visiting convention planners on a circuitous route through Pioneer Square and the Pike Place Market, trying to minimize panhandling incidents and the number of times they have to step over prone bodies on the sidewalks” (Roth, 1990, p. 6).

This rhetoric and the use of such “urban survival” tactics served to further define the homeless population and Pioneer Square low-income residents by their alleged pathologies. It did little to come to grips with the underlying tensions in the area, nor the inherent contradictions of city policies which sought to provide social services for the poor while also promoting urban revitalization in the district. Efforts to incorporate low-income groups into redevelopment activities in Pioneer Square were never a major aspect of these initiatives. With police and downtown merchants advocating an iron fist approach to the increasingly visible street populations, by the late 1980s city officials had reacted in an expected manner. Aggressive panhandling laws were passed, as well as a long-sought ban on sales of fortified (“street people”) wine (Schaefer, 1987; Norton & Sever, 1987). Overall, while historic preservation and economic redevelopment produced numerous public benefits, Pioneer Square remained an area polarized along class lines.

## **Chapter Six: The Washington State Convention and Trade Center**

### **Introduction**

From 1982-1988, the planning and construction of a new state convention center dominated Seattle's downtown redevelopment process. While supporters touted the project as critical to increased trade and tourism, and a significant link in the revitalization of downtown, opponents questioned key financial assumptions and raised the specter of the significant loss of already limited low-cost housing. The lengthy political battle over where to locate the facility pitted local housing and community activists against some of the city's most powerful actors from the business and development sector. A legal dispute about the likely impact on low-income housing from a downtown convention center ultimately reached the state Supreme Court.

This chapter examines the key issues involved in this redevelopment project and highlights the way elite interests dominated development policies in the central city. The following thus serves as an illustrative case of elite power and decision-making. Three key arguments frame this discussion. First, the site selected for the convention center was one that beset served the interests of those elites with significant investments in downtown commerce. I demonstrate that while the convention center decision-making process was ostensibly open, the interests of corporate capital and local elites—who had direct links to the convention center board of directors—were ultimately served. Thus a formal political process masked the way in which key members from the business and

corporate sector wielded disproportionate power relative to their actual numbers.

Second, the public—local taxpayers and future tourists—would be co-opted at various stages of the construction process into paying the escalating costs of the project through the exercise of political power. As this analysis shows, media coverage, specifically newspaper editorials biased in support of the convention center, were one method used to perpetuate this form of political inequality. Finally, the local population of one downtown neighborhood, mostly poor and low-income residents, would be dislocated with a minimum of compensation. Through the loss of critical housing stock serving low-income households, this case study highlights how the convention center hastened the destruction of part of the existing downtown community. Despite the promise of jobs, a more vibrant central city, and a high-profile national image, construction of the convention center served to accelerate the ongoing process of gentrification and displacement of poor and working class downtown residents.

### **Selling the “Convention City”**

When a state legislative plan emerged in the 1970s for a new convention center in Seattle, it envisioned the facility at the Seattle Center, home to the city’s indoor sports arena and site of the 1962 World’s Fair. While not located in the heart of downtown, the Seattle Center was still only a few minutes walk or monorail ride from the central business district and had several buildings that

were already used for exhibitions and conventions. Despite this existing infrastructure, the final decision about where to place the new facility would prove to be a significant political battle over competing visions of future growth in Seattle. As described by one newspaper, “no issue was argued more vigorously than where the project should be sited” (State Convention Center, 1988). Indeed, the group responsible for choosing the location of the facility—the non-elected Washington State Convention and Trade Center board appointed by the governor—coveted an alternative downtown site next to and over the Interstate 5 freeway. Their plan called for construction of a 10-story high convention center, with a lid to be built over the freeway north of the existing Freeway Park to accommodate the massive structure. The board and proponents of this location repeatedly cited its desirability due to its proximity to downtown hotels, restaurants and other services.

Supporters of the so-called freeway location envisioned a downtown convention center as the focal point of a vibrant, 24-hour international city, and the logical site for attracting convention business to Seattle (Clever, 1985a). According to Informant A, church leader, those supporting the freeway site had a rather narrow vision of how the convention center fit into Seattle’s future. “Their argument was that this would be good for downtown business, this would be good for downtown hotels, especially, and the whole development of the downtown. I think they saw this as a key ingredient in the redevelopment of the downtown.” Many local developers and business leaders, such as John

Gilmore, the longtime president of the Downtown Seattle Association, articulated this point. Gilmore claimed that only at the freeway location could Seattle have a “competitive edge” against other cities seeking convention business (Clever, 1985a, p. B3).

As Harvey (1994) observes, in an effort to overcome the urban decline associated with deindustrialization and cuts in federal aid, many large cities embarked on urban revitalization schemes in the 1980s to counter images of central city decay and disorder. Feagin (1983) notes that urban decline—which he suggests is an inevitable part of the process of uneven urban development—presents “a negative symbolism” for business elites. “Decline may be tolerated for a period; then new pressures often arise for revitalization” (p. 86). Urban renaissance strategies have therefore included efforts to draw conventions, business travelers and tourists back to the central city. In Seattle, public officials and private elites formed a partnership focused on urban redevelopment by refashioning the downtown into “spectacles of tourism, consumption and leisure” (Gibson, 1997).

Thus an unstated yet implicit aspect of the convention center proposal was an effort by local elites to integrate downtown Seattle into a restructuring, post-industrial urban economy (Wilson, 1996). Many scholars find that economic “globalization” has been marked by a globally linked financial and service economy. Nationally and internationally, this process has transformed

numerous urban centers into white-collar headquarters or key networks of multinational corporations (Smith & Feagin, 1987; Smith, 1996a; Smith & Williams, 1986; Zukin, 1987). Robinson (1995) finds that through this process “downtown high-rent, high-rise districts have been pressed by growth proponents to absorb surrounding neighborhoods of less intensive uses,” while “the state, through redevelopment activities, grants, loans, and a corporate-friendly tax structure, has facilitated the advance of corporate-dominated ‘civilization’ into the heart of the impoverished *urban frontier*” (p.487). In other words, as globalization intensifies, corporate capital seeks investment opportunities in previously underdeveloped urban neighborhoods, often areas of concentrated poverty.<sup>1</sup> In Seattle, large tracts of downtown, one of the few remaining areas of the city where low-income residents could find cheap housing, thus sat as prime real estate to be subsumed into an ongoing economic restructuring process marked by the construction of high-rise office buildings and high-income residential and retail projects.

While construction of the convention facility at the Seattle Center offered many benefits, including a much-needed economic stimulus for the neglected site, the convention center board claimed the downtown location ultimately made the most economic sense. Board member Phyllis Lamphere, an ex-city council member and former regional director of economic development for the federal Department of Commerce, admitted that siting the project at the Seattle Center

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<sup>1</sup> This “top down” form of urban investment and economic growth is distinctly different from—and

could provide an economic boost for the existing complex. However, she argued that because of private financial backing for the freeway location by local banks and corporations, the state could build a bigger and better convention center at that location, and thus offered her support for a downtown facility.

The convention center board also alleged that revenue projections showed the city would reap greater income at the downtown site than the Seattle Center, and that the level of public subsidy was insufficient to build a comparable convention facility at the Seattle Center (Lane, 1984). In addition, while the \$120 million convention center would be built largely through the sale of state revenue bonds, the facility over the freeway was touted as a project that would not cost the city of Seattle any public funds. Further, in 1983, Jim Ellis, vice-chair of the state convention center board, had argued during state legislative hearings that the project would not exceed its \$90 million state budget authorization, and that with proper support the facility would generate significant state tax revenue (Hadley, 1983b).

Supporters further argued that a downtown convention facility would be cheaper to construct (despite the report of an independent consultant), and that it would have less impact on traffic than at the already congested Seattle Center. In addition, the central access to hotels, restaurants, and shops downtown would attract increased convention business, thereby making Seattle

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benefits fewer local residents—than “bottom up” community economic development strategies.

more “competitive” with other large cities seeking convention business. Board member Jim Ellis noted that, “If you don’t have hotels right there, you’re not in a competitive game with other cities” (Villiers, 1983, p. A5). Finally, the board argued that placing the convention center directly downtown would help provide a crucial economic stimulus for the central business district. Thus backers of the freeway site suggested that downtown Seattle would receive a significant economic boost from the convention center: more than 7,000 new jobs would be created, \$280 million in annual income would be generated for workers and local businesses, and the state would reap \$30 million a year in new tax revenues (Gering, 1984a).

Sanders (1992) notes the recent phenomenon of large U.S. cities engaging in massive public investment in convention center developments. He links the rise of the “Convention City” to an effort to promote economic development and tourism through these urban redevelopment projects. As was the case in Seattle, he suggests that construction of such facilities arise not from public support or demand for this type of public investment. Instead, the politics of convention center development are driven by the preferences of local elites (property owners, developers and downtown business leaders) who view these projects as a publicly subsidized urban economic stimulus. Such facilities thus “represent a magnet for private land development and investment tied to everything from hotels and restaurants to retail sales and meeting support” (p. 138). Significantly, unlike the early years of urban renewal projects that often

involved a public vote, contemporary convention center projects rely on specialized financing schemes and the creation of “special purpose governments” rather than voter approval.<sup>2</sup>

This process occurred in Seattle, where a state appointed board was given broad power over virtually all decisions relating to the convention center, including where it would be built. Sanders adds that by “insulating this investment from electoral politics, convention centers no longer need depend on a broad appeal to the public” (1992, p. 139). Of note, not only are the financial costs of convention facilities thus harder to trace, but much of the funding for these projects occurs through dedicated taxes borne largely by visitors and tourists. In the case of the convention center, the cost of repaying the state revenue bonds would come from increased taxes on large hotels and motels in King County (Gering, 1984a).<sup>3</sup> As noted earlier, the role of local corporate media was critical to the selling of the convention center project. At the same time, however, media coverage by the city’s two major daily newspapers throughout this process served numerous and conflicting roles: as occasional critic of the project, as a key source for documentation and critical information, and as elite propaganda engine. One way of understanding this contradiction is to recognize that a merger of editorial functions between the Seattle Times and

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<sup>2</sup> Special purpose governments are usually un-elected and formed for the specific purpose of oversight or governance of municipal and redevelopment projects.

<sup>3</sup> At more than 14 percent by 1990, Seattle’s hotel room tax became one of the highest in the country (Larsen, 1990).

the Seattle Post-Intelligencer in the 1970s produced a de facto one-newspaper town. This created an unresolved tension between these conflicting media functions that had to be reconciled either by editorial philosophy or the cynical calculation of corporate self-interest. While the two newspapers were often even-handed in their reporting of the construction of the convention center, newspaper editorials were decidedly biased in favor of the project.

### **The Convention Center Board and Elite Interests**

The nine-member convention center board of directors, which was appointed by then-Governor John Spellman in 1982 to design and operate the facility, was supposed to be answerable to the governor about all aspects of the project. By the time the siting decision and other key issues were being deliberated in the mid-1980s, Gov. Booth Gardner had taken office and in theory had oversight of the board. Yet despite the board's apparent accountability to the governor, the Seattle Times later noted that "in practice, they operate independently" (Nalder, 1985a). Indeed, as the newspaper openly speculated whether anyone aside from the convention center board was actually in charge of the project, Gov. Gardner seemed to confirm the worst fears of project opponents. Not only did he express faith in the ingenuity of downtown business interests supporting the venture, but the governor also seemed to be completely unaware of the status of the project. "I don't know what the hell is going on," he told the newspaper. "And I haven't cared much yet. I have other fish to fry" (Nalder, 1985a).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gardner himself was an heir to the fortunes of the Weyerhaeuser Company, one of the largest timber companies in the United States.

Although state lawmakers would eventually pay more attention to the project, the governor's comments highlight the autonomy and decision-making power afforded the non-elected board.

The most prominent member of the convention center board was Jim Ellis, a local attorney and civic leader who had gained distinction on several different downtown development and transportation projects.<sup>5</sup> Ellis was named board vice-chair, and emerged as the de facto spokesperson. Never personally elected to any office, or the head of a corporation or business association, Ellis' close contacts with Seattle's elites afforded him vast influence over city politics and downtown development. In an interview, a former city council member with extensive involvement on the convention center called Ellis the "primary force" behind the facility, as well as other civic projects over some 30 years. Indeed, Ellis' reputation as a major power broker in the city extends to most of those with knowledge about local politics and decision making authority. When the Seattle Times editors and reporters were asked in 1987 to name the most influential people in the city, Ellis (along with his brother John) was ranked first (The Standouts, 1987).<sup>6</sup> A survey of Seattle's government and business leaders similarly chose Ellis as the most influential individual in the city. Thirteen

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<sup>5</sup> Ellis is given much of the credit for the creation of the city's Metro (bus) system, the cleanup of Lake Washington, and the successful passage of the Forward Thrust bond issue. The latter helped create new city parks, pools, fire stations, the Seattle Aquarium and the Kingdome sports stadium (The Ellis, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Among the 10 most influential individuals in Seattle, reporters and editors named three developers (including one husband and wife couple), four chief executive officers of local corporations, and two investors (including one husband and wife couple). No politicians made the list. (The Standouts, 1987).

years earlier, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer also named Ellis as among the city's 10 most influential people (A Richness, 1987). Local media would later suggest that the location of the convention center project and the fact that it was built relatively on time were a result of Ellis' "sheer will" (Nelson, 1987a).

The board members were described by one newspaper as wielding significant influence and political power over local and regional development issues (Schaefer, 1983b). Aside from Ellis, they included:

- James Cairns, a Seattle area developer and president of People's Bank. He also held leadership positions with the Downtown Seattle Association and the local convention and visitors bureau;
- DeWayne Kreager, CEO of Pacific First Federal Savings and Loan, and a board member of Pacific Northwest Bell and Washington Natural Gas;
- Bob Wallace, founder and managing partner of Wallace Properties Group, a real estate investment, development and management company. He was also the former president of the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce, and head of the King County East Visitor and Convention Bureau;
- Jack Neupert, chairman of Spokane-based Consolidated Supply Co., was also a board member of Old National Bank, a regent with the University of Washington, and an active member of the state Republican party;
- Dr. Robert Flennaugh, a local dentist and the former president of the University of Washington Board of Regents;<sup>7</sup>
- James Wilson, a Snohomish County doctor who had held leadership positions with the Seattle Chamber of Commerce and the Seattle-King County Convention & Visitor Bureau;

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<sup>7</sup> Flennaugh admitted, "low income homes are going to be impacted" by the convention facility, but suggested that the overall economic benefits from the project outweighed any such displacement.

- Phyllis Lamphere, a private consultant on economic development issues, and a former Seattle city council member and federal official;
- Rhonda Allgaier, the secretary-treasurer of local Hotel, Motel, Restaurant Employees and Bartenders union, and the only board member to ever publicly support the Seattle Center site. She was also a board member of the Governor's Tourism Development Council and the local convention and visitor bureau (Board Of, 1983; Schaefer, 1983b; Foster, 1984b; Lane, 1984; Gering, 1984a).

Despite the lack of representation from housing or community groups, and the fact that only one member of the nine-person board was a racial minority, an editorial in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* described the board of directors as “broadly representative” (Convention Site, 1984).

Among the key private supporters of the freeway site were Jerome Hillis, a prominent local attorney who served as the lawyer and environmental consultant to the convention center board. John Gilmore, the executive director of the influential pro-business Downtown Seattle Association, Howard S. Wright, part owner of the downtown Sheraton Hotel, and Fred Burrow, head of a local task force supporting the project, also lent significant backing to the project.<sup>8</sup> At one time or another, most argued that economic growth from a downtown convention facility would provide significant benefits to both the city and the entire state through increased tax revenue (Foster, 1984b; Lane, 1984;

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<sup>8</sup> Gilmore, termed an “adamant” supporter of the downtown convention center site, was derisive of the work of the community coalition opposing the freeway location. “To the best of my knowledge, that group has never built a single unit of housing,” he told a local newspaper (Clever, 1985, p. B3).

Clever, 1985a). Indeed, with Seattle's business elites committed to a vision of downtown as the economic center of the Puget Sound region, support for a large development project in the central business district like the convention center made perfect commercial sense. Thus one local newspaper noted that "the construction of the convention center is a clear case in point of business pursuing its self interest" (For Seattle's, 1987).

The Seattle Chamber of Commerce, the downtown hotel lobby, and other local business leaders also provided different levels of support to the proposed freeway site convention center project (Parker, 1983; Nalder, 1985a). Most downtown hotels had been facing high vacancy rates in recent years, and saw the convention center as a guarantee of increased profits (Lee, 1985). Prior to the final site selection of the convention center, Howard S. Wright organized a group of the city's largest hotels, including the Sheraton, Westin, Four Season's and the Holiday Inn, to offer private financial backing for a facility at the downtown site. Local banks, including Rainier National Bank and Seafirst Bank, along with large downtown department stores such as Nordstrom and Bon Marche were also among the biggest contributors to the private fund which pledged nearly \$1 million for construction costs (Nalder, 1985c). Even communications giant Pacific Northwest Bell supported the downtown convention facility with its own money, "because conventioners make phone calls home" (Pacific Northwest, 1987, p. C11). Andrew Smith, CEO of the corporation was a key member of Seattle's business elite by virtue of his

participation in the exclusive “Washington Roundtable” meetings of corporate leaders and other invited guests. The group held invitation-only monthly meetings, ostensibly to discuss downtown and regional economic development issues. Smith once told the *Seattle Times* that the “real function of these meetings is to maintain a business network wherein people determine ‘what everybody else is going to do.’” (For Seattle’s, 1987).

The proposed downtown convention center received critical backing in December 1981 when a 12-member state-appointed select legislative committee supported construction at the freeway site.<sup>9</sup> An editorial in the *Seattle Times* offered strong support to this recommendation, calling the freeway site “a superior and logical location.” In lauding the project as the “missing link” in downtown Seattle’s tourist potential, the paper also noted that the convention center would not cost the city or the state one dollar (A Well, 1981). A few months later the state legislature approved the sale of more than \$90 million in state bonds to pay for construction of the new convention center (Legislature OKs, 1982).<sup>10</sup> In just 10 years, the scope of the project had grown dramatically, and became a favored project of local elite interests. When a convention facility was first proposed in 1971 by King County Executive John Spellman, it was

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<sup>9</sup> The committee was appointed by the state legislature and included several people who would later serve on the convention center board of directors. The committee chair, state Sen. Rod Chandler, earlier claimed that site selection would be based on nine criteria, including proximity of hotels, transportation and truck access, visitor attractions, and retail and restaurant availability. The committee would also assess environmental impacts, zoning issues, and land costs (Lane, 1981a).

<sup>10</sup> The bonds and operating costs of the convention center would be paid off over 25 years via the increased hotel room tax.

estimated to cost only \$10 million and was planned as an adjunct to the Kingdome (Schaefer, 1988c). After years of increasingly bigger and more expensive designs, according to the Seattle Times, planning of the project was “taken over by a citizens’ committee that included powerful downtown hotel interests.”<sup>11</sup> By the end of 1981, the cost of the planned convention facility had risen to \$90 million, “and the committee announced it favored a freeway site next to the Sheraton Hotel” which opened the next year (Nalder, 1985b).

This represented a significant about-face for the downtown hotel lobby. In 1978, local hotel owners opposed a planned convention facility at the Seattle Center, allegedly “because it would be paid for with a room tax.” However, by the time the “citizen’s committee” recommended in late 1981 a larger, more expensive convention center be built at the downtown site paid for with a similar hotel room tax, “hotel-motel owners interests by then favored the project” (Nalder, 1985b). As the Seattle Times later reported, “executives of the major downtown hotels...are among the most enthusiastic and forceful supporters of the center” (For Seattle’s, 1987). More than five years after the fact, the paper also described some of the blatant conflict of interest among members of the “citizens committee.” For example, then state representative Rod Chandler, the chair of the committee, was simultaneously serving as a public relations consultant for Carma Developers. Since the company owned “a lot of valuable property in downtown Seattle,” the recommendation to build the

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<sup>11</sup> The newspaper was referring to the select legislative committee described above, which included state

convention center at the freeway site was a blessing, “indirectly boosting Carma’s fortunes” (Hatch, 1987). Another member of the committee, House Speaker Bill Polk, also had a dual mission. One year before the committee’s recommendation, Polk went to work for the John Graham Co., one of three partners in the Seventh Avenue Association. That group was the local owner of the downtown Sheraton Hotel, planned for construction directly across the street from the freeway site “recommended” by the committee as the best place to build the convention center (Hatch, 1987).

Clearly, the decision about where to build the convention center had significant financial import for numerous elite interests in the city. Though non-binding, the committee’s siting recommendation served as an impetus to intensified downtown development near the freeway site. Lured by the expectation of a new convention facility, “several companies built hotels in downtown Seattle” near where the project was planned, while several other existing hotels underwent extensive remodeling (Nalder, 1985c). The Seattle Times described a downtown hotel “building boom” between 1980-1983 that nearly doubled the number of rooms in the adjacent central business district (Healy, 1988). Other major hotel chains, like Raddison Hotels, subsequently announced plans to build large luxury hotels near the convention center during the construction phase of the project (Gilje, 1987).

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lawmakers, hotel and business interests, tourist officials, and one union representative.

More importantly, CHG International, an investment and development firm that at one time was the city's largest real estate company, had previously purchased property adjacent to the proposed freeway location. In exchange for future development rights to build a hotel, office tower, parking garage and retail shopping galleria next to the convention center, CHG donated the land next to the freeway and agreed to subsidize \$30 million of the cost of the \$120 million project (Hadley, 1983b; Gering, 1984a; Lane, 1984). While supporters of the freeway site stressed that the project would only cost \$90 million, the total cost of building the convention center, adjacent hotel, parking lot, and office building was actually close to \$120 million. Thus the financial support of CHG International was critical to the successful completion of this larger convention center project. As noted, key downtown business leaders, such as Howard S. Wright and Richard Cooley, president of Sea-First National Bank, pledged to raise private funds to help pay for the development of the hotel-office complex at the downtown location (Gering, 1984b). Significantly, no such offer of private financial assistance was made for construction of a convention center at the Seattle Center.

This phenomenon of municipal government's depending on private partnerships with local developers and investors stems in part from the dramatic cuts in federal urban aid over the past 20 years (Gibson, 1997). As Squires (1994) notes, with deep reductions in federal urban assistance, these public-private partnerships represent a key shift in the use of public funds, often providing

taxpayer subsidies for the corporate sector to pursue urban redevelopment schemes that promote their own financial interests. As a result of such offers of resources and cooperation, however, private elites are often able to extract significant concessions from local government. In this case, CHG's "incentive" for helping construct the convention facility was the opportunity to develop a major hotel/retail project at the downtown site. CHG's proposed development and huge subsidy, along with other offers of private contributions, thus ensured that the downtown site was ultimately chosen for the project. Indeed, after the state-appointed board chose the freeway site for the convention center, the Seattle Times reported that the donated property and financial contributions "were the deciding factors" in the board's decision (Nalder, 1985d, p. B1). The Times later reported that the committee's 1981 recommendation to build the convention center at the freeway site was based in part on the advice of its financial consultant, the accounting firm of Touche, Ross and Co. Coincidentally, that firm also represented CHG International and Westside S&L (Westside, CHG, 1987).

In a series of the behind the scenes maneuvers, Henry Griffen and Clinton Hergert, the heads of CHG and among the city's largest real estate investors, had purchased the freeway location property prior to the convention center board's 1983 recommendation to build at the site (Westside, CHG, 1987). Almost as soon as the state had approved the bond funding for the convention center, supporters of the freeway location claimed that they had

underestimated overall costs for the facility. Thus the state's \$90 million contribution was deemed insufficient to build a downtown convention center and still have money to purchase the land and develop a parking lot and hotel (Nadler, 1987). Recognizing the enormous profit potential from a 1,000 car parking garage, hotel and office complex, and a shopping gallery next to a downtown convention center, Griffen and Hergert "donated" the land next to the freeway site. In order to pay for the land and their part of the construction, CHG soon borrowed tens of millions from Burien-based Westside Federal Savings and Loan Association. As it turns out, these financial transactions would ultimately hasten the collapse of both institutions (Nadler, 1987).

### **Community Opposition**

In retrospect, it is ironic that the final siting decision of the convention center was ostensibly influenced by the availability of (existing or proposed) hotels. Opponents of the freeway location raised many concerns with this site. The Rev. David Bloom, director of urban ministries for the Church Council of Greater Seattle, claimed that the proposed project rested on faulty assumptions and unrealistic revenue projections. He and other critics also claimed a downtown convention center would likely lead to unforeseen cost overruns and severe impacts on downtown traffic (Bloom, 1983a). Bloom soon became the chair and main spokesperson for the Washington State Convention Center Coalition, a citizen's advocacy group formed to block the construction of the convention center at the freeway site. The coalition survived largely on the

efforts of local housing advocates, but also included members of church and community groups, service employees unions, and other interested individuals.

Those critical of the freeway location also argued that a downtown convention facility would take business from the Seattle Center, which was already losing some \$2 million a year (Gering, 1984b). Many of these same concerns were also voiced by state lawmakers and Seattle city officials, including Mayor Charles Royer who originally supported the project at the Seattle Center (Glover, 1983). Prior to the selection of the downtown location for the convention project, the mayor announced his support for construction at the Seattle Center. He noted that "major problems" existed with the freeway site, in particular, the possibility that a downtown facility would drain activity and support from the Seattle Center (Meriwald, 1982). Indeed, according to Informant B, former city council member, most of the city's elected officials favored building the convention facility at the Seattle Center. In fact, two weeks before the convention center board was to announce their siting decision in March 1983, the council voted 8-1 in favor of the Seattle Center as the preferred location for the project (Schaefer, 1983c). In an interview, Informant B said he believed that utilizing the facilities at the Seattle Center would expand the city's existing resources and infrastructure. He also noted that the city's small monorail system was ideally located to shuttle convention delegates between the Seattle Center and downtown hotels within minutes.

Community opposition to the freeway location was always a small, grassroots and somewhat disparate effort. The community group lacked the funds and connections to city officials that provided the convention center board and other project supporters key influence. For example, although the Seattle Center Merchants Association offered support to the coalition and sought to have the convention center built at the Seattle Center, the merchant's group never offered more than a nominal financial contribution to the coalition. And once the decision about where to locate the facility was made, the merchants' were never seriously involved in the decision-making process. More active community members included the Seattle Tenants Union, and John Fox of People for Downtown Housing (Glover, 1982; Schaefer, 1983a).<sup>12</sup> Noting the continued loss of hundreds of units of affordable downtown housing each year, Fox opposed a downtown convention center precisely because of its perceived threat to affordable housing in the area, as well as its impact on traffic and parking. First Hill residents, fearful of the traffic and noise impacts of the convention center on their adjoining neighborhood, as well as the pressure on affordable housing for the area's many elderly residents, were also opposed to the downtown facility (Glover, 1982; Hatch, 1985; 1987; Schaefer, 1983a).<sup>13</sup> Local attorneys Peter Eglick & Barbara Warren, provided legal counsel for the coalition.

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<sup>12</sup> Fox has remained a leading low-income housing advocate in Seattle, especially regarding the preservation of downtown SROs and other low-cost housing.

<sup>13</sup> Local newspapers noted the overall lack of involvement on this issue by most First Hill residents once the siting decision was made.

Among the various concerns raised by opponents, however, the greatest perceived threat posed by construction of a downtown convention center was to the private housing stock serving low-income residents, especially low-cost SRO hotels that were concentrated in the downtown. Perhaps for no other reason than the likely displacement of as many as a thousand poor and working class central-city households, community groups and some city officials thus favored the Seattle Center location for the convention center. For example, Rev. David Bloom warned of a potential loss of at least 500 units of low-cost housing through direct construction at the freeway site. The threat of additional housing loss and displacement also existed, he argued, through the development of nearby hotels, restaurants and shops that would inevitably occur if downtown was chosen as the site of the convention center (Bloom, 1983a).

Of further significance, TRA/HNTB, an independent consulting firm hired by the convention center board to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of the two principal sites provided further ammunition for critics of the freeway location. Of 29 separate criterion used for a comparative evaluation—including the loss of housing, the likely impacts of future expansion, financial costs to the city, effects on traffic—the Seattle Center ranked best on 17, while the downtown site was favored on only four measures (Bloom, 1983b). TRA/HNTB raised a vital point by noting that the freeway site ranked “significantly below

average” on the ability to control design and construction costs, a warning that would prove prophetic (Hadley, 1983d). In their 1983 report, the consultants also made clear that locating the facility over the freeway would cost some \$15 million more than a similar project at the Seattle Center (Hadley, 1983a).

Meanwhile, a report by the city Department of Community Development urged that the convention center be built at the Seattle Center; a project located downtown risked the economic viability of the Seattle Center as an exhibition and convention facility, city staff warned. The city also argued that traffic and parking impacts would be severe at a downtown convention facility, a point made in the consultants report (Hadley, 1983b).

The evidence against building at the freeway site was mounting. After a tour of the proposed convention center sites in early 1983, a group of international convention industry leaders rejected several of the main arguments in support of building at the downtown location. In particular, they concluded that proximity to hotels—the key issue advanced by downtown business and hotel interests—was not a problem at the nearby Seattle Center (Hadley, 1983c). The group also noted that the future ability to expand the convention center was an “extremely important” consideration in final site selection, especially given the modest size of the proposed convention center. This expansion potential was most limited at the freeway site, and best at the Seattle Center, they noted. At the time, board member Jim Ellis claimed that the views of these visiting industry leaders would significantly influence the pending siting

decision by the convention center board. Finally, the consultants, along with a local architecture firm, also warned that construction at the freeway site would accelerate the loss of low-cost housing in the area.<sup>14</sup> They suggested that the freeway project would likely accelerate ongoing trends in nearby neighborhoods—specifically, the demolition or conversion of affordable rental housing to market-rate uses. Convention center board members dismissed these concerns, suggesting that such housing would be lost regardless of the location of the project due to rapid commercial development in the downtown core (Schaefer, 1983a).

Given this seemingly objective “evidence” and the range of opinion against a convention center located in the heart of downtown, the siting decision would seem to have been a relatively straightforward choice. Perhaps sensing that support for the freeway site was waning, local corporate media intensified its lobbying efforts as the board prepared to make their decision. In the view of the *Seattle Times*, building the project at the freeway location represented a bulwark against the forces of urban decline. The paper noted that not only was this site closest to downtown hotels, but it “would strengthen the economic base of the entire downtown area, thus erecting further defenses against the urban decay that has afflicted far too many metropolitan centers elsewhere in the nation” (The Broader, 1983, p. A14). Such arguments were apparently more persuasive than community concerns and the views of independent

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<sup>14</sup> They also noted that both of the two proposed building sites had distinct advantages and disadvantages.

consultants: despite voicing key concerns with their decision, on March 31, 1983, the board voted overwhelmingly to build the convention center at the freeway site. Rhonda Allagier, Secretary-Treasurer of the hotel and restaurant employees union, was the only board member to oppose that location in favor of the Seattle Center. She warned “that the complexity of building over the freeway could push construction over budget” and cause significant building delays (Schaefer, 1983d).

After a series of delays related to investigating the financial feasibility of construction at the downtown location, in early 1984 the board made a “final” decision and unanimously approved the freeway site as the preferred location for the new state convention center (Lane, 1984). Of note, board member Rhonda Allagier now favored the freeway location, stating that she changed her vote simply because she now believed the freeway site was the best location for the project (Hadley, 1984a; Lane, 1984). Although her single vote would not likely sway the other board members, Allagier’s shift from opposition to support of the downtown convention center location was significant. Nonetheless, save for two small newspaper articles, there is a lack of additional information about this issue. When questioned about the vote, several informants were unable to recall with any certainty the circumstances surrounding Allagier’s change in position. Community members seeking increased oversight of the convention center decisions were unable to find much support among local or state legislators, especially once a siting decision had been made. Despite approving

the sale of some \$100 million in state bonds to finance the facility, only a few Seattle area lawmakers expressed interest during 1983 and 1984 in holding public hearings to review the cost and impacts of the project.

### **The Convention Center as a “Done Deal”**

Given the composition of the convention center board, and the interests and background of key supporters of the freeway location, the final siting decision was perhaps predictable. The nine-person board was comprised of individuals with direct or indirect financial and political clout who could determine the pattern of future downtown building and planning (Clever, 1985b). As important, the un-elected board was given the power by the state legislature to make such decisions as they best saw fit. Ultimately, although they needed to take into account the local political environment and negotiate certain issues with the city, the board had little to worry about in terms of accountability for their decision.

Several informants involved in the siting decision process stressed that convention center board members or their close associates had a direct financial interest in the freeway site. A wealth of documentary evidence, in particular news reporting by Seattle’s two major daily newspapers, provides strong corroboration for this contention. Echoing their claims of 16 years ago, community advocates continue to believe that the public hearing process about where to locate the convention center was largely a pretense. Key informants suggested that the decision about where the facility would be built was made in

advance. For example, Informant C, coalition staff member, claims that the convention center board did not necessarily have to be persuasive, since the project (at the downtown location) “was a done deal from the beginning.” While she has no direct evidence to support this idea—no “smoking gun”—her feeling throughout the siting process was that a decision had been made behind closed doors to locate the convention center at the freeway location. “It seemed at the time like a done deal. It didn’t matter what we said about the Seattle Center being a more desirable location. It wasn’t going to go there” (Informant C, coalition staff member).

Another respondent involved in community opposition to the downtown project provided further elaboration on this point. Informant D, social worker, suggested that convention center board member Jim Ellis almost single-handedly pushed through the freeway site in order to further the financial interests of local developers who were also close associates:

He had his reasons for doing it, and one big reason....is that some of his pals were the big hotel owners. You know, you’ve got a number of these big, fancy hotels now that weren’t even built at the time but they were going to build them at all these different sites. And they were all upset and appalled that the Convention Center might be built a half a mile away, and, therefore, impact the nice little money-making vision and venture that they all had obviously agreed upon years prior to all this stuff concretely taking form (Informant D, social worker).

At the time that the siting decision was being debated, it was clear that the downtown location was favored almost exclusively by local business and corporate elites, such as developers like Howard S. Wright and CHG International.

As noted in the Seattle Times, the allegedly objective convention center board included “the staunchest supporters” of a downtown facility, including the downtown hotel lobby. Conversely, most public officials, the external agency hired to evaluate the possible sites, as well as most citizens involved in the decision making process initially urged that the project be located at the Seattle Center rather than the freeway site. A decision based on financial considerations, the assessment of the consulting firm, and public opinion, seemed to heavily favor the Seattle Center location. Yet, as evidenced by the decision-making process “the public good” meant two distinctly different things, depending upon who was making the definition.

Indeed, in the case of the convention center, individuals like Jim Ellis appeared to represent the agenda of a narrowly defined range of downtown business interests. As a group, they have long held a disproportionate amount of power over local development decisions compared to their actual numbers. Overtly or covertly, these local elites have successfully promoted development and growth in downtown Seattle that has favored publicly subsidized projects that have displaced thousands of low-income residents. Several informants cited the

downtown Metro bus tunnel, new stadiums for professional sports teams, the Nordstrom parking lot, and the convention center as specific examples of this phenomenon.

While Jim Ellis emerges as a key player in downtown development, in part because of his prominent public profile on the convention center, he appears to be simply the public face representing a powerful, yet hidden fraternity of business and corporate elites in Seattle with shared economic interests. Informant D, social worker, described Ellis as “the great un-elected emperor of the Puget Sound area.” Clearly, the level of political sophistication and strength of the community coalition was woefully insufficient compared to the experience, resources, and influence of the Convention Center board and supporters of a downtown convention center. In essence, the primary obstacle facing the coalition was countering the ability of local elites to successfully pursue their development agenda. This effectiveness was largely due to shared interests and the direct access to city officials enjoyed by developers and other downtown elites. In all likelihood, the convention center board used their leverage with the downtown business community to successfully promote the downtown convention center location. The convention facility thus represented one specific example of the way elite business interests in Seattle were served through downtown redevelopment projects.

Those promoting this particular type of growth and development in downtown Seattle include members of the Downtown Seattle Association (DSA). Most are men, who often meet at the exclusive and private Rainier Club, and these individuals are primarily *local* developers and businessmen, though some may have national and/or international links. Thus corporate elites used their membership in the Downtown Seattle Association—described by one newspaper as “the most powerful lobby in Seattle”—to merge a range of business interests into a single entity that became the key force promoting major downtown redevelopment projects like the convention center (Hatch, 1989). The organization’s effectiveness is so pervasive that the Seattle Times credited it with ensuring that the convention center was built downtown; a \$430 million downtown Metro bus tunnel was created rather than a street level transit mall; and more than 30 office buildings comprising 13 million square feet of office space were erected in the central business district during the 1980s (Hatch, 1989).

According to the newspaper, the DSA represented many of the city’s “most influential business people, developers and downtown retailers” (Clever, 1985b). The 65-member DSA board, “a who’s who of the downtown establishment,” including representatives of both major daily newspapers and the three network television stations, is credited with reshaping the downtown core (Hatch, 1989). An analysis of local media coverage, along with informant interviews, suggests that most members of the DSA choose to keep a low public profile, but wield

decision-making power with city officials over downtown development issues disproportionate to their actual numbers. As described by one reporter,

the DSA membership still consists mainly of wealthy, conservative men who work in glass towers, play handball and squash at the Washington Athletic Club, dine at Seattle's best restaurants and belong to the Rotary and the Kiwanis. From year to year, they flit between the boards of the DSA and the Chamber of Commerce (Hatch, 1989).

Almost uniformly, this group shares a collective view that downtown is the engine that drives the local economy and creates jobs for the greater Seattle area. Because of their belief in this model of economic growth, local elites appear quite willing to use an unequal amount of public funds to help develop the downtown infrastructure to support projects they promote. As a result, elites have been able to pursue an economic development agenda that serves their narrow financial interests. Indeed, in an interview the former city council member also endorsed this economic development model, highlighting the shared values among public and private decision makers. Through this development process, local elites have successfully made downtown the business, retail and cultural center of Seattle, utilizing public funds to help develop the infrastructure for these projects.

In fact, many of downtown Seattle's largest redevelopment and "capital improvement" projects since the early 1980s—the convention center, the Metro bus tunnel, Westlake Center (and more recently, two new professional sports

stadiums and the Nordstrom parking garage)—depended heavily on public support. Informant B, former city council member, suggests that this economic development process has actually served the city and downtown well.

“Downtown hums today because of wise decisions made by the city council” in the 1980s and early 1990s. Noting a big difference in the downtown environment as a result, he described the area as “a fun place to be, there’s lots of people on the street...we encouraged downtown living” (Informant B, former city council member).

### **The City and the Decision-Making Process**

With the siting decision finally made, the convention center issue moved to the city council, which needed to approve or reject permit requests and act on guidelines for the project. As Informant B, former city council member, recalled in an interview, once the board made their decision to build the project at the freeway site, he and others were confronted with a difficult choice. “I was faced with a decision: do I want to get in the way of this thing...or help make it happen?” (Informant B, former city council member). He noted that like other council members, he decided to support a convention center at the downtown location, rather than join opponents of this plan, in order to ensure that the project went forward without unnecessary delay or cost. Indeed, once the siting decision was made the mayor and other local elected officials vowed to support construction at the freeway site.

Opponents of the freeway location initially opposed a plan drafted by Mayor Charles Royer and city council member Paul Kraabel to change the city's standard zoning procedures and expedite the permit process for the convention center.<sup>15</sup> Convention center board members argued that the facility had undergone extensive review and that in response to public concerns significant changes were made to the project. Although as a state agency the convention center board could legally override local zoning laws, they pledged to be guided by the city's legal process ("A Fair", 1984).

While sponsors of the permit provision claimed the zoning change would provide the city with greater influence and public scrutiny over how the facility was constructed, local advocates believed the public interest was not being served. David Bloom, chair of the community coalition, charged that the convention center board had largely ignored a 30-page document from the group that raised serious concerns with the draft Environmental Impact Statement. He called on the city to appoint a special counsel to represent the public, a request that was not taken up (Hadley, 1984b). Despite this resistance to open up the decision making process, public pressure and advocacy did have some impact. The convention center board agreed to pay \$250,000 for housing mitigation due to the expected impacts on downtown housing, a relatively small amount given the expected level of displacement

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<sup>15</sup> Existing law required that the board secure several separate city permits for the facility. The proposed change would combine all permits into one procedure, and allow the convention center to be built in high rise, commercial, manufacturing and industrial zones, contingent to restrictions the council might enact on housing, traffic, parking and landscaping (Hadley, 1984).

from the project. This minimal financial contribution appears to have been a calculated gesture on the part of the convention center board to avoid a potentially expensive and lengthy class action lawsuit brought by local activists. The board also agreed to extensive landscaping and design changes to the convention center, and to work with the city on parking issues and access plans (Lane, 1984; Gering, 1984a).

As the city council prepared to act on the permit issue, a Seattle Times editorial declared that city officials were about to make a truly momentous decision. “Seldom in Seattle’s history has the City Council had a greater opportunity to act in the public interest.” Reiterating its support for the freeway site, the paper urged city lawmakers to move “with all deliberate speed and approve the construction process.” The editorial also accused local government of being “too faint-hearted about the project. It has overreacted to critics of the freeway site, whose complaints about housing displacement surely are capable of resolution through compromise” (Convention Center, 1984, p. A18).

After securing changes to expand the range of issues the city would consider when evaluating the convention center proposal, the coalition supported the expedited permit process (Hadley, 1984c).<sup>16</sup> The coalition viewed these changes as increasing the likelihood that the convention center would seek to mitigate

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<sup>16</sup> The city had agreed to “weigh the public benefits against the adverse impacts on a broad range of concerns, including the impact of future developments” likely to occur as a result of the convention center construction (Hadley, 1984c, p. B1).

against adverse impacts on surrounding neighborhoods (Hadley, 1984).

Despite this agreement to allow the project to proceed, significant disagreement remained between convention center supporters and housing and community groups. In particular, key differences emerged over the amount of mitigation fees the convention center would provide for housing displacement, and the overall impact on low-cost housing from the project, including the indirect effects on First Hill.<sup>17</sup>

In a clear display of their political power, the convention center board failed to delay the process as requested by the coalition pending agreement on the impacts of housing, parking and other issues. Contradicting estimates by the city itself, board member Jim Ellis argued that the convention facility would not directly displace any low-income housing units (“Jobs And,” 1985). The convention center board also claimed that it was impossible to precisely determine *potential* housing loss, especially though “indirect” construction of the facility (Lane, 1984). Community activist David Bloom derided the \$250,000 in mitigation fees as insignificant compared to “real costs” of at least \$5 million needed to replace the housing units that would be destroyed by

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<sup>17</sup> Under the initial deal worked out between the city and the convention center board, the \$250,000 in housing mitigation fees would be used to help pay rehabilitation costs of the Olive Tower. The building would become an 87-unit subsidized housing project at a total cost to the city of \$1.7 million. CHG International also agreed to renovate the nearby Eagles Building, pledging that the project would include 50 “affordable” units in a building which formally had 88 low-income units (Foster, 1984a).

construction of the facility (Foster, 1984a).<sup>18</sup> While the city estimated a loss of 137 low-income housing units from the project, the coalition countered that this was in all likelihood a *minimum* figure. They again suggested that hundreds of market-rate, low-cost housing units would be lost, and urged the city to create a large fund to assist residents of downtown and First Hill who would be displaced by the convention center (Foster, 1984b).

### **The Legal Challenge to Housing Loss**

As construction neared, in July 1985 the coalition filed suit in Superior Court to stop the building process until a public review of changes at the convention center was filed. Because of the extensive revisions from the original plan that would create new impacts on downtown, the group argued that the convention center board should be required to publish a new environmental-impact statement (Brown, 1985; Maler, 1985b). The coalition charged that design changes to the facility, and the city's financial participation in the project, invalidated the terms of a conditional-use construction permit approved by the city council. In particular, the suit noted that the council had recently approved \$2 million in city funds to help pay for reinforcement costs to the building. The lawsuit also cited a recommendation by a city council committee that the convention center be exempt from Seattle's new downtown housing preservation ordinance. In response to the loss of some 1,000 low-cost

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<sup>18</sup> This amount was based on an estimate from the City Department of Land Use Planning that suggested a figure of \$11,000 per displaced unit; the coalition claimed 650 units of low-cost housing would occur through direct construction (Foster, 1984a).

downtown housing units since 1980 to demolition, abandonment and conversion, local activists helped push through a new city housing preservation ordinance. The law required replacement housing be provided for any units destroyed in downtown Seattle by new office buildings and other redevelopment projects (Clever, 1985b; Schaefer, 1985c).<sup>19</sup> Significantly, the council followed the lead of its subcommittee, and by a vote of 7-2 excluded the convention center from the new ordinance, and hence any further housing replacement requirements. Council members claimed that they were bound by a resolution exempting the project from complying with the law since the convention center issue had been heard before the council prior to adoption of the new housing ordinance (Clever, 1985a). This decision would soon be contested at the state supreme court.

The coalition contended that by granting the project an exemption from the housing ordinance, developers of the convention center would be allowed to build less low-income housing than the number of units the facility would displace (Nalder, 1985g). Council member Paul Kraabel noted that his support for the exemption to the housing replacement measure came after the city council required that the developers of the convention center build 95

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<sup>19</sup> The new Housing Preservation Ordinance mandated that new rental housing be built, or a fee paid, whenever rental housing was destroyed in downtown. However, if low-cost replacement housing were built, developers would only be required to replace one unit for every four units destroyed. Further, any housing destroyed in downtown would have to be replaced within two blocks of downtown. The new statute also required that up to \$2,000 be paid to tenants who were displaced when a building was torn down (Schaefer, 1985c).

replacement housing units (Wilson, 1985).<sup>20</sup> Significantly, no formal hearings were held to discuss the city's financial contribution to the convention center, although "opponents were allowed to briefly testify before a council committee" (Maler, 1985b). While the strengthening project would allow the roof of the convention center to be used for a public park, it nonetheless represented a violation of the pledge to avoid using any city funds for the convention facility (Brown, 1985).<sup>21</sup> For some members of the city council, the use of public funds also raised the potential of further financial involvement by the city (Maler, 1985a). By mid-1985 the projected cost of the convention center had risen to some \$135 million, an increase of more than 12 percent. While the board had successfully requested an additional \$6.2 million in state bonds to support the project, they were also forced to reopen bids in an effort to lower construction costs by some \$10 million (Nalder, 1985a; Foster, 1984; Brown, 1985).

Housing advocates urged that the convention facility be forced to comply with the new law, and that the agency should provide more than \$1 million in additional funds for demolished housing, enough to help subsidize 100 affordable apartments. After a King County Superior Court judge found a "rational basis" for providing an exemption to the convention center, local

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<sup>20</sup> In October 1984, the city agreed to construction of the convention facility provided the board and CHG International replace destroyed housing with 95 low-cost apartments and 68 market-rate condominiums (Schaefer, 1985).

<sup>21</sup> Not only was the city's financial involvement a watershed, but it was also "a bit of a gamble" since no funds were available or dedicated for the actual park. Convention center board members nevertheless suggested that the city funds were a "worthwhile investment" as the board sought federal money to help pay for the park (Maler, 1985a).

advocates appealed their case to the State Supreme Court (Group Loses, 1985). The court eventually ruled that the convention center was indeed exempt from the city's newly enacted housing replacement ordinance ("Court Gives," 1986). In a unanimously supported opinion, Justice Robert Brachtenbach rejected several constitutional arguments brought by the community group. In particular, the court dismissed "an argument from the coalition that a dispute among council members showed that the convention center conditional-use permit was unclear as to whether the old housing-replacement requirements applied" (Court Gives, 1985, p. D1).

### **Community Impacts**

As the following discussion suggests, the various community impacts of the convention center became a highly charged and debated issue. Perhaps nowhere was this more so than in the case of the anticipated effects of construction on low-cost downtown housing. As important as the impacts on housing, other predictions by community members about the negative effects of a downtown convention center came true. Of note, these included major cost overruns that would require much higher public subsidies, and the need to expand the facility because its original size was not large enough to accommodate major convention business. Indeed, a significant expansion of the Convention Center began in the late 1990s. This project, advocates note, caused additional housing loss and displacement of low-income downtown households during the late 1990s.

The decisions related to construction of the convention center serve as an exemplar of the political and urban redevelopment process in Seattle, and help highlight the unequal distribution of decision-making power in the city. At the time, David Bloom, the chair of the community coalition, suggested that the public hearing process about where to locate the facility was largely a farce that highlighted the corruption of the local governing process.

In many ways it's a depressing decision that only reinforces impressions of the preference given to the economically powerful in Seattle. It suggests a kind of corruption that continues to go unchallenged, allowing the elite power structure to do what it wants (Bloom, 1983b, p. 14).

### *Housing Loss*

Although opponents of a downtown convention center won several admittedly minor concessions, they ultimately lost on the issue that mattered most: where the facility would be built. And as feared, the subsequent construction of the center and the “attendant development” of nearby hotels, shops and commercial offices led to the loss of significant amounts of already scarce low-cost downtown housing. As noted in the *Seattle Times*, before construction of the project began the convention center created “a powerful incentive” for landlords and owners of aging SROs and low-cost apartments to convert their properties into luxury hotels, “thereby displacing local tenants” (Clever, 1985b, p. B1). The process of converting these older, low-cost hotels—many held by absentee owners—was often one of attrition, abetted by the city’s inability to enforce its own housing code and safety standards. Describing the likely transformation of

the once elegant (and now low-cost) Payne Apartments a few blocks from the convention center, the *Seattle Times* described “the path money will one day take to the Payne.”

In this booming uptown neighborhood, the future is not so much speculation as it is simple arithmetic. Profit is guaranteed. Meanwhile, the corporate ledger says do nothing to the property, or for those who live on it (Anderson, 1986a, p. D1).

While several hotels were directly lost by construction of the facility, it appears that the greatest housing loss occurred through subsequent (“attendant”) development in the surrounding area. Bob Willmott, a homeless and housing advocate who ran a “maverick” campaign for mayor in 1989, described the ripple effect on housing costs and residents produced by the convention center.

When you build a new convention center, you tear down a few old buildings and there goes 200 units of low-cost housing. But the convention center also drives up property values in the area, so eventually you lose more like 800 units. And that’s 800 people in the streets (Anderson, 1989, p. B3).

Informant C, coalition staff member, suggests that the overall loss of housing caused by the project came close to the 600-800 units predicted, with most housing destroyed as a result of “indirect” development. Several informants active in housing and development issues agreed with this estimate. Informant D, social worker, noted that the final tally of lost housing caused by the

convention center remains a disputed issue between community activists and city officials.

We always argued that about 800 units of low-cost housing was impacted. Some of that may have been buildings that were already abandoned. But our argument has always been that they shouldn't have been abandoned in the first place and this of course finalized their obsolescence, because the Convention Center ensured that they weren't even there any more. So that was a direct impact. And some of the, you know, the hotel construction all around there, it knocked down or displaced old buildings that could never be replaced. Not in this economy, and not for that population if they were replaced (Informant D, social worker).

In an interview, Informant B, former city council member, underscored this notion of conflicting perspectives, offering a dramatically different account of the impact caused by the convention center. He claimed he could not recall exactly how much low-cost housing was destroyed from the convention center, but insisted it was not significant.<sup>22</sup> He also argued that the aggregate number of new affordable units subsequently built downtown "takes care of any displacement" that did occur. Informant B, former city council member, further believes that most of this replacement housing was a qualitative improvement over existing low-cost/SRO housing utilized by low-income area residents. In suggesting that the overall effect of the convention facility has been extremely positive for Seattle, he noted that the city actually helped preserve some low-cost housing in the area adjacent to the facility. Convention center board chair

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<sup>22</sup> In an earlier telephone conversation, this informant suggested that approximately 45 units of housing were lost as a direct result of the construction of the convention center.

Jim Ellis echoed this point, telling a local newspaper the convention center was “responsible for putting in place more housing than we have taken down” (Schaeffer, 1988c).<sup>23</sup>

The available evidence suggests a more complex picture. For example, after a lengthy battle, the 73-unit McKay Apartments located one block from the convention facility was torn down in early 1990 (Plank, 1990). The building, vacant since January 1987, was the scene of a bitter conflict between housing advocates and the convention center board. Informant E, housing advocate, notes that coalition members sought to keep the building open as a source of low- and moderate-income rental housing, while the board sought to tear it down in order to offer part of the property to a private developer. An agreement between the city and the convention center eventually allowed for the razing of the McKay. In exchange for approval of demolition of the building, the convention center paid into a fund to help finance the rehabilitation and construction of 81 units at the existing Oregon Hotel and an adjoining new building at the corner of First Avenue and Bell Street (Lane, 1988b; Hatch, 1989).

In addition to the loss of the McKay, the adjacent Eagles building underwent significant remodeling. These two events resulted in the direct loss of 161 low-

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<sup>23</sup> Ellis was likely referring to direct and indirect financial support by the convention center to the city that helped finance some 450 units of low-cost housing in five projects.

cost housing units (Lane, 1988b).<sup>24</sup> The Pine Court, Blackstone and Astor apartment buildings were among those subsequently destroyed, according to Informant E, housing advocate. Those three hotels were linked in an agreement for a major private hotel project, that required the demolition of the residential buildings (Clever, 1985b). Pressured by housing activists, the city forced the convention center to provide a total of \$750,000 to help pay for the cost of city-subsidized replacement housing at several downtown locations (Plank, 1990; Lane, 1988b). This represented a significant improvement from the initial offer by the convention center to provide \$250,000 in housing mitigation funds, but was still a relatively insignificant amount. Further, as noted by several informants, this money was used for public housing, rather than market rate low-cost housing to replace similar units torn down by the convention center. Advocates justifiably feared that those displaced by construction of the convention center would be unable to afford access to and/or meet eligibility restrictions for the new city subsidized housing. It appears that many of those who were displaced were not provided direct access to replacement housing units.

After months of further protest and negotiations, housing advocates achieved a more significant victory: a pledge from the city and convention center board to provide low-cost housing that would replace the units lost in the demolition of the McKay. In 1990, the group forced the state to appropriate \$800,000—a

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<sup>24</sup> The loss of any housing at the Eagles building is significant since the convention center board originally

figure to be matched by the city—with the promise that the funds would be used for replacement housing that would rent for no more than \$200 a month (Plank, 1990). As noted by nationally syndicated columnist Coleman McCarthy (1990), this action came only after housing activists, low-income tenants, and local homeless individuals engaged in a series of vigils, sit-ins, demonstrations and other forms of direct action that kept pressure on the city and convention center board. No legal requirement forced the city to replace housing units from the McKay, he noted. “Only a moral requirement, pressed on politicians and the monied by the poor themselves” (Citizen Group, 1990). Despite this commitment of increased funding, public taxes would ultimately pay for this replacement housing, not the private developers of the convention center.

Ultimately, it is difficult to definitively “prove” that the convention center by itself promoted gentrification and caused the widespread displacement claimed by advocates. Nonetheless, the siting of the convention center was clearly a significant part of the process of downtown gentrification.

The following analysis of the costs and financing of the convention center highlights how an allegedly simple plan requiring minimal public support mushroomed, becoming an intricate financial scheme requiring the intervention of federal regulators to ensure construction, and ultimately cost the state millions of dollars in additional public subsidy. These processes further

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ensured its preservation and rehabilitation.

demonstrate the close links enjoyed by a small group of business and corporate elites, and how influence over downtown development in Seattle is vested in the hands of a select few.

*Rising Costs and Public Subsidy*

In December 1984, CHG International, which was providing one-quarter of the financing for the convention center project in order to develop the hotel and parking garage, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection (Balter, 1986). Shortly thereafter, the Westside Federal Savings and Loan, CHG's lender which assumed responsibility for private development of the convention center when CHG went bankrupt, reported its own financial troubles (Lane, 1985a). Under a financing agreement signed in 1983, Westside Federal would assume CHG's monetary obligations and gain private development rights to the convention center if CHG encountered financial problems. In order to maintain the private part of the convention project, Westside had to secure a \$37 million loan from a consortium of nine local and international lenders (Nalder, 1985d). Unable to stem continuing financial losses and burdened by \$85 million in loan commitments to CHG, in 1985 Westside S&L collapsed, like hundreds of similar financial institutions nationwide. This left Industrial Indemnity of San Francisco, Westside's bonding company, liable for bonds worth \$30 million for the private portion of the project. It also meant, according to a local paper, that "the land under the convention center wasn't free anymore. The promise of free land had been one of the main arguments in favor of the freeway site" (Nelson, 1987b). What local media failed to explain was that this financing scheme was

yet another example of public support for the convention facility. Federal taxpayers, by subsidizing the massive nationwide bailout of hundreds of failed Savings and Loans, thus helped finance the new convention center, along with the state and the city.

After Westside S&L went bankrupt, the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation (FSLIC) secured ownership of the private property next to the convention center site that was originally held by CHG. Industrial Indemnity and federal bank insurers subsequently brokered a deal with the convention center board—a public non-profit corporation—to purchase the properties needed for a joint development for only \$5 million. In exchange, Industrial Indemnity relinquished any future claims against Westside S&L's assets, while also having their liability reduced on the \$30 million in surety bonds to some \$10 million (Lane, 1985a; Clever, 1985c.). Industrial Indemnity agreed to pay the convention center approximately \$30 million over 13 months in exchange for nearly \$1 million a year in parking revenue for 30 years—money CHG International was originally planning to receive (Nelson, 1987b).

As it turned out, the deal with the city was extremely generous, and was also critical to the survival of the project. In effect the state of Washington had “agreed to pay \$5 million to the FSLIC to buy its way out of any delays the federal insurer, and Westside's depositors, could have caused” (Nelson, 1987b). Further, the federal agency had agreed to take some \$9 million in losses by

deferring collection on an additional \$3.5 million the convention center would get through the sale of the nearby land which housed the McKay Hotel, and by refusing to charge the state any interest on the money (Clever, 1985d).

According to an FSLIC official, “without an out-of-court settlement, the convention center had no chance” of moving forward since ownership of the private property—crucial to the overall convention center project—would have been litigated for years (Nelson, 1987b). While this agreement allowed the project to proceed, it represented yet another instance of a public and largely hidden subsidy for the convention center; FSLIC losses are born by taxpayer dollars.

The bankruptcy of CHG and Westside S&L forced the convention center board to find a new private partner to help develop the property next to the convention center and avoid major funding problems and delays. Yet maintaining the financial solvency of a private firm was not the only serious fiscal issue threatening the project. Rising construction costs and technical uncertainty also posed growing problems for the board. Indeed, with construction barely started, some state lawmakers suggested that the final cost of the project would far exceed estimates, and the state would be asked to foot the bill. Board members, however, insisted that project costs were under control, and that the state would not have to sell any additional bonds to finance the project (Nalder, 1985h; 1985i).

Given the host of design and construction problems associated with the freeway site, it should have been clear that costs were no longer an issue in the decision to support the project at the downtown location. Among other concerns, the freeway site would require construction on top of a bridge to be built over the interstate freeway, and called for more steel to support it than the city's tallest building, a 75-story skyscraper. Such work was termed "difficult" by the *Seattle Times*,

because the contractor can use the freeway surface only at night and can block lanes in only one direction at a time. During the day, contractors must move equipment to freeway shoulder or median strips. Express lanes will remain open in the direction in which the freeway mainline is blocked. The contractor faces the risk of dropping something on the cars below or incurring a fine by tying up rush hour traffic (Nalder, 1985b).

Such potential obstacles virtually ensured that the project would be delayed or require significantly higher expenditures. Indeed, the total cost for the project had risen from \$90 million in 1982, to \$120 million in 1984, to an estimated \$135 million by mid-1985.<sup>25</sup> The final bill for the downtown convention facility would ultimately be much higher. By this point, the city and convention center

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<sup>25</sup> It's worth noting that in calculating the state's commitment to the convention center, bond funding (\$99 million in 1985 when the project cost \$136 million) never included the cost of interest payments the state would make on the bonds. The bonds were sold at the unusually low interest rate of 9 percent. Total interest costs on the 25-year bonds was originally projected to be \$152 million, in addition to the repayment of nearly \$93 million of bond principal (Layton, 1983). At the time, aside from the added costs of insurance and higher steel prices (approximately \$6 million), the *Seattle Times* suggested the increased cost of the project was due to compensation that would be needed for the loss of low-income housing (which never amounted to more than \$2 million), landscaping, and a parking garage and shopping mall which were originally intended to be built by private developer CHG International (Nalder, 1985b).

board were so committed to the downtown project, that they faced little choice but to proceed with construction despite costs that were seemingly out of control.

One alternative explanation for rapidly escalating costs is that in order to maintain public support for the convention center, the projected costs of the facility were intentionally kept low. Housing and community advocates made this allegation at several points during the site selection and construction process. In fact, several informants interviewed for this research still maintain that the board and their allies consistently underestimated the total expense of the convention center, knowing full well that the costs of the project would likely escalate and require additional public subsidy. Under this scenario, the board of directors simply kept their cost estimates low and downplayed potential construction problems in order to secure city and state support. Once underway, the project was literally unstoppable, and there was little likelihood that public support would be withdrawn. Not surprisingly, Informant F, convention center board member, and Informant B, former city council member, vigorously denied this allegation. Both suggested that the drastically higher final price tag of the convention center was due to unforeseen circumstances (rising steel costs, technical difficulties involved in construction) and the fact that opponents of the downtown location lengthened the site selection and construction process through litigation and other needless protest.

As the price of the convention facility rose, so too did the direct cost to taxpayers. Two pieces of neglected legislation from 1982 and 1985 emerged to slap the state with \$10 million in new costs. The first law allowed the convention center to use money from the state general fund if hotel-motel tax revenue in Seattle and King County were insufficient to cover the cost of repaying the bond debt for the convention center. The 1985 measure let the convention center keep a higher percentage of interest from the bonds. Each law was now slated to cost the state \$5 million to help pay for the convention center, with no guarantee that the legislation would not eventually cost the state even more (Hatch, 1986a).<sup>26</sup>

Local media continued to serve a crucial role in securing additional public support for the convention center. Even after costs for the project had soared to some \$160 million, nearly twice the initial estimate, the city's newspapers maintained their unflagging support for the downtown project. As the convention center board lobbied state officials for a new loan for the facility in mid-1987, Seattle area Sen. Phil Talmadge called for the creation of a special legislative committee with subpoena powers to investigate management of the convention center's finances and property transactions. The Seattle Times called the request political "showboating," which demanded swift rejection by lawmakers. "The public long since has wearied of years of second-guessing,

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<sup>26</sup> While the convention center board insisted the \$5 million from the hotel-motel tax would be repaid to the

political ‘investigations,’ legal maneuvering and other forms of obstructionism” directed at the project, according to an editorial (Political Theatrics, 1987, p. A18). Two months later, lawmakers debated a request for \$63 million in state funds for rising construction costs, much of which would allegedly be paid back to the state (Underwood, 1987a). The paper’s editorial page warned darkly that failure to approve the legislation would mean disaster for the project. “All construction work on the project would simply stop and the state would find itself in a sea of legal troubles that would take years to litigate. Plainly, those are eventualities to be avoided at all costs” (Caught In, 1987, p. A22). Thus in the zero sum logic of support for the facility, any requests for additional financial assistance had to be approved “at all costs,” seemingly on blind faith and good will.

As a pair of Chicago developers sought to take over the private development of the project, state lawmakers reluctantly approved a \$57 million plan to assume all authority for the construction and operation of the convention center. Under a new plan favored by Governor Gardner and the convention center board, the state would sell nearly \$60 million in additional state bonds to finance the remainder of the project. The plan gained backing when a consultant estimated the state would make significantly more money by financing and operating the project itself (by leasing parking and retail operations), rather than pursuing a public-private partnership as had been planned for several years (Schaefer,

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state with interest, the second \$5 million would not (Hatch, 1986a).

1988a). Although several lawmakers criticized the strategy, in part because of rapidly shifting cost estimates, most state legislators appeared to favor the deal. The proposal included money to enlarge the convention center by adding a new meeting and exhibition space, while reducing the amount of retail space in the project (Schaefer, 1988a; 1988b; Convention Center's, 1988; Hatch & Matassa, 1988; Convention Center, 1988). By now, the total estimated cost for the convention facility had risen to more than \$180 million.

#### *Dominance of Elite Interests*

Several informants suggest that for more than 30 years, local elites have ruled the process of downtown development in Seattle by dominating the decision-making process. In particular, this form of urban development has generally excluded the needs of low-income groups. In particular, elites in Seattle appear to have successfully promoted a pro-growth agenda despite public hearings, community activism and opposition to specific downtown redevelopment projects. Somewhat begrudgingly, most advocates acknowledge that a public (hearing) process existed on most downtown redevelopment projects during this period, including for the convention center. Yet while noting that Seattle has a reputation for having a generous amount of citizen involvement in such planning decisions, Informant A, church leader, claimed "this is more of a charade" than reality.

We have public hearings; we show up at the public hearings. Now business representatives might come and make their statements at those hearings. But where they really have the

influence is in the background, in the conversations that we never see, in the council members offices, or over lunch at a downtown....restaurant, and that sort of thing. And that's where the real influence is generated. And we don't have access to that (Informant A, church leader).

In other words, an apparently open public hearing and review process masks the reality of power differentials between the public on the one hand, and local elites who in fact dictate development in downtown Seattle. Most housing and community advocates interviewed for this research suggest that in spite of public hearings, most development decisions in downtown Seattle—such as those relating to the convention center—were therefore made out of public view.

In the case of the convention center, the lack of public officials actively opposed to a downtown facility clearly hindered the effectiveness of community activists. For example, despite Mayor Charles Royer's initial opposition to the freeway site, according to Informant C, coalition staff member, "when push came to shove, he always caved in" to development interests. This view of a city government unable or unwilling to oppose large urban redevelopment projects was echoed by all community and housing advocates interviewed for this research. "Basically, everyone in the City (government) rolled over" on issues affecting downtown, said Informant E, housing advocate. He cited an historic reluctance by elected Seattle officials "to stand up to the local business sector" on numerous downtown projects (both public and private). Thus, local activists note, it is difficult, if not impossible, to challenge or oppose these downtown projects once elite interests support an idea. "There are some opportunities to

mitigate these projects, but once they start, they happen,” Informant E, housing advocate, added.

Informant B, former city council member, provided a different view of downtown development issues during an interview. Confirming reports in local media sources, he noted that city government was usually in accord with private developers. Thus rather than suggesting that business and corporate elites forced city officials to “cave in” on downtown development issues, a picture emerges of a mutually reinforcing relationship between these two forces. Although he described specific instances of egregious corporate lobbying and conflict between city officials and developers, Informant B, former city council member, noted that the city largely took a hands-off position on urban development issues. Thus, he added, local elected officials were largely unwilling to intervene and “mess with the wisdom of private developers.”

The bulk of evidence uncovered in this study suggests that for the most part, local elites—the downtown business community—wield excessive decision-making power on development issues through their direct access to and influence with the *formal* (or “proximate”) decision-makers (Dye, 1986). As described by Informant A, church leader, these connections with Seattle elected officials are usually made once individuals get in office. Those public officials who exhibit political independence, the informant stated, usually pay a high price for attempting to be responsive to a broad range of community interests.

Informant A, church leader, cited several city council members who were willing to work with the coalition and other community groups, thus helping to contribute to some gains advocates made on local housing policy. In general, however, these elected officials ran a risk of becoming politically isolated.

### **The Role of the Media**

As a further sign of institutional power differentials, the editorial departments of both major Seattle daily newspapers also provided unquestioning support for the downtown convention center site. This clearly served to influence public opinion and further isolate those opposed to this site. For example, opponents of the downtown convention facility were labeled “obstructionist” by the Seattle Post-Intelligencer during the siting decision process, largely for their initial opposition to the plan to expedite the city’s permit process for the convention center (“Convention Site,” 1984). In contrast, convention center board members and supporters of a downtown convention facility were depicted as rational throughout the process by the editorial boards of both the Seattle Post-Intelligencer and Seattle Times. Thus the Post-Intelligencer cited the “exhaustive study and public comment” that had led to the identification of the freeway location “as the best choice” for the convention center” (Convention Site, 1984).

The Seattle Times later derided the state Legislature’s “shameful delay” when some lawmakers questioned the siting decision and delayed authorizing \$6

million in bonds to pay for increased insurance and steel costs.<sup>27</sup> The newspaper's editors also described opponents of the freeway site as "self serving," while lauding the project as "critically important to the objective of reinforcing the regional economy through expansion of the convention and tourist trade" (Valued Project, 1985, p. A8). The editorial neglected to note that the \$6 million was originally designated as contingency funds, not to be issued except for emergency, unforeseen circumstances (Lane, 1985a). Given the newspapers' membership in the Downtown Seattle Association, editorial support for the downtown convention center was hardly surprising. As former city council member (and later mayor) Norm Rice observed, Seattle's two major newspapers play an integral role in the city's downtown business network (Hatch, 1989). As just one example of this process, Virgil Fassio, publisher of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, also served as the president of the Seattle-King County Convention & Visitors Bureau. Just prior to the decision about where to locate the convention center, the Visitors Bureau strongly endorsed the downtown location (Hadley & Gooden, 1983).

Despite receiving mostly favorable press, the convention center board consistently displayed a paternalistic attitude—characterized as "we know what's best"—and assumed that any poor or low-income households that might be displaced by the convention center would somehow be taken care of,

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<sup>27</sup> After the additional state bonds were approved in mid-1985, some state lawmakers finally called for legislative hearings on the convention center as also happened in 1987. By then, however, state oversight was too little and too late to significantly alter the project.

Informant C, coalition staff member, noted. While the community coalition constantly cited the likelihood of housing loss from a downtown facility, these warnings seemed to matter little to the board. "I don't think they saw things the same way," the informant said. "Basically, I don't think it mattered" (Informant C, coalition staff member). Indeed, convention center supporters seemed more interested in promoting an urban redevelopment agenda that met their financial needs and specific image of downtown growth.

Those backing the freeway site were thus able to present a consistent and favorable public message: there was a pressing need to make Seattle a "world-class city." They claimed that a new convention center would represent the cornerstone of a downtown renewal and signal a commitment to revitalization of the central business district. In this respect the Downtown Seattle Association was extremely effective in facilitating this process. Informant C, coalition staff member, notes that convention center board members (and other local elites) were "very charming, well-educated, influential folks...most really believed what they were saying. When you really believe something, you can sell it. They sold everybody on a vision" of downtown Seattle's future. That concept was of "Seattle as a destination city," a place where people from across the country and the world would visit.

Importantly, this image offered the promise of jobs, economic growth and income from tourism for downtown Seattle businesses and the city as whole.

This became a critical selling point at a time when unemployment was approximately eight percent in the city, and the state's economy was mired in the midst of a nationwide recession. According to an editorial in the Seattle Times, despite its "controversial nature," the convention center promised "to pay handsome dividends to the entire region in the coming decade." The paper suggested that the promise of 2,500 permanent new jobs—admittedly, "many of them for entry-level workers"—and expected regional economic development demanded strong support from local and state lawmakers (Convention Center, 1985, p. A12).

While not discounting the importance of creating jobs and economic growth resulting from the convention center, Informant A, church leader, suggested that such arguments are rarely subject to critical scrutiny.

...There's been a lot of studies on major, public development projects where jobs are used as an argument, around the country. And the numbers that are promised, almost always, simply do not pan out. They're exaggerated, they're used as an excuse to do things that might not otherwise demonstrate good judgement...As far as the convention center is concerned, it would generate jobs anywhere, it would generate tax revenue, anywhere (Informant A, church leader).

Nonetheless, community activists were unable to counter the resources and prestige of those advocating a downtown convention facility. Paul Schell, Seattle's current mayor, was another prominent individual who promoted the convention center at the freeway site. In his former role, he was the president

of Cornerstone development, a subsidiary of corporate heavyweight Weyerhaeuser Company. Schell noted that a new convention center was critical to the anticipated downtown renaissance. “My own vision is that this is going to be a great international Pacific Rim city. It really is our turn and there are things we can be doing to prepare for that,” he told the Seattle Times (Clever, 1985, p. B3). In the end, this vision of a thriving, cosmopolitan downtown Seattle proved to be too persuasive—and in fact continues to dominate public discourse—despite those who claimed that most new employment generated by the convention center would be low-paying jobs in the hotel and service industry. Indeed, an editorial in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer noted that the case for the “jobs-producing convention center” at the freeway site was “overwhelming” (“A Fair,” 1984). It’s worth noting that a large percentage of downtown residents at the time were existing on public assistance and/or sporadic employment, and no doubt many would have welcomed these work opportunities. However, there is no evidence whatsoever that the convention center, local hotels, construction firms or other businesses attempted to recruit or train this population for the expected influx of thousands of new jobs from the project.

### **Conclusion**

While the lure of jobs and urban redevelopment was apparently irresistible to local elites, the convention center was an integral component in the ongoing transformation of downtown Seattle. Several informants describe the project as a “watershed” in the process of downtown redevelopment, especially in making

the area a more upscale environment that caters to an increasingly narrow population. They characterized the broader scope embodied by the facility as an effort to transform downtown into an area geared toward serving the needs of corporate elites. These community and housing advocates suggested that the extensive residential changes that have occurred downtown further demonstrate that central city neighborhoods are increasingly being developed for higher income households.

The extent to which the convention center negatively impacted the surrounding downtown neighborhoods remains a disputed issue. Local housing and community activists suggest that the facility had an overall adverse effect, especially on low-income residents. Supporters of the convention center highlight the economic benefits to downtown and the city that they claim proves the project was ultimately successful. Yet it seems inescapable that the convention center hastened the sweeping changes underway in the residential composition of downtown. Before it was built, the surrounding neighborhood was home to greater numbers of residents, especially low- and moderate-income households. As in other downtown areas, most were able to find sufficient shopping options and other services nearby to meet their needs. Over time, many of those small businesses and retail shops went out of business, most likely as a result of the upward pressure on real estate values caused by the convention center and attendant development. Further, not only did the project directly destroy affordable, market-rate housing, but the subsequent

development of hotels and other projects had a direct effect in increasing rents and housing costs in the area.

The convention center was thus part of the puzzle that helped contribute to making downtown (and parts of First Hill) a more “desirable” place to live for an increasingly higher-income residential community. It helped fuel the ongoing process of gentrification in the central city. Predictably, low-income households who were eventually forced out of their neighborhoods felt the price of these changes most adversely. A walk through this part of downtown Seattle today confirms that the area has undergone dramatic changes; the plethora of construction cranes and building activity suggests that further alterations of this downtown district loom on the horizon.

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

This dissertation sought to use the two case studies under examination to reveal several key processes in depth: to determine the loss of housing in downtown Seattle between 1960 and 1990, in particular, the loss of low-cost housing; to examine the displacement of low-income populations from downtown during this period of time; and to determine if this phenomenon was indicative of gentrification in the central city. My research utilized a critical theory approach through a comparison of two case studies of urban redevelopment. Based on my understanding of the literature, and preliminary research on demographic change in downtown Seattle, the dissertation sought to show how seemingly open public interest processes actually serve the interests and agenda of local elites.

Over the course of this research my emphasis shifted to an increased focus on elites and their interactions with the public policy process. As a result, this research has highlighted some of the various mechanisms through which local elites in Seattle manipulate the political and economic system to influence events to their benefit. While one of the two case studies in this dissertation (the convention center) overtly involved the role of public policy decisions, my research demonstrates that this urban redevelopment project was also an example of city and state policymakers often reacting to elite demands. Thus, it also represented a public policy process that was heavily influenced and ultimately subverted by local elites. In this sense, my research is informed by a

modified version of elite theory as described in Chapter Three and below, one that highlights the principal of *local* elites in controlling the metropolitan political and economic development process.

### **The Financial & Social Costs of Urban Redevelopment**

Because the field of social work (according to its Code of Ethics) is committed to addressing social problems and challenging social injustice, my dissertation sought to pay particular attention to the impacts of redevelopment and gentrification on those groups who were adversely affected in the two case studies. Not only did the city of Seattle and Washington state have to bear financial expenses for the new convention center and as part of the redevelopment of Pioneer Square, but more important there were also larger *social* costs associated with downtown redevelopment. Such damages, however, are inherently much harder to calculate, in part because they usually were borne by invisible or socially marginalized populations. Indeed, in the case of Pioneer Square, there was an overt and largely successful attempt to remove low-income and transient populations from the district as part of the process of urban (economic) redevelopment. These impacts raise important questions about the efficacy of urban redevelopment schemes.

How does society propagate myths and identify social problems that require “solutions” serving elite interests? Why, for example, should we accept at face value elite claims that urban growth and redevelopment initiatives benefit the greater common good? A more critical, reflexive examination of such assertions

would question the underlying motives behind such efforts—who really stands to gain?—and demand to know the hidden costs of urban revitalization.

Similarly, the process whereby elite claims on urban space are made should be rigorously investigated. Yet too often those dissenting voices that challenge the intent and potential impact of urban renewal and redevelopment projects are silenced. As a result, public proclamations of the need to “clean up” downtown areas, to “eliminate urban blight,” or to stimulate new investment via central city development are accepted *de facto*. Despite the visionary rhetoric of redevelopment, the lure of refashioned urban playgrounds for tourism and investment capital, and the promise of an improved quality of life for all residents, we might instead ask, at what cost? That is, who loses from these processes, and why?

Cities rise and decline, and their economies grow and contract. Throughout the twentieth century, central business districts and downtown areas across the United States have been constantly recreated to meet the changing needs of elite business and financial interests. Despite many similarities among metropolitan areas, these urban processes are not always identical, nor are such outcomes predetermined. Of note, individuals who are not elites have often supported these revitalization efforts. Further, local neighborhood groups and community activists have occasionally impacted the scope of urban redevelopment initiatives. Based upon this research, however, three distinct themes about this process emerge. The first is that the interaction between

those with privilege and power and other groups of people usually results in a disadvantage for certain social groups, particularly those without power. Second, the changes that cities undergo and the impacts of various urban economic and social transformations are the result of *political* decisions, and thus reflect conscious choices made by powerful actors. Third, whatever the stated intentions of those promoting metropolitan change, there are inevitably both positive *and negative* impacts of downtown growth. This dissertation, which examined the assumptions and planning by local elites for urban redevelopment initiatives and the outcomes of these efforts in downtown Seattle, highlights these points. More importantly, my research demonstrates that those groups who are already vulnerable to urban restructuring—less-skilled, poor and low-income individuals—most often experience these negative impacts.

### **Key Findings**

#### *Demographic Change*

There are several key findings of this dissertation. First, an analysis of census data reveals distinct patterns of demographic change in downtown Seattle from 1960 to 1990.

- A significant process of depopulation occurred over this 30 year period, resulting in the loss of one-half of the downtown population, including many low income residents;
- There was a simultaneous decline of the housing stock in this period: downtown Seattle lost approximately one-third of its housing units—a

net loss of 12,000 total units—most of which were low-cost private rental units;

- Some downtown census tracts experienced rising socioeconomic status (higher median income, educational status, and numbers of white-collar workers) among residents by the end of the 30-year period.

In sum, this data is illustrative of the processes of gentrification and displacement in the downtown core. While there was not overwhelming evidence on all demographic measures used in all nine downtown census tracts, nonetheless there are strong indications to make the claim that downtown Seattle underwent a process of gentrification during the period between 1960-1990.

#### *The Notion of Local Elites*

This dissertation highlights the primacy of elites in determining the pace and scope of urban growth and change in Seattle, as well as the complexity of class conflict that underlay such processes. However, this was not always a clear-cut issue. Two basic variations of proposed urban growth and development by local elites seem evident. The first is the vision of a “city on a hill,” a metropolis that seeks to be inclusive of all residents and competing claims on urban space as it undergoes economic transformation and redevelopment. The other concept is the social control model, whereby elites are intent on reclaiming urban space for certain social groups as redevelopment occurs, and in the process exclude low-income and other marginal groups from the benefits of such urban growth. Thus there can be “good” elites, those who may support development on a

particular issue in part because the specifics are relatively complex, as well as those elites who are interested in a comprehensive ideal of the city and urban development—the promotion of a greater civic good. Conversely, other local elites are often more interested in preserving their elite status, rather than supporting a model of egalitarian urban growth.

Two basic scenarios (or potential outcomes) of urban change were identifiable through this research. Both must be viewed in the context of urban (and global) economic change and transformation that affected Seattle. The first would continue to allow urban blight to occur in the downtown area, an option more distinct in the case of Pioneer Square. Under this strategy, local elites and the city could have chosen to withdraw from a commitment to promote the central business district and urban economic redevelopment. Urban decline and deterioration would have continued, along with the ongoing neglect and abandonment of low-income central city neighborhoods. A second alternative was one whereby local elites promote a vision of urban growth that encouraged the economic and physical renewal of downtown, and in the process placed a claim on urban space that denied a place for low-income populations. In both cases, marginalized groups lose, and usually have little voice in the policy and decision making process. Importantly, neither alternative was inclusive of the needs of all social groups, a process that was again most evident in the redevelopment of Pioneer Square.

A third scenario of urban growth, one where the city actively promoted a commitment to equality and socioeconomic diversity rather than the displacement and targeting of low-income households, could have just as easily been pursued. Such an inclusive model of urban redevelopment, while seemingly at odds with the overt needs and interests of many local elites, can arguably be seen as best serving the long-term goals of a broader spectrum of civic interests. Clearly, such plans would have avoided the need for many social control measures implemented both during and after the period of this study that targeted much of the downtown low-income population. Combined with a greater distribution of the economic benefits of urban redevelopment, this egalitarian alternative would have been more cost effective by reducing the demand for social services and policing costs in the central city. As important, it would have broadened the level of participation in civic issues by making poor downtown residents partners in the process of urban change.

Urban revitalization initiatives may indeed be well thought out plans to promote urban reinvestment and stabilize neglected or low-income neighborhoods. These projects may even be seen as having little (if any) negative impacts on the city or specific populations. That these goals may ultimately be achieved, however, should not obscure any costs, in particular those affecting local residents, that do indeed occur as a result of redevelopment. This raises the question of how elites define civic responsibility. That is, how do elites construct their world-view? The evolution of the Downtown Seattle Association

(DSA) is crucial in this respect, as they emerged with a central role in both cases examined in this research: the redevelopment of Pioneer Square and the construction of a new state convention center. The DSA was and remains a key player in urban redevelopment efforts in Seattle and planning for future downtown growth. While he was not personally involved in specific Pioneer Square activities, the role of Jim Ellis is instructive. Ellis represents the new breed of downtown elite, the so-called humane face of corporate power. Ellis was clearly the key figure in the development of the convention center and wielded an inordinate amount of power throughout that process. His determination during the development of the facility to play the part of accommodater (rather than a kingpin) is important, for it reflects an image of an elite intent on doing “the right thing” for the city, trying to accomplish “what was best” for Seattle.

Members of Seattle’s elite network like Ellis can hardly be faulted for their desire to improve the image and economic status of the city. That they believe they have a civic responsibility—and indeed are uniquely qualified—to promote positive urban growth and change is itself laudable. What is troubling is that theirs is a world-view that operates from the top down, one that has little room for the views of community advocates and others who can speak of a different social reality. What is often left out of their equation, then, are the needs, indeed the rights, of those with few economic resources and little political power. Under this elite framework, urban redevelopment plans not only fail to

be inclusive of accommodating low-income populations, but as in the case of Seattle, they often deliberately set out to remove these groups from public view.

*Elite manipulation*

How did local elites manipulate events to achieve hegemony over urban development plans and in the process public policy? This research underscores that in Seattle this was achieved through both a formal and informal process on several levels. A close collaboration clearly exists between the public and private sector—among government and local business leaders, for example—which share a similar outlook and many key goals concerning urban redevelopment and growth. This allowed these two important groups to articulate urban development schemes that were not inclusive of most of the existing low-income population, while also allowing the local corporate and business sector to influence urban policy. A shared vision about the role of economic transformation was also apparent in this process. In the case of Pioneer Square, deindustrialization (the increasing mechanization that led to redundant labor among blue-collar workers) simultaneously created a need for investment by finance capital. This was evident in urban renewal schemes that called for downtown Seattle to become a headquarters for national and international corporations, and to serve the needs of an anticipated growth in white-collar downtown workers. “Competing” claims on Pioneer Square by historic preservationists to promote the district as a venue for tourism, nightlife and the arts also seemed to recognize the changing nature of the downtown Seattle economy; this group merely sought a different type of urban

redevelopment. In the case of the convention center, supporters of the facility promoted a vision of Seattle as a “24-hour city,” with important links to the burgeoning Pacific Rim economy, and increased global trade. The convention center was thus cast as a crucial component of the city’s efforts to promote local commerce, revitalize the downtown business district, and ensure Seattle’s rightful place in the new international economy. Related to this, as demonstrated in the case of Pioneer Square, local elites are also sympathetic to the needs and concerns of merchants in the central business district. Thus the ability to depict poor people as an obstacle to progress in the redevelopment of Pioneer Square (as well as downtown in general) became a common theme of urban redevelopment schemes. In this respect, the role of local media was instrumental to the vision of urban growth shared by most local elites, initiatives that excluded the local low-income population.

#### *Local Media and Public Discourse*

Adverse public attitudes toward low-income downtown residents were a crucial aspect of urban redevelopment, and were largely fostered by public and private elites. In fact, this negative discourse—the social construction of a specific target population—and representations of central city decline were a deliberate aspect of the urban redevelopment process in downtown Seattle. Indeed, selling the city (the general public and elected officials) on the need to take decisive action in the form of redevelopment projects was a necessary precursor to actual policy decisions.

Twin processes were at work. First, local elites produced and perpetuated negative imagery of urban decline and populations of social deviants who were said to be a primary cause of central city decay. This was clearly more prominent in the case of the redevelopment of Pioneer Square, especially the denigration of low-income groups and their depiction as the main obstacle to urban renewal and progress. Second, elites promoted central city redevelopment projects as the best solution to the perceived social problem. As part of the process of advocating urban renewal, elites use their position of privilege to urge the removal of allegedly problem populations (in the case of Seattle, transients and local low-income groups) to foster capital investment and downtown growth. The exercise of elite power over the policy making process, in particular the ability to define social problems and solutions, thus becomes central to urban gentrification.

This process, carried out with the complicity (and often outright support) of the city's two major daily newspapers, allowed for the denigration and displacement of the poor and low-income groups in downtown Seattle. Significantly, their voice was rarely allowed to emerge or gain legitimacy in the varied efforts to redevelop downtown. This phenomenon was especially evident in the case of Pioneer Square, where those supporting both historic preservation and urban renewal schemes portrayed most of the low-income population as an obstacle to urban growth. With the opinion of elites dominant—and a distinct lack of voice for residential populations throughout the two case studies—policy discourse

served as a background to policy practice. In his seminal work on the perceived collapse of social order in American cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Boyer (1978) highlights the role of social ideology as a shaper of public discourse in reestablishing moral order in urban life. Thus the power of language and public discourse becomes central to elite hegemony. In Seattle, the city's urban redevelopment efforts were depicted in terms of repossessing public space and establishing a different public culture in downtown, most notably in redevelopment efforts in Pioneer Square.

Fueled by the powerful influence of local media (which seemed to share the goals of local elites), a continuum of rhetoric about urban decline and problem populations existed in these two case studies. This ranged from blatant assertions (in the case of Pioneer Square) about urban blight and problem groups, to a more nuanced focus (with the convention center) on the need for economic revitalization to help make Seattle a 24-hour city, a key link in the global economy. Both strategies proved ultimately effective, if for no other reason than the impacts of these projects fell on one distinct urban population.

#### *Key Similarities & Differences*

Clearly, the two cases investigated here have distinct differences. The convention center project represents a fairly straightforward instance of a vision of urban redevelopment corrupted by elite power and greed. For example, construction of the convention center was marked by a process of escalating financial costs that were shifted from private interests who stood to benefit onto

local (and state) taxpayers. Originally estimated to cost approximately \$90 million, the final expense for the facility was more than twice that figure, with the public (taxpayers and tourists) forced to subsidize the project. There were no comparable cost overruns in Pioneer Square that required massive public financial assistance, although local government did help subsidize many physical improvements made to the district, especially in the early crucial phase of redevelopment in the 1960s. Nonetheless, in both instances elites sought to reclaim downtown space for investors, the wealthy, and a broad middle-class who were expected to frequent these renovated urban areas.

The second case, Pioneer Square, is one where an explicit public consensus was built to exclude and displace poor and low-income groups. This, in turn, could not occur successfully without a range of “social gentrification” laws and policies—those initiatives that specifically target low-income groups and visible street populations. Thus, local ordinances that began in Pioneer Square in the late 1970s to curb public drinking led to broader policies implemented throughout downtown Seattle in the late 1980s and 1990s targeting panhandling, sitting on sidewalks, sleeping and other street activities. This range of regulations represents a campaign by public and private elites to “reclaim” downtown streets for those viewed as the rightful denizens of this urban space. The reclamation of downtown Seattle for upper- and middle-income uses, as well as for “deserving” low-income populations, clearly required the backing of elites and local government.

This is where the interface between ideology and policy practice noted by Boyer (1978) was most evident. What were the simultaneous processes that converged in Pioneer Square? This case appears to be an instance of the convergence of economic goals and a social control agenda. The claims placed on urban space in Pioneer Square came after the area was seen as a commodity waiting to be exploited. After years of intentional neglect and physical decline, a consensus emerged that Pioneer Square represented valuable urban real estate vital to urban redevelopment schemes favored by local elites. The visibility of most Pioneer Square residents (transients, the urban poor, and so-called social deviants) in public space thus lead to a concerted public push for social control in the district. This, in turn, required the use of public rhetoric and local media about the threat posed by the urban poor in order to help promote redevelopment initiatives, and simultaneously implement social control measures.

This was a distinct process compared to what occurred during the development of the convention center. Another key difference in the two case studies that emerged from this research—one with more positive outcomes—involves the evolution over time of perceptions of low-income downtown groups. Transients and low-income residents of Pioneer Square had few allies willing to advocate for their right to public space in the district in the 1960s and much of the 1970s. As a result, the needs of the poor were rarely at issue during debates

over the two competing visions of redevelopment in Pioneer Square. There is little evidence to suggest that an effort that had the backing of public or private officials be made to advocate for space in Pioneer Square (or other areas of downtown Seattle) that would accommodate poverty or the alleged social deviance of certain groups.

By contrast, significant public opposition emerged in the mid-1980s to the planned construction of a downtown convention center because of its perceived impact on low-income residents and low-cost housing, including fixed-income elderly residents of nearby neighborhoods. Not only did local media provide some challenge of the city's political and economic status quo, but the potential impacts on low-income groups of the convention center became more visible in the local media. It is likely that, in part, this change in attitudes had to do with different public perceptions of these low-income residents compared to those in Pioneer Square: the working poor and elderly, vs. "transients, bums and winos." Community organizing and advocacy in the 1980s thus served as a check on elite interests that might otherwise have neglected to address housing loss and the impacts of the convention facility on low-income groups. Nonetheless, the efforts of community advocates were unable to significantly impact a seemingly open public policy process. The convention center was ultimately built at the location favored by local elites.

Nonetheless, local organizing by these same housing and community advocates led the Seattle City Council in the 1980s to take relatively aggressive measures to mitigate the loss of low-cost downtown housing and prevent future housing hardships for low-income residents. Thus, in response to the significant loss of SROs and other cheap downtown housing in the 1960s and 1970s, local advocacy efforts helped create housing preservation and other ordinances in downtown (like a city housing replacement and relocation fund). Overall, a more activist local government—pushed by legislative and direct action tactics by community activists—began to slow the pace of downtown housing loss and displacement by the end of the 1980s. This “victory,” however, came after years of policy neglect or ineffective efforts by local government to address the process of housing loss and gentrification affecting downtown Seattle. Further, in spite of this visible public opposition to redevelopment plans, a corrupt political process ultimately defeated local community groups and others that challenged the convention center proposal.

Ultimately, this dissertation involves a comparison of urban ecology vs. political economy in its examination of gentrification in downtown Seattle. What does my study show? Did one (or both) of the cases under examination “prove” either theory as the key factor driving gentrification? Generally, it seems safe to say that differences exist depending on the specifics of each case; that is, beyond this particular study, there is no definitive answer to this question. However, most evidence from this research supports the critical theory (political

economy) analysis. There is little to suggest that the dramatic changes that occurred in downtown Seattle during this period of study—in particular, urban redevelopment plans and a massive loss of low-cost housing—were driven by the demands of middle- and upper-income consumers. Rather, these phenomenon and other processes indicative of gentrification stemmed largely from the desires and demands of local elites.

### **The Positive & Negative Impacts of Downtown Growth**

In spite of the impact on local low-income populations, there is a need to recognize that urban redevelopment can in fact produce positive outcomes for municipalities. Thus government subsidies and investment may indeed pay for themselves in the form of increased local tax revenue, job creation (both short term and long-term employment), and/or redeveloped central business districts that lure residents, tourists and new businesses back to neglected downtown areas. In the case of the state convention center, it has undeniably served as a focal point for commerce, trade and tourism in downtown Seattle since the late 1980s. Millions of dollars were pumped into the local economy, and many jobs were created, as a result of the initial construction and subsequent expansion of the building. Local hotels and many related businesses appear to have done well due to the fairly constant use of the facility. This was also probably due to other changes in the local economy, thus highlighting the difficulty of making definitive claims about causality. According to board members and supporters of the convention center, increased tax revenue to the city has also resulted in

the rehabilitation and construction of new downtown affordable housing units, thereby offsetting most of the original loss of low-cost housing.

One could make a case that the convention center has indeed helped revitalize an area of the central business district that was formerly on the outer fringes of retail and tourist activity. In this sense, the project has been an overwhelming success. Similarly, the transformation of Pioneer Square has produced many tangible benefits for Seattle. New housing has been built or rehabilitated, bringing scores of new residents—mostly middle- and upper-income households—into a district formally home to the city's poorest groups. An arts community has thrived in the district, and the numerous restaurants and bars that have opened provide a focal point for local residents and tourists alike, making Pioneer Square one of the city's most popular destinations. At the same time, the various forms of urban redevelopment activities described in this research inevitably have a dark, often unexamined, underside. The experience of Pioneer Square offers an excellent exemplar.

The period between 1960-1990 was one of rapid change in the physical and economic environment of downtown Seattle. Public and private redevelopment efforts, marked by projects like the convention center, urban renewal efforts in Pioneer Square, and an office building boom, provided the impetus for the ultimate destruction of much of the downtown low-cost housing stock. While some economic benefits may have trickled-down to low-income households from

redevelopment activities, poor people and those residents with deep ties to downtown neighborhoods were most often forced out by these processes. In fact, the various stages of gentrification that occurred in Pioneer Square forced out both low-income inhabitants as well as many of the initial groups of local merchants who were involved in the first phase of renewal activities.

### **Policy Implications**

Several policy implications arise from this research. First, there is a need for government initiatives to promote and ensure an inclusive process of urban growth and change. As just one example, local governments could work to ensure a more equitable use of tax money occurs on urban redevelopment projects (given that public subsidies are inevitably used for most of these proposals). This could take the form of job training opportunities and/or job guarantees for low-skilled and low-income workers on public projects as a requirement of any public subsidy (something that did *not* happen in the case of the convention center). In the absence of such measures, it seems apparent that low-income and socially marginalized groups will often be excluded from most of the economic benefits of such efforts. This research highlights the need for other types of proactive policy measures, especially those linked to the preservation of affordable housing (both subsidized and, importantly, private rental housing). Examples could include providing direct subsidies or low/no interest loans for small landlords to ensure low-cost housing is preserved. This would have been especially useful in downtown Seattle in the 1960s and 1970s, when enforcement of code violations in low-cost rental housing placed financial

burdens on some small hotel operators or apartment owners. Recent experience in Seattle and other cities demonstrates that in the absence of some forms of public subsidy, landlords are reluctant or unable to meet the housing needs of low-income groups, thereby fostering an environment that leads to the loss or abandonment of affordable housing. Greater direct support for affordable housing by local, state and federal governments, especially in the central city, as well as requirements that a percentage of new housing is affordable to low-income populations are other solutions to the problems of displacement and housing loss posed by gentrification.

Such measures finally suggest a need to articulate an alternative to the dominant mode of urban redevelopment, that is, the promotion of an egalitarian vision of urban growth. What was missing from the experience of urban redevelopment in Seattle was an inclusive plan that incorporated a mix of socioeconomic groups. Ultimately, this notion of a more socially just vision of urban growth and redevelopment highlights what is usually included and excluded in the discourse of agenda setting. How can we work to ensure that all groups are represented in this process of urban growth and change? Once again, this underscores the notion of social ideology as a primary shaper of public discourse. It also highlights the need to offer different policy setting frameworks, which in turn has implications for policy research and analysis. Whether made explicit or not, and despite claims of objectivity inherent to the process, the design of public policy (which clearly includes plans to redevelop

central city environments) is laden with the values of those involved in this process. Thus, this is inherently a political process in the sense that the outcomes of policy in capitalist economies usually result in “winners” and “losers.” That the groups involved in policymaking are usually made up of elites (from both public and private sectors) with shared values dramatizes the need to recast public policymaking with an eye toward the needs of vulnerable groups.

This highlights the critical role of community organizing and political advocacy to help ensure that policy-making, especially at the local level, reflects the desires of a broad spectrum of community interests. The example of redevelopment in Pioneer Square described in this research makes clear that in the absence of vigorous advocacy on behalf of low-income groups, public policy will ultimately reflect the interests of local elites. Conversely, in the case of the convention center, local activists were able to gain some political concessions from both local developers and city leaders. While not successful in their quest to block the construction of the facility, this activism mitigated some of the negative impacts of the project, and helped facilitate a change in the city’s housing policy. Thus, one crucial lesson of this experience is that vigilant activism is a key necessity of a truly democratic public policy process. Without that, the continued failure to involve low-income populations and community advocates as legitimate stakeholders in the process of urban growth will only

result in the continued polarization of society. Ultimately there are no “winners” in such a scenario.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**List of Key Informants**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Description</b>
Informant A, church leader	A former key leader of the Church Council of Greater Seattle who was active in the opposition to a downtown convention center.
Informant B, former city council member	A former (16-year) member of the Seattle city council who served as a key conduit between the city and the convention center board.
Informant C, coalition staff member	The former paid staff-person for the Washington State Convention Center Coalition, a citizen's advocacy group formed to block the construction of the convention center at the freeway site.
Informant D, social worker	A social worker with nearly 30 years practice experience in downtown Seattle who was active in the campaign against a downtown convention center.
Informant E, housing advocate	A long-time housing advocate who was instrumental in the opposition to siting the convention center project downtown.
Informant F, convention center board member	A former member of the convention center Board of Directors.
Informant G, city council member	A current member of the Seattle City Council.
Informant H, city staff person	A 20-year staff member of the City of Seattle's Office of Housing and Department of Community Development.

**APPENDIX B**  
**Human Subjects Review**  
**Certification of Exemption**

Section II. ABSTRACT:

*a) Purpose of the research*

The purpose of the proposed study is to obtain information as part of my dissertation. This research will examine changing patterns of spatial stratification by social class in downtown Seattle, Washington from 1960 through 1990, with a particular focus on the loss of low-cost housing and displacement of low-income residents. The research attempts to document these changes and to determine to what extent public policies and decision making were responsible for alterations in the social and class composition of the downtown environment.

Primary and secondary data sources will be used to assess the relationship between public urban redevelopment and gentrification, the loss of low-cost rental units, and the displacement of low-income residents from downtown Seattle neighborhoods. In particular this data is expected to help provide the *context* for analyzing these changes. This project will attempt to investigate several key processes that are expected to address my central research questions. These include:

- Public policy affecting urban development and downtown redevelopment activity;
- The loss of (affordable) housing and displacement of low-income downtown residents;
- The role of key actors involved in downtown development and local funding mechanisms.

*b) What subjects will do*

Key informants for this research will provide verbal consent of their agreement to participate in the project, and will answer interview questions as noted below in section (c).

*c) The nature of the data to be obtained*

Through the use of public documents, archival materials, and key informant interviews, I seek to identify and highlight key public projects and the related decision making that was instrumental in the redevelopment and transformation of downtown Seattle.

The archives used for this research will be local newspapers and materials from the City of Seattle Archives. The latter are all public documents and records; if they are from an "agency," the agency or department is a public body (i.e., part

of the city or county government like the City of Seattle Department of Community Development). I do not anticipate using any private agency records.

A significant aspect of this research will involve the use of interviews with key informants. No advertising will be done for human subjects. Access to key informants will instead be generated via word of mouth from other informants. During the course of initial interviews, subjects will be asked for the names of other key informants who might have direct work experience and/or knowledge about the primary topics and themes of this research. It is anticipated that interviews will be conducted with key decision-makers directly involved in city politics and urban redevelopment between 1960-1990. These subjects could include the following:

- ✓ Public officials (such as elected representatives and/or civil servants), some of whom may be retired and/or no longer working in this capacity);
- ✓ Community activists from organizations concerned about affordable housing and downtown development issues (such as the Seattle Anti-Displacement Coalition, the Low Income Housing Institute, and the Seattle Tenants Union);
- ✓ Lobbyists and public policy advocates involved in these specific issues.

Written consent of each subject shall be sought through the following process:

- a) I will identify myself and my affiliation, and provide my telephone number;
- b) I will indicate that my study involves research, and describe the purposes of the research;
- c) I will describe how I became aware of the subject, and the potential benefits of their participation in the research;
- d) I will indicate my interest in conducting research with the subject through an interview, and that the expected duration of the subjects' participation shall be approximately 60-90 minutes;
- e) I will indicate that the interview will be held at the natural setting of the subject (or a mutually agreed upon neutral setting), unless conducted via the telephone;
- f) I will indicate that the interview will include open-ended questions of the subject to generate discussion about their knowledge and perceptions of:
  - ✓ the impacts of development in downtown Seattle between 1960-1990;
  - ✓ how these developments affected low-income groups and the supply of low-cost downtown housing;
  - ✓ the decision making process related to this topic.
- g) I will indicate that interviews will be tape-recorded;
- h) I will specify (*based on the information in section (d) below*) how I intend to deal with confidentiality and protection of the identity of the subject;

- i) I will provide the name and contact number of the Associate Dean for Research at the School of Social Work as the contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research and research subject's rights;
- j) I will ask if the subject has any questions about the research project or their participation;
- k) I will verify that all of the above information is understood by the subject, that the subject voluntarily agrees to participate in the research project, and that refusal to participate or withdraw from participation will involve no penalty.

Interviews will include questions to facilitate discussion about subjects' perceptions of the impacts of development in downtown Seattle, especially on low-income groups, and the process of decision making related to urban redevelopment. Because this aspect of the data gathering process is somewhat exploratory, the interview process—in particular during the initial phase of the research—will be open-ended.

Sample interview questions will likely include the following:

1. Are there key events or projects in the development of downtown Seattle that should be examined for their impact on low-cost housing, and/or the transformation of Seattle?
2. What impact (both good and bad) did these projects have?
3. How did they affect low-income downtown residents?
4. How did key decisions get made regarding urban development?
5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this method of decision making?
6. How did this decision making process change over time?
7. Who were the key decision-makers for downtown development issues?

*d) How anonymity or confidentiality will be maintained*

Unless individual informants grant specific authorization, no subjects interviewed for this research will be identified in the final written dissertation.<sup>1</sup> No affiliations of any subjects will be included. Instead, general identifiers will be assigned to subjects that broadly describe an individual's role and relationship to the research topic. For example, a subject might be referred to as "a former city official with direct working knowledge of the city's housing policy." These identifiers will not allow for human subjects to be either directly or indirectly identified.

No information from informants shall be disclosed which could in any way jeopardize the reputation, financial status, or employment prospects of human subjects. Further, no information shall be included in the final written

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<sup>1</sup> As noted on the exemption form, I understand that voice recordings will make subjects identifiable. However, because there are no sensitive interview questions asked about personal behavior, I assume this study is eligible for exemption.

document that could place the subject at risk of civil or criminal liability. Confidentiality of all informants/human subjects shall be maintained both during and after the conclusion of the research project. Tapes will not be used for any *public* purpose. The sole use of all audiotapes will be to analyze them in relation to the research project, for example, to help answer some of the "Key Research Questions" of the study. Access to the tapes will only be given to the researcher. The tape-recorded interviews of human subjects will be erased on December 1, 2000.

**University Of Washington**  
**Consent Form**  
**“Urban Redevelopment, Housing Loss and Class Segregation:**  
**A Case Study of Gentrification in Seattle”**  
**Interviews**

Investigator

Scott Harding, Ph.C., Principal Investigator, School of Social Work, 685-1264

Investigator’s Statement

**PURPOSE AND BENEFITS**

The purpose of the interview phase of this research study is to elicit information from “key informants” about public redevelopment projects in downtown Seattle from 1960-1990; the public policy processes and decisions involved in such projects; and the impact of these projects on low-cost housing and the displacement of low-income residents. The information will be used to supplement other data sources being gathered and analyzed for this study.

**PROCEDURES**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to provide information through an interview regarding your knowledge and perceptions of:

- the impacts of development in downtown Seattle between 1960-1990;
- how these developments affected low-income groups and the supply of low- cost downtown housing;
- the decision making process related to this topic.

The interview will include open-ended questions of the subject to generate discussion about your knowledge of these topics. The expected duration of your participation in the interview shall be approximately 60-90 minutes. For the purposes of this research project you are being asked to allow your interview to be audiotaped. This is intended to allow the interviewer to concentrate on what you are saying, as well as to ensure that your comments are not misrepresented. Audiotaping is *not* a requirement of participation in this research study. Please indicate on the form below whether or not you give your permission to have the interview audiotaped.

**RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT**

Some people feel that providing information for research is an invasion of privacy. Some people feel nervous when their interview is audiotaped. I will do everything in my power to make you feel as comfortable as possible.

## OTHER INFORMATION

All of the information you provide is completely confidential. No one other than the researcher will have access to the audiotapes of the interview. You will not be asked to identify yourself or provide any other identifying information during the interview. Audiotapes of the interview will be erased on December 1, 2000.

Participation in this interview and research project is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. If you have any questions or concerns, please call Mary Gilmore, Associate Dean for Research at the School of Social Work at 685-1685.

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 Scott Harding

Date

## Subject's Statement

The study described above has been explained to me. I voluntarily consent to participate in this interview. I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the study and interview process. I understand that future questions I may have about the research or about my rights as a subject will be answered by the Principal Investigator listed above.

I give permission for my interview to be audiotaped for the purposes stated above.

 Yes

 No

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 Name of Subject

---

 Signature of Subject

---

 Date

**Scott Harding**  
 817 Missouri Street  
 Lawrence, KS 66044  
 (785) 864-4720  
 hardings@ukans.edu

## EDUCATION

(December)	<b>Doctorate of Social Welfare (Ph.D.)</b>	2000
	University of Washington	
	Dissertation: "Urban Redevelopment, Housing Loss and Class Segregation: A Case Study of Gentrification in Seattle"	
	<b>Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)</b>	1992
	California State University, Sacramento	
	Concentration: Community Organizing, Planning and Administration	
	Thesis: "Multicultural Content in the Histories of Social Work"	
	<b>Bachelor of Arts, Government/Journalism</b>	1984
	California State University, Sacramento	

## RESEARCH INTERESTS

Poverty; residential segregation, affordable housing and homelessness; social welfare policy and its impact on African-Americans and low-income groups; gentrification and urban problems; social welfare history; community organizing and social change; multicultural social work education.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**Aug-Dec 2000** *Faculty.* University of Kansas, School of Social Welfare. Course: *Social Problem, Policy and Program Analysis I.* Required course for BSW seniors. Class emphasizes understanding social problems and social constructionism, and the history of U.S. social welfare policy. Attention is given to problems of poverty, inequality, and discrimination, their impact on particular groups, and the role of social workers in affecting social policy/social change.

- Jan-Mar 2000** *Instructor.* University of Washington, School of Social Work. Course: *Poverty & Inequality in America.* Requested by students to teach elective course. Class emphasizes theories of poverty and inequality, its impact on key groups, and public/private initiatives to address these problems.
- Sept-Dec 1999** *Instructor.* University of Washington, School of Social Work. Course: *Social Policy & Economic Security.* Foundation course for MSW students. Topics included historical context of income assistance programs, poverty, welfare reform, and race, class and gender biases in social welfare policy.
- Mar-June 1999** *Instructor.* University of Washington, School of Social Work. Course: *Community Change Practice.* Foundation practice course for MSW students. Course focused on historic & contemporary compatibility of social work values with community organization and political action. Emphasized case studies of organizing by low-income women and communities of color.
- Jan-Mar 1999** *Instructor.* University of Washington, School of Social Work. Course: *Poverty in America.* Designed new elective in BASW curriculum. Focused on structural determinants of poverty and inequality and the disproportionate impact of poverty on women, children and racial minorities.
- Sept-Dec 1998** *Instructor.* University of Washington, School of Social Work. Course: *Cultural Diversity and Social Justice.* Foundation course for MSW students. Explored issues of oppression, privilege, racial and gender discrimination and social workers' role in creating strategies for social change.
- March-June 1998** *Instructor.* University of Washington, School of Social Work. Course: *Cultural Diversity and Justice.* Foundation course for BASW students. Focused on topics of individual and group differences, domination and subordination, individual & group approaches to eliminate social injustice.
- Jan-June 1998** *Co-Instructor.* University of Washington, School of Social Work. Course: *Intergroup Dialogue Facilitator Training.* Developed and instructed a two-quarter training course (methods & consultation) for students who served as intergroup dialogue peer facilitators in BASW Cultural Diversity course.

**RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

- Sept. 1999-June 2000** *Research Assistant. University of Washington, School of Social Work, Seattle, WA.* Analyzed home mortgage lending data to determine if patterns of lending discrimination or segregation exist for Asian Americans.
- Nov. 1997-Nov. 1998** *Project Evaluator. Seattle Police Department, Seattle, WA.* Evaluated problem-solving/community-policing model to determine perceptions of public safety issues in targeted areas of Seattle. Utilized qualitative research techniques including ethnographic interviews (both individual and focus group), survey design, participant observation, and data analysis.
- June-Oct 1998** *Research Analyst. Casey Family Program, Seattle, WA.* Member of Practice Replication Project team that investigated best practices among social workers serving foster families. Interviewed social workers, family developers and others. Evaluated interview data and report writing.
- Dec 1996-Dec 1997** *Research Assistant. University of Washington, School of Social Work, Seattle, WA.* Trainer and Coordinator of intergroup dialogue project used in course on Cultural Diversity and Justice. Developed & implemented training for student facilitators. Created survey for evaluation of student learning through intergroup dialogues. Data analysis of survey & interview research.
- July-Sept 1997** *Research Analyst. Casey Family Program, Seattle, WA.* Co-authored report on email tutoring project for youth in foster care. Interviewed foster parents and foster youth, summarized data, wrote report.

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

- May-August 1996** *Policy Analyst. California Budget Project, Sacramento, CA.* Conducted research and wrote report on the working poor in California. Analysis and preparation of briefing papers on state budget, welfare reform and related fiscal policy issues. Wrote articles for monthly newsletter.
- Sept 1995-April 1996** *Conference Coordinator. Housing California, Sacramento, CA.* Co-coordinator of "Housing California 96," the largest national conference on housing, homeless & economic development issues. Coordinated workshops, oversight of fundraising & diversity committees.

- Nov. 1994-June 1995** *Acting Executive Director. California Homeless & Housing Coalition, Sacramento, CA.* Supervised staff in Sacramento and Los Angeles offices. Responsible for fundraising and financial management. Coordinated statewide Board of Directors. Coordinated federal policy advocacy and primary media contact. Oversight of organizational assessment process.
- June 1992-Nov. 1994** *Northern California Coordinator. California Homeless & Housing Coalition, Sacramento, CA.* Coordinator of California Housing Policy Initiative, part of a national project monitoring implementation of federal housing programs. Coordinator of Fair Share Network, a grassroots advocacy coalition on welfare reform and budget issues. Supervised interns.
- May 1991-May 1992** *Staff. California Coalition for Rural Housing Sacramento, CA.* Participated in tenant education & organizing campaign on conversion of subsidized rental housing to market-rate units. Editor of monthly newsletter. Conducted research on housing issues affecting rural areas of California. Responsible for financial management and administrative affairs.
- Jan 1988-Aug. 1990** *Project Coordinator. Labor Coalition on Central America, Oakland, CA.* Coordinated national human rights support network for Central American union members and U.S. tours of Central American labor leaders. Wrote articles and edited bi-monthly newsletter. Grant writer and public speaker.

## PUBLICATIONS

Nagda, B.A., Spearmon, M., Holley, L.C., Harding, S., Ballasone, M.L., Moise-Swanson, D., & de Mello, S. (1999). Intergroup dialogues: An innovative approach to teaching about diversity and justice in social work programs. *Journal of Social Work Education, 35*(3), 433-449.

Nagda, B.A., Harding, S. & Holley, L.C. (1999). Social work and multicultural organization development: Toward empowering and empowered organizations. In W. Shera & L.M. Wells (Eds.), *Empowerment practice in social work: Developing richer conceptual foundations* (pp. 278-306). Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Longres, J. & Harding, S. (1997). Editorial: Ebonics and social work. *Journal of Social Work Education, 33*(2), 222-224.

**PRESENTATIONS**

*Intergroup dialogues, education, and action: Innovation in the School of Social Work.* Invited presentation at the Conference on Intergroup Dialogue on the College Campus (with Biren Nagda & Lynn Holley). University of Michigan, November 13, 1997, Ann Arbor, MI.

*Intergroup dialogue: An innovation in teaching about diversity and social justice in a school committed to multiculturalism* (with Biren Nagda, Margaret Spearmon, Lynn Holley & Jonathan Stacks). Presentation to the School of Social Work Visiting Committee, November 7, 1997, Seattle, WA.

*Social work and multicultural organization development.* Presentation at the International Conference, On the Margins: Social Exclusion and Social Work, September 10, 1997, University of Sterling, Scotland.

**HONORS & AWARDS**

2000	Excellence in Teaching Award, University of Washington
1998	Eugene H. Beebe Scholarship, University of Washington
1996-97	Boeing Endowment Fellowship, University of Washington
1991-92	Graduate Equity Fellowship, California State University, Sacramento
1990-91	Graduate Research Assistant, California State University, Sacramento
1983-84	Editor-in-Chief of student newspaper
1983	Sacramento Bee Journalism Scholarship

**COMMUNITY SERVICE**

1997-1998	<b>University of Washington, School of Social Work</b> <i>Diversity Committee</i>
1993-1996	<b>Sacramento Housing Alliance</b> <i>Board of Directors</i>
1994	<i>President</i>
1994-1996	<i>Executive Committee</i>
1993-1996	<b>California Reinvestment Committee</b> <i>Board of Directors</i>
1994-1996	<i>Monitoring Committee</i>
1994-1995	<b>National Low Income Housing Coalition</b> <i>Board of Directors</i>