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THE POLITICS OF RELIGION: THE IRISH AND PROTESTANT DISPUTE OVER HOUSING IN DERRY, NORTHERN IRELAND AND SOUTH BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, 1920–1960

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**THE POLITICS OF RELIGION: THE IRISH AND
PROTESTANT DISPUTE OVER HOUSING IN DERRY,
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MASSACHUSETTS, 1920–1960**

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THESIS

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OVER HOUSING IN DERRY, NORTHERN IRELAND AND SOUTH BOSTON,
MASSACHUSETTS, 1920–1960**

by

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ABSTRACT

In the latter half of the twentieth century, subsidized housing created a system of religious and racial segregation in the cities of Derry, Northern Ireland and South Boston, Massachusetts. In the following thesis, the housing projects of the Creggan Estates in Derry and the housing projects Old Colony and Old Harbor in South Boston will be the case studies for identifying the historical similarities between these two cities. By examining how the respective governments in each country used housing to achieve said segregation, it will help to identify why in the latter half of the twentieth century, Irish American Catholics fought against the African American Civil Rights Movement, while their Irish Catholic counterparts in Derry fought for their own civil rights.

The examination of official government documents is used to investigate how top officials viewed the Catholic areas in both cities. By uncovering if religion played a part in Protestant lawmakers reactions to housing shortages in Catholic neighborhoods, historians will be able to better understand why Protestant lawmakers seemingly chose to

continue an antagonistic relationship between the Protestant and the Catholic communities. In Derry, housing projects served to reinforce the political imbalance between Catholics and Protestants. In Boston, low income Irish American Catholics were separated from African Americans of the same or lower income level in Roxbury and Jamaica Plain in the hopes that by separating the two groups, racial tensions would dissipate. Not only did these projects work to separate certain demographics of the population from one another, it created a sense of “us versus them,” which was one of the factors in these cities’ different reactions to civil rights issues in the 1960s and 1970s.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION.....	1
HISTORIOGRAPHY.....	8
SOURCES	14

CHAPTER 1

DERRY	16
-------------	----

CHAPTER 2

SOUTH BOSTON	53
--------------------	----

CONCLUSION	93
------------------	----

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	97
-------------------	----

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DERRY

MPMEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
NIHT..... NORTHERN IRELAND HOUSING TRUST
DHAC.....DERRY ACTION HOUSING COMMITTEE

BOSTON

GGA.....GOOD GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION
CNL..... COMMISSION ON THE NECESSARIES OF LIFE
RHC..... RENT AND HOUSING COMMISSION
BHA..... BOSTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

Introduction

On 4 October 1968 one of the headlines on the *Evening Herald* (Dublin) proclaimed “Groups to Defy Ban on Derry Parade.”¹ The following evening on 5 October one headline dominated the same paper: “Marchers Cry ‘Gestapo.’” A sub-headline reported, “Civil Right marchers in Derry clashed with police at the Craigavon Bridge end of Duke Street this afternoon when they tried to break through a barrier of police vans and R.U.C. men with arms linked.”² The event that had prompted the *Evening Herald* to print such a bold headline would prove to be one of the most transformative events the province of Northern Ireland had ever experienced. On that dreary Saturday afternoon on 5 October, Irish Catholics in the small town of Derry (or Londonderry according to some), Northern Ireland had taken to the streets to protest the discriminatory practices of the Protestant ruling majority in the allocation of subsidized housing.

Since the 1920s Catholics in Derry had been subjected to building delays, substandard living conditions, and overcrowding in their communities. Although this was not a problem exclusive to Derry, because housing for the Catholic population was tied to their political representation, they had grown weary of being denied their political rights. The Protestant half of Northern Ireland’s population had never possessed a cordial relationship with Irish Catholics, so when the state of Northern Ireland was created in 1920, in an attempt to consolidate its control of the North, they had used housing as a means to keep Catholics from gaining any political power. In 1968, Irish Catholics decided they had had enough, and so took to the streets to march for their long-denied

¹ “Groups to Defy Ban on Derry Parade,” *Evening Herald* (Dublin), 4 October 1968, p. 1, Irish Newspaper Archive.

² “Marchers Cry ‘Gestapo,’” *Evening Herald* (Dublin), 5 October 1968, p. 1, Irish Newspaper Archive.

civil rights. Little did they know that this march would cause Northern Ireland to descend into nearly thirty years of civil war, an era referred to as the “Troubles.”

A few years later, and nearly 3,000 miles away, tucked away on page seventeen, the *Boston Globe* reported on 30 March 1974, “Boston Neighborhoods Get Ready for March.”³ Six months later, on 30 September, this time on page eight, the *Globe* reported, “400–700 March in S. Boston Against Busing.”⁴ The events which had spurred both of these headlines would also prove to be transformative for the community of South Boston, Massachusetts. However, where the residents of Derry had marched for their civil rights, the residents of South Boston were marching in opposition to a policy inspired by the African American Civil Rights Movement. Irish Catholics in South Boston had taken to the streets in the humid summer months of 1974 to protest the local government’s decision that South Boston High would participate in a busing program in order to racially balance the high school.

In 1974 the District Court for Massachusetts had found that the Boston School Committee had deliberately maintained segregation in Boston’s public-school system. Boston’s lawmakers felt that the best way to rectify the situation was to have South Boston High, which was a majority white and Irish American, and Roxbury High School, a majority African American school, participate in a busing program. The residents of South Boston declared they would not comply and started marching in protest to the order. They claimed that they were not against the civil rights of African Americans, but rather resented being told what to do by lawmakers who knew nothing about their

³ “Boston Neighborhoods Get Ready for March,” *Boston Globe*, 30 March 1974, p. 17, Boston Globe Archive.

⁴ “400–700 March in S. Boston Against Busing,” *Boston Globe*, 30 September 1974, p. 8, Boston Globe Archive.

neighborhood, which to a certain extent was true. South Boston was a world unto itself, defined by its strong Irish history. Historically, the neighborhood had never shared a cordial relationship with the wealthy, ruling Protestant half of Boston's population. When the busing order was handed down, the residents of South Boston felt that this was just another instance of Boston's Protestants exerting their control over the Irish neighborhood. The ensuing brief but violent years of protest came to be known as the South Boston Busing Crisis.

The decades of chaos in Northern Ireland known as the Troubles (1968–1998) and the years of upheaval witnessed during the South Boston Busing Crisis (1974–1988), would change and shape both communities in profound ways. Although one was more extreme than the other in terms of its length and scale of violence, both periods were no less devastating or disruptive in their respective cities. Demonstrations spilled over into full-scale riots. Stones, molotov cocktails, and petrol bombs were thrown at passing vehicles, police, and those considered to be on the “other” side. Tensions escalated to the point that young and old alike would suffer great bodily harm, and in some case, would lose their lives. Both cities were marked by these periods of violence, left to deal with the aftermath and consequences well into the twenty-first century. What set these movements apart was that in Derry, Irish Catholics fought for their civil rights, long denied them by the ruling Protestant community of Northern Ireland. In South Boston, Irish American Catholics worked against the civil rights of African Americans, claiming that their own rights were being denied in the city of Boston's attempt to desegregate its public-school system.

However, the history of these two cities suggests that they had the potential to have similar reactions to civil rights issues when they came to the fore in the latter half of the twentieth-century. Both cities were founded, expanded, and controlled for generations by a Protestant ruling class.⁵ Both had large populations of Irish Catholics with which they had to contend, making sectarianism a defining feature of both city's political thought and practices. This, in turn, caused the identities of the Irish Catholics in both cities to evolve in a similar manner. Influenced by a centuries-old antagonism with those of the Protestant faith, each area defined itself by cultivating a heritage based on a strongly republican ideal of Irishness.⁶ During the twentieth century, housing projects built with the intent of providing low-income individuals and families an affordable option to live in morphed into segregated slums, extreme poverty, and in some, cases crime. The economy of Derry was similar enough to Boston that Irish Catholics separated by 3,000 miles had many similar complaints against their respective governments for failing to provide job opportunities which would have revitalized both cities. Both were inhabited by heavily unemployed and working-class Irish Catholics, who by the late 1960s to early 1970s, were mistrustful of outsiders and preferred to care to their neighborhoods themselves.⁷ These similarities, along with a few of others, pointed to the

⁵ For a complete history of Boston's early history, see Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Hub: Boston Past and Present* (Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press, 2001), esp. chaps. 1–5. For a complete history of Northern Ireland's early history, see Richard Killeen, *A Brief History of Ireland: Land, People, History* (London: Constable and Robinson, 2012), esp. chaps. 8–11.

⁶ For a first-hand account of Derry's Irishness, see Eamonn McCann, *War and an Irish Town*, 3rd. ed. (London: Pluto Press, 1993). For a secondary analysis, see Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles* (Cork, Ire.: Cork University Press, 1997). For a first-hand account of South Boston's Irishness, see Michael Patrick MacDonald, *All Souls: A Family Story from Southie* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1999). For a secondary analysis, see Thomas H. O'Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town: The History of an Ethnic Neighborhood* (1988, repr.; Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press, 1994).

⁷ For Derry's economy and unemployment rates during the twentieth century, see Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites*; and Robert Fist, *In Time of War: Ireland, Ulster, and the Price of Neutrality, 1939–45* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983). For South Boston's economy and unemployment rates during

potential that Irish Catholics in both Derry and South Boston should have had similar reactions to the equality movements that sparked in the latter half of the twentieth century. They both knew what it was to be discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity and religion. However, their histories took radically different paths in the 1960s and 1970s, elevating the profile of the Catholic community in Derry and leaving a black spot on the Irish Americans of South Boston.

In the case of housing, Derry and South Boston share many similarities. By comparing the housing situation in Derry, Northern Ireland to that of South Boston, Massachusetts, from 1920 to 1960 it will be possible to show that South Boston's reaction to the busing order was influenced by more than just racism. The failure of Boston's government to address the severe housing shortage and overcrowding in ethnic areas like South Boston contributed to the frustration felt by the community's residents, much like the case of Derry. By examining the years leading up to the movements in each area, it will be possible to expand the dialogue as to why the Irish American community in South Boston fought against the desegregation of its high school in 1974.

Of the many challenges facing the post-World War II world, housing was one of the most transformative. Although many big cities after World War II featured structural decay and outdated infrastructure, housing was one of the more pressing issues facing urban centers by the mid-1950s. Working class neighborhoods, often defined by their extensive tenements for these often-unskilled laborers, had sprung up across Europe and in America during the nineteenth century in response to the industrial boom. In the aftermath of World War II, the need for updated buildings, better living conditions, and

the twentieth century, see O'Connor, *The Hub*; and Roland P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

subsidized housing for poor and working-class citizens became central topics of conversation. Derry and South Boston were no exceptions to this, and proved to be the areas most in need of better housing conditions for their residents. Urban renewal became the vehicle by which these areas were “updated.” Such updates often translated into displacing hundreds of low-income people, as was seen in the case of Boston, who then could not afford the new structures built in place of the old tenements buildings. In the case of Derry, new housing projects only served to perpetuate overcrowding rather than alleviate it. However, although urban renewal would be the means by which cities like Boston would rejuvenate their infrastructure, particularly in the case of Derry and South Boston, this would eventually lead to more problems than it would initially solve.

In Derry, housing was tied to political representation, making it one of the most contentious issues in the province of Ulster.* In South Boston, it was a marker of “turf,” an indication of where one ethnic neighborhood began and the other ended. It was also a means by which those Protestants in positions of power in each city were able to make their feelings known about their respective Catholic communities. From 1920 to roughly 1960 both areas endured a severe housing shortage, one that shaped their political thought and was one of the driving forces in their reactions to the issues of civil rights issues in the 1960s and 1970s.

In Derry from the 1920s to 1930s, new housing developments were delayed and canceled due to fears of upsetting the balance of Protestant control. Protestants in Northern Ireland had, among other things, redrawn the electoral boundary lines of the North’s urban centers, a practice known as gerrymandering, in order to assure that their

* “Ulster” and “Northern Ireland” are considered interchangeable terms for this region. This paper will follow this practice.

political party, the Unionist Party, retained the upper hand in Ulster's parliament, known as Stormont. In doing this, they were able to keep Catholic political parties at bay. When in the 1940s subsidized housing became a U.K.-wide program intended to alleviate overcrowding, the allocation of those houses became another way in which the Unionist Party was able to exude control over political power in the North. Catholics could not receive too many new homes or the gerrymandered electoral lines and would be thrown off. By containing the Catholic population to a specific area, the Unionist Party was able to limit their political influence.

In Boston delaying, canceling, or channeling housing developments away from ethnic neighborhoods like South Boston served as a means of reprisal for the Irish Catholic community's support of the Democratic Party. The Protestant population of Boston had historically supported the Republican Party. The Irish, resentful of the "Yankee" conservative spending habits, unerringly supported the Democratic Party. Unrestricted in their voting rights as were their counterparts in Derry, the Irish of Boston ensured that one of their own was elected to the deeply coveted position of mayor. In the 1920s and 1930s, an Irish Catholic with the means to run an election campaign meant that he was more than likely one of the infamous ward bosses. When in office they ran the city as they did their wards, with extensive job contracts, favors extended to loyal supporters, and under the table financial deals that always benefited them. When the Protestant Yankees were able to regain control of the city, they often expressed their displeasure of the Irish Catholic community's choice of a mayor by failing to address their housing shortage.

In South Boston, this would have unfortunate side effects, which would prove to be a double-edged sword. Although South Boston needed new housing developments, they fought their construction because those in charge of the projects were often Republicans. They continued to support corrupt Irish Democrats, which in turn made the Republicans hesitant to see to the community's needs. This unending cycle had severe consequences for the housing issue, one that had long-lasting effects. An examination of how religion and politics influenced housing developments in the twentieth century between these two cities will help uncover why they dissolved so quickly into violence when their respective governments made it clear they were not going to listen to their demands or concerns during their respective movements.

Historiography

The historiography of housing in Derry and South Boston contains a dearth of information on the early twentieth century. It is true that it was not until after World War II that subsidized housing became a wide-reaching phenomenon, however, many histories about Derry and Boston of the later twentieth century only discuss housing in terms of how urban renewal changed these neighborhoods. Housing shortages, overcrowding, and tenement buildings have not been discussed as issues going back to the 1920s but have rather been shown to be problems of the late 1940s and 1950s. By demonstrating that housing was actually a substantial issue in the early half of the century, historians will better understand why these movements—the Troubles and the Busing Crisis—inspired large social upheaval.

The few histories which discuss the South Boston Busing Crisis tend only consider its political and racial aspects, and issues like housing have not yet been taken

into consideration as one of the problems which caused the order to desegregate South Boston High to be so explosive. Additionally, few historians have taken South Boston's Irishness into account when examining the history of the Busing Crisis. Currently the only complete history on the Busing Crisis, Ronald Formisano's *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (1991), is incredibly thorough in its examination in the economy of South Boston but does not offer an in-depth analysis on the housing situation in either South Boston, or Roxbury, the African American neighborhood paired with South Boston for the busing program. Formisano does acknowledge that South Boston was predominantly Irish, but he fails to take the neighborhood's history and experiences into consideration. By not positioning South Boston's history in the Irish American experience, he does not fully identify why South Boston reacted to the busing order in such a volatile way. Irish identity in South Boston was linked to the Famine Irish of the nineteenth century and had, therefore, come from a long tradition of poverty a resentment of governments defined by their Protestant ascendancy. They were particularly distrustful of Boston's Yankee Republican ruling class, which is an aspect of South Boston's history which must be taken into account when looking at their violent reaction to the busing order.

One of the foremost authorities on Boston, Thomas H. O'Connor, has written extensively on all aspects of Boston's history and has shaped the current dialogue on the religious dynamic between the Catholics and Protestants of the city. He has effectively shown this relationship to be unique to the city of Boston and has utilized urban history as a means of relating how the city's development shaped Boston's neighborhoods. He is also one of the few historians to argue that South Boston's Irishness was a contributing

factor in 1974. All of his histories contain a political element, but *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (1995) is an in-depth analysis of the antagonistic relationship between the Irish Catholic Democrats and the Yankee Protestant Republicans. However, in his more general histories of Boston, where he considers many different aspects of life in Boston, he does link housing to Boston's strained political situation. He, like many other historians, considers housing only in its post-World War II aspects. His general history of Boston, *The Hub: Boston, Past and Present* (2001), his urban history *Building a New Boston: Politics and Urban Renewal, 1950 to 1970* (1993), and his specific history *South Boston, My Home Town: The History of an Ethnic Neighborhood* (1988), do not offer any synthesized accounts of what housing was like from 1920 to 1950 in South Boston. Although O'Connor is an invaluable source on Boston's history, by conducting an in-depth analysis of housing, and how it shaped South Boston, it will be possible to construct a deeper understanding of South Boston's attitude towards Boston's local government.

Other historians have also greatly enhanced our understanding of Boston's past, but here too there is a problem with how housing has been presented. Lawrence J. Vale his history, *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (2000), is one of the only overviews of Boston's history of housing. However, his biggest shortcoming is that it does not discuss the housing shortage during the 1920s, but rather goes from the late nineteenth century right to the mid-1930s when the New Deal was introduced. Although this is a valuable addition to the scholarship, by passing over the 1920s and early 1930s, he has failed to explain why South Boston was in need of new housing developments by 1950. He also does not discuss Boston's ethnic makeup,

beyond informing the reader that Boston had a large Irish population. Charles H. Trout in *Boston, the Great Depression, and the New Deal* (1977) goes into greater detail of Boston's ethnic makeup, yet his discussion on housing is only to point out that it started in the late 1930s. Finally, Gerard O'Neill's *Rogues and Redeemers: When Politics Was King in Irish Boston* (2012), is a collective biography of each of Boston's Irish Catholic mayors, linking to O'Connor's history of the political history of Boston, but here too, South Boston's housing situation is not given a great deal of consideration. These histories are informative and rich in their scholarship. However, by expanding these histories to consider housing as an aspect of South Boston's reaction to desegregation, scholars will be able to present a more robust image of the Irish community in Massachusetts.

The Troubles of Northern Ireland have been covered extensively by Irish and Irish American historians for many years. When it comes to the issue of how housing inspired the first civil rights march in Derry, the prevailing practice of the field is to start in 1968 with the formation of a group known as the Derry Housing Action Committee. Although this was the first group to actually bring about relatively quick change to the housing situation in the North, many historians have neglected to show that housing was, in reality, a contentious issue from the moment Northern Ireland was created in 1920. Expanding the history of Derry's housing issue back to the 1920s will enhance the scholarship of the Troubles and reveal how serious the situation was by the 1960s.

Of the many histories written on the Troubles, Niall Ó Dochartaigh is one of the few Irish scholars to do a comprehensive history of Derry during the civil rights movement. His history *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish*

Troubles (1997), offers a detailed analysis of this city. But while he begins this history with a brief summary of housing in the introduction, he too begins this history in 1968. His article, "Housing and Conflict: Social Change and Collective Action in Derry in the 1960s," (1999) is one of the only detailed histories of Derry housing situation, but even here 1920 is mentioned only briefly, and his analysis starts in the late 1940s. One of the more recent histories of the Troubles, Simon Prince's *Northern Ireland's '68: Civil Rights, Global Revolt and the Origins of The Troubles* (2007), does a good job of linking Northern Ireland to the Global 1968, and shows how Northern Ireland's history influenced the outbreak of the civil rights movement in 1968. Housing does play a key role in this history, but Prince does not adequately explain that Ulster's government was dealing with housing shortages and overcrowding in the 1920s and that these were directly impacted by the Unionist Party's consolidation of political power. These historians have greatly added to the knowledge of Northern Ireland's Troubles, but they do not adequately explain how housing was the issue that sparked the civil rights movement.

Other general histories of the Troubles tend to have the same problem, as well as presenting the idea that one of the parties which represented the Catholic community, the Nationalist Party, was not participating in local government because of the Unionist Party's dominance throughout Northern Ireland. To a certain extent that is true, however, they have failed to show that Nationalist ministers of parliament (MPs) were attempting to force the Unionists to acknowledge that housing was a serious and destructive aspect of life in Derry's Catholic communities. David McKittrick and David McVea's, *Making Sense of the Troubles: A History of The Northern Ireland Conflict* (2012), Peter Rose's

How the Troubles Came to Northern Ireland (2001), and James Loughlin's *The Ulster Question since 1945* (2004), all start their histories after World War II, and do point out that housing shaped political thought and worked to divide the Protestant and Catholic communities since the 1920s. This is just a sample of the many histories written on the Troubles, but they are also some of the most widely used and discussed histories of the field. By building on what these scholars have written about Northern Ireland and the Troubles, this thesis will show why housing proved to be the spark that set Northern Ireland alight.

Finally, this history is the first to compare the history of housing within these two communities. There are currently two articles that link Boston to Derry, but neither discuss housing in depth. The first is "'Sure, It's Hard to Keep Up with the Splits Here': Irish-American Responses to the Outbreak of the Conflict in Northern Ireland, 1968–1974," by Niall Ó Dochartaigh.⁸ This article details how Irish American groups in Boston, like the Committee for Justice in Northern Ireland, worked with representatives from Derry to influence the United States government to pressure Britain into intervening in Ulster's civil rights campaign. He also explains how Irish political groups had a tendency to split and divide due to political differences, and how that influenced the relationship between the Boston Irish and the Irish from Derry. The second is "Public Protest and Popular Style: Resistance from the Right in Northern Ireland and South Boston," by Jack Santino.⁹ This article details why groups of the political right tend to

⁸ Niall Ó Dochartaigh, "'Sure, It's Hard to Keep Up with the Splits Here': Irish-American Responses to the Outbreak of the Conflict in Northern Ireland, 1968–1974," *Irish Political Studies* 10, no. 1 (1995): 138–160, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07907189508406542>.

⁹ Jack Santino, "Public Protest and Popular Style: Resistance from the Right in Northern Ireland and South Boston," *American Anthropologist* 101, no. 3 (September 1999): 515–528, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/683845>.

resist social movements that challenge the status quo. Although neither article will be utilized in this thesis because they do not fit the time frame or the theme, these scholars do show the merit in linking Derry's history to South Boston's. This paper will expand our current understanding of housing between these two cities and why this issue was such a transformative and controversial one in the 1960s and 1970s.

Sources

In terms of sources, this paper is largely a top-down analysis. In the case of Derry, the parliamentary debates from both Westminster, the parliament of the United Kingdom, and Stormont, the parliament of Northern Ireland, are used extensively. They show how the members of parliament were reacting, and more often, turning a blind eye to the situation of housing in Derry. They also divulge how often and forcefully Nationalist MPs presented the case of substandard living conditions in Irish Catholics neighborhoods in Derry. In order to gauge the reaction on the ground to this practice, newspapers from various towns in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic are used to show what Irish Catholics thought of their government, and its seeming refusal to address the housing shortage and overcrowded conditions in Derry. Additionally, in order to show what the top officials in Westminster thought of the situation, Cabinet papers are used to reveal what was said behind closed doors on the questionable practices of the Unionist government.

Sources in South Boston offer somewhat of a challenge. Thomas O'Connor talks in each of his histories how many official city documents were lost or deliberately destroyed.¹⁰ Boston it seems is a city intent on keeping its secrets, however, this paper

¹⁰ Thomas H. O'Connor, *Building a New Boston: Politics and Urban Renewal, 1950 to 1970* (Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press, 1993), xii–xiv.

has found many council city proceedings to draw upon in order to present a top-down approach similar to the one used in the chapter on Derry. Although documentation at the state level was not available at this time, due to none of these sources being digitized, unlike the parliament debates for both Northern Ireland and Westminster, newspapers from Boston have proven to be a rich source of information in relaying state and local decisions when it came to the issue of housing. In order to gain the national perspective when it proved necessary, Congressional debates proved useful in gaining an understanding of how bills were implemented at the state level. Finally, various other sources published by the City of Boston were a boon in understanding how the city viewed itself and its citizens. Although the sources for Boston are more varied than those for Derry, they have still worked to show how serious and long-lasting the effects of both government's failure to address housing problems were in the early and mid-twentieth century.

* * *

Chapter 1

Derry

Many histories of Northern Ireland's Troubles speak of subsidized housing in cities like Derry not becoming inflamed until the 1960s when social movements were sparking around the world, and issues like civil liberties and equality were at the forefront of university discussions. Although this is not an unfair assessment, it was in the years directly preceding Northern Ireland's inception in 1921 that laid the groundwork for housing to become the issue which sparked the civil rights movement in Derry in 1968. One of the principal actors of the Troubles, Bernadette Devlin, wrote in her memoir, *The Price of My Soul*, "until [the] civil-rights campaign forced a promise of reform, housing was *the* burning issue in Northern Ireland, because only householders have a vote in local elections: subtenants, lodgers, and adult children living at home are all without the vote."¹¹ Until the late 1960s, housing in Northern Ireland was the central political issue. The Unionist leaders of Northern Ireland's parliament, Stormont, desired to retain control of political representation, and so manipulated housing development in the Catholic majority neighborhoods in order to ensure they never gained the upper hand.

If the Nationalist cause ever gained enough political support through their sheer volume of numbers, Unionists believed that the Nationalist party would challenge the Union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Another key actor, Eamonn McCann wrote in his memoir, *War in an Irish Town*, "to give a person a house . . . was to give him a vote, and the Unionist Party in Derry had to be very circumspect about the people to whom it gave votes."¹² From 1920 to the late 1960s, the Unionist Party worked to ensure

¹¹ Bernadette Devlin, *The Price of My Soul* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 55.

¹² McCann, *War and an Irish Town*, 79.

that their political domination remained weighted in their favor. By controlling housing development in areas like Derry, Unionist hegemony in Ulster remained uninterrupted. By the tactics of gerrymandering and delaying and canceling new building schemes, Unionists retained their political control of Derry. Although such efforts did not become wholly clear until after World War II, political decisions made by the Unionist Party from the 1920s onward had far-reaching consequences for Catholic political rights.

Although it was in the 1920s that Protestants in the North started consolidating their political power, they had been the ruling majority in the North for many decades prior. Starting in the seventeenth century, the North of Ireland was colonized by Presbyterians from Scotland at the behest of the British crown in an attempt to subjugate the Catholic population. The British government felt that they needed loyal subjects to be representatives of their authority in the region in order to better control the rebellious native Irish. Protestant Scots were given land to settle in areas such as Derry which quickly enabled them to become the economic and political rulers of the province.¹³ These Scots, whose Calvinism Westminster felt would prevent them from “going native,” and assimilating into the Catholic population, ensured that loyal subjects governed Ulster, willing to defend the crown’s rule of the province at whatever cost. This mentality shaped the way Protestants in Ulster viewed themselves, as “a frontier community facing wily and violent enemies,” which caused them to remain fiercely loyal to British authority.¹⁴

¹³ For a complete history of the Plantation of Ulster and its underlying causes see Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1998); Killeen, *A Brief History of Ireland*; Ian McBride, *The Siege of Derry in Ulster Protestant Mythology* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997); and David McKittrick and David MaVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles: A History of the Northern Ireland Conflict*, rev. ed. (New York: Viking, 2012).

¹⁴ McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 7; and Winston Churchill, Irish Office, Etc., 26 June 1922, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 155 (1922), cols. 1700–04. Churchill referred to Ulster as a “frontier” several times, where Protestants are virtually always under attack.

The native Irish had been subjected to varying degrees of British control since the thirteenth century. Britain first settled Dublin in the twelfth century, then expanded outwards, slowly but surely bringing Ireland under their control through violence, legal manipulation, and intimidation. The Irish, deeply resentful of their colonial overlords, and the laws and regulations they were subjected to over the centuries, rebelled frequently. In 1801 Britain decided to abolish Ireland's parliament and unite the two islands with the Act of Union, hoping that this would discourage any further rebellions.¹⁵ However, it only had the opposite effect, which caused Westminster to tighten its control over the small country until the twentieth century. On Easter Monday in April of 1916 Irish republicans lead a small rebellion in Dublin which led to the Irish War of Independence (1918–1920). Westminster, in an effort to pacify those Irish nationalists who were demanding total independence from British rule, introduced the Government of Ireland Act in 1920. Catholics in the Dublin and Protestants in Belfast would establish their own parliaments, a practice called Home Rule, but the island would remain a dominion within the British Empire.¹⁶

Dublin rejected the Act, and after three years of a guerrilla-style war, Britain agreed to a cease-fire and independence talks in December of 1921 which gave birth to the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Although the Treaty granted limited freedom for Southern Ireland, the Protestant majority in six of the nine counties of the northern province of Ulster (Atrium, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry/Derry, and Tyrone), rejected it, fearing it would sever their ties to British authority. During the negotiations, James

¹⁵ See Killeen, *A Brief History of Ireland*, esp. chaps. 13–14.

¹⁶ See James Loughlin, *The Ulster Question since 1945*, Studies in Contemporary History, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 12–17.

Craig, who later became the first prime minister of Northern Ireland, threatened Lloyd George, the then prime minister of England, that Protestants in Ulster were willing to go to war with Britain in order to remain in the Union with Great Britain. Westminster, therefore, stipulated in the Anglo-Irish Treaty that until such a time as Northern Ireland voted to reunite with what was now referred to as the Irish Free State (Southern Ireland), Ulster would remain in the Union and be governed by the Government of Ireland Act of 1920.¹⁷ The North and the South were to be divided by a border, an act known as the partition of Ireland, which was drawn in a way to ensure there was a ruling Protestant majority in the north, making it two-thirds Protestant and one-third Catholic.¹⁸ As the state of Northern Ireland adjusted to its new political status, Protestants realized that although they were the political majority in 1920, if they did not work to consolidate their power, it was possible they might not always be so. They quickly found that by controlling housing, they could control political representation, which meant ensuring elections, in particular, were always fixed in their favor.

In 1919 the Housing (Ireland) Act had been passed in Westminster which stipulated that it was “the duty of the local authority of every urban district or town . . . to consider the needs of the district or town with respect to the provision of houses for the working classes, and within three months after the passing of this Act, and thereafter as often as occasion arises, to prepare and submit to the Local Government Board a scheme for the exercise of their powers.”¹⁹ The bill made it clear that the state was responsible for

¹⁷ “Anglo-Irish Treaty, December 6, 1921,” p. 4, The National Archives of Ireland, accessed 1 March 2018, <http://treaty.nationalarchives.ie/document-gallery/anglo-irish-treaty-6-december-1921/anglo-irish-treaty-6-december-1921-page-4/>; and Loughlin, *The Ulster Question since 1945*, 17–18.

¹⁸ For a complete history of the 1916 Easter Rising and the Treaty negotiations see Killeen, *A Brief History of Ireland*, especially chapters 21–23.

¹⁹ “Housing (Ireland) Act, 1919,” electronic Irish Statute Book (eISB), accessed 1 March 2018, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1919/act/45/enacted/en/print.html>.

ensuring that the citizens of its state were decently housed. However, it did not appear as if the newly formed parliament of Northern Ireland, called Stormont for the castle chosen to serve as the North's seat of power, was going to act upon the bill with any immediate haste.

As early as 1922, newspapers in the North were reporting on the housing shortages in the city of Derry. Under the Housing Act, local bodies like the Londonderry Corporation, a committee in charge of general city maintenance (such as bridge upkeep, roads, and housing), were in part responsible for paying for the construction of new houses, although Westminster would refund them the money once the new houses were completed.²⁰ In Stormont, Hugh Pollock, Minister of Finance, told his fellow MPs that Westminster would provide one million pounds to aid in building new public houses, but that money would only take effect on any housing schemes begun after August of 1921. Any current schemes would be the responsibility of Stormont. Later Stormont suggested that only private enterprises undertake new housing schemes, even though they acknowledged this would not provide enough housing to address the shortage across the province.²¹ However, once Stormont had the ability to start applying Westminster's subsidies towards improvement like housing, few to no housing schemes were started even though there was ample evidence that the North was in need of development.

This practice of inaction by local councils would invariably lead to a severe housing shortage across Ulster but was especially acute in the city of Derry. By 1923 the

²⁰ "Housing (Ireland) Act, 1919."

²¹ Hugh Pollock and Crawford McCullagh, *Orders of the Day, Supply, Vote on Account*, 22 March 1922, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 2 (1922), cols. 118–19, 129–30; and Ronald McNeill, *Government Buildings (Costs)*, 29 November 1926, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 200 (1926), col. 835.

Londonderry Sentinel reported that the Londonderry Corporation was refusing to build any new houses on the grounds of material expenses, despite there being “a well known shortage of houses.”²² The Corporation at first did not seem concerned by such claims, and as the 1920s progressed it was common to see local newspapers declaring “there is great need for more and better housing as there is much congestion, and many of the houses of the working class are very bad.”²³ By 1925 the Minister of Home Affairs, Sir Dawson Bates reported in Stormont that in Belfast alone there was an estimated shortage of 10,000 homes.²⁴ Although he claimed that the housing shortage was not as acute across the rest of the province, the *Derry Journal* ran a story that claimed Cahir Healy, MP for Fermanagh and Tyrone, had gone to Derry to look into the housing situation in St. Columb’s Wells, and “witnessed one of the most distressful scenes ever witnessed in a Christian country; a poor woman was dying; her children around the death-bed were sobbing while kindly neighbours were holding umbrellas over the bed to keep the rain off.” The article reported that these houses where the “distressful scene” had taken place had been condemned twenty years ago, and that the city acknowledged the reason these people still lived there was due to the shortage of houses, but that “it was very difficult thing to start to put people out on the street” in order to update them. Although rents in this particular area had been raised from 3s to 5s with the understanding that some of the

²² “Derry Housing Shortage,” *Londonderry (N.I.) Sentinel*, 17 May 1923, p. 3, British Newspaper Archive; William Miller, Londonderry Corporation Bill, 24 March 1924, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 4 (1924), cols. 359–60; and “More Derry Houses,” *Belfast Newsletter*, 13 February 1928, p. 3, Irish Newspaper Archive.

²³ “Derry Housing Problem,” *Derry (N.I.) Journal*, 5 May 1924, p. 8; and “Derry Housing Problem,” *Derry (N.I.) Journal*, 21 May 1924, p. 4, both in the Irish Newspaper Archive.

²⁴ Dawson Bates, Oral Answers to Questions: The Housing Problem, 19 May 1925, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 6 (1925–1926), col. 625.

money would be used for improvements, plans did not appear forthcoming.²⁵ Perhaps because of this and other such episodes, Stormont and the Londonderry Corporation finally started to address the housing situation of the working class and poor.²⁶

By the end of the 1920s, some housing schemes had been introduced and successfully implemented (notable a few were subsidized housing schemes), however, this was a short-lived period.²⁷ Between 1928 and 1929 some 500 houses had been erected in the city of Derry but local newspapers claimed that only “the most courageous would inhabit them.”²⁸ Tenants complained that there were cracks and openings appearing in the walls, the walls were extremely thin, they were damp, some suffered from dry-rot, “and in one case a lodger is reported to have dropped through a floor laid down only a few years ago.”²⁹ The members of the Corporation declined to take a tour of the houses to see for themselves if the homes they had built were actually “condemned as unfit for habitation.” Even in Stormont, MPs recognized that not only were these dwellings substandard but that 500 new buildings were not nearly enough to satisfy the housing shortage.³⁰ Although the Londonderry Corporation had fulfilled some of its

²⁵ “Rain Dropping on Death-bed: The Housing Scandal,” *Derry (N.I.) Journal*, 10 March 1926, p. 5, British Newspaper Archive; and Thomas Moles, Order of the Day, Rent and Mortgage Interest Restrictions Bill, 20 May 1925, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 6 (1925–1926), cols. 681–82. The lowercase “s” in the British monetary system prior to 1971 stood for “shilling.” For a full explanation of Britain’s monetary system see “Money,” University of Nottingham, accessed 1 March 2018, <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/.manuscriptsandspecialcollections/researchguidance/weightsandmeasures/money.aspx>.

²⁶ Dawson Bates, Housing Bill, 26 May 1925, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 6 (1925–1926), cols. 847–48.

²⁷ “Enough Subsidy Houses in Derry?” *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 19 July 1928, p. 10, Irish Newspaper Archive.

²⁸ “Views of Derry Chamber of Commerce, ‘Sufficient Houses in Derry,’” *Derry (N.I.) Journal*, 10 October 1928, p. 5, British Newspaper Archive; and “A Londonderry Problem,” *Belfast Newsletter*, 19 October 1928, p. 8, Irish Newspaper Archive.

²⁹ “A Londonderry Problem.”

³⁰ Dawson Bates, Housing Bill, 30 October 1928, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 9, (1928), cols. 2747–48.

obligations under the Housing Act of 1919, when tallied together it was only the bare minimum needed to abate the housing shortage, and evidently, they had not exerted much effort to ensure that the houses were of good quality.³¹ Neither did Stormont MPs feel the need to request they speed up or expand their efforts.³²

The lack of extensive housing schemes, not just in Derry, but throughout all of Northern Ireland was directly influenced by Unionist MPs in Stormont attempting to consolidate their control of Ulster by limiting those who had voting rights. When the Government of Ireland Act was passed in 1920, Unionists in Ulster realized that this act “handed almost all political power into their hands, [and] they realized they could make effective use of it to buttress and protect the new Northern Ireland.”³³ The Act stipulated that the Parliament of Northern Ireland could not “make a law so as either directly or indirectly to establish or endow any religion, or . . . impose any disability or disadvantage, on account of religious belief or religious or ecclesiastical status.”³⁴ However, those Unionists who had just threatened Britain with war if they did not allow Ulster to remain in the Union with Great Britain were not willing to allow Irish Catholics, who supported the nationalist cause of the South, to potentially undermine their authority in the North. They, therefore, found ways to weigh political representation in their favor, in part by controlling housing development and the electoral ward boundaries of certain neighborhoods.

³¹ Dawson Bates, Oral Answers to Questions: Housing Subsidies to Public Utility Societies, 4 November 1926, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 7 (1926), cols. 2217–18.

³² Dawson Bates, Housing Acts Amendment Bill, 23 October 1924, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 4 (1924), cols. 1497–1500.

³³ McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 6.

³⁴ “The Constitution of Northern Ireland, being the, Government of Ireland Act, 1920,” Extracts from the Government of Ireland Act, 23 December 1920, CAIN Web Service—Conflict and Politics in Northern Ireland, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/goi231220.htm#5>.

In 1922 Northern Ireland's first prime minister, Sir James Craig, made the decision to abolish the voting system known as proportional representation in local elections, so as to, in the Nationalist perspective, "prevent minority [Catholic] representation altogether [in local government]."³⁵ The system of proportional representation ensured that both Catholics and Protestants received equal representation at all levels of government, no matter how large or small their voting ward, and was a "safeguard for Catholic and Protestant minorities in the two parts of Ireland and also a symbol of respect for their views."³⁶ Craig reasoned that "after all the attempts which have been made in the Imperial House to protect our interests by doing away with Proportional Representation [I am] . . . convinced so far as the South and West were concerned that Proportional Representation would secure no benefits for loyalists there, and so far as we are concerned in the North, we would be prejudiced by having Proportional Representation as part of our electoral system whether for the Parliament here or for local Government."³⁷ In Westminster, Unionist MPs argued that, due to the high and growing Catholic population, the abolition of proportional representation could have a detrimental long-term effect on the Unionist cause: Unionist MPs would struggle to continually return Unionist heavy local councils.³⁸ This was not an unfounded argument when in 1920 Derry, where Catholics comprised 50.2 of the city's overall 40,750 population,

³⁵ "Fair Play for Minorities! As Understood by the Belfast Parliament," *Western People* (Mayo, Ire.), 13 October 1923, p. 2, Irish Newspaper Archive.

³⁶ McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 8; and Thomas Harbison, Irish Free State (Agreement) Bill, 17 February 1922, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 150 (1922), cols. 1436–39.

³⁷ James Craig, Local Government (Northern Ireland) Bill, 5 July 1922, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 2 (1922), cols. 919–20.

³⁸ William Coote, Local Government (Ireland) Bill, 24 March 1919, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 114 (1919), cols. 141–44.

succeeded in returning a Catholic mayor under said system.³⁹ Since Catholics tended to have large families, in places like Derry it was not unreasonable for Unionists to think the Nationalist party might actually challenge their authority over time. Although proportional representation was as fair a system as could be implemented in a country like Northern Ireland, Craig knew that if Derry, Tyrone, and other areas where Catholics were the majority, continued to return Nationalist councils, such a system could potentially undermine the stability of the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

Even though Northern Ireland's first official election had "produced a comfortable majority for the Unionist party," earning them forty of the fifty-two seats in Stormont, the actions of the Unionist party in the ensuing months and years indicated that Unionists were worried about preventing future Catholic dominance.⁴⁰ When the Nationalist party went from controlling 25 of the 80 local councils in 1920 to only 2 in 1924, it became obvious that the Unionist party was determined to keep power out of Nationalist sympathizers' hands.⁴¹ This meant that Catholics were almost completely deprived of political representation. Unionist MPs in Westminster had fought against the implementation of proportional representation, arguing from the onset that the system would not greatly change the outcome of elections in favor of one party or the other.⁴²

³⁹ "Craig and Catholics: Gerrymandered Elections," *Cork (Ire.) Examiner*, 18 January 1923, p. 3; and "Catholic Mayor Elected in Derry," *Derry (N.I.) Journal*, 2 February 1920, p. 6, both in the Irish Newspaper Archive.

⁴⁰ McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 10; and Kenneth Bloomfield, *A Tragedy of Errors: The Government and Misgovernment of Northern Ireland* (Liverpool, U.K.: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 150–53.

⁴¹ Loughlin, *The Ulster Question since 1945*, 22–23; and McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 8.

⁴² The Marquess of Crewe, Government of Ireland Bill, 2 December 1920, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Lords, 5th ser., vol. 42 (1920), cols. 939–40.

Additionally, as it clearly stated in the Government of Ireland Bill, “after three years from the day of the first meeting . . . Parliament may alter the qualification and registration of the electors, the law relating to elections and the questioning of elections, [and] the constituencies and the distribution of the members among the constituencies,” Craig was within his rights to change the voting system.⁴³

Westminster was against the ending of proportional representation because they feared it would damage their relationship with the Irish Free State. Westminster had insisted that the Dáil Éireann (Parliament of Ireland) provide a way for Protestants in Southern Ireland to have representation since they were the minority in the South. By failing to insist that Catholics in the North be shown the same courtesy, Westminster was effectively disregarding the agreement made between all three countries (England, Southern Ireland, and Northern Ireland) that “no law may be made either directly or indirectly to endow any religion . . . or impose any disability on account of religious belief.”⁴⁴ When the Government of Ireland Act was being drafted, Irish MPs knew that unless the system in the North was used for elections, “it would be perfectly impossible for the Northern minority to have any representation on the Senate.”⁴⁵ MP Samuel Roberts argued that Unionists “will get a large enough majority whatever system they have,” and that their reasons for the system being flawed were not justified as the system seemed to be working fine in Southern Ireland.⁴⁶ However, Unionists remained adamant.

⁴³ “Extracts from the Government of Ireland Act, 23 December 1920”; Craig, Local Government (Northern Ireland) Bill, col. 920.

⁴⁴ “Draft Constitution of the Irish Free State,” 15 June 1922, CAB 24/137/34, p. 3, National Archives, Kew, <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7731815>.

⁴⁵ Lord Oranmore and Browne (Geoffrey Henry Browne), Government of Ireland Bill, 13 December 1920, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Lords, 5th ser., vol. 39 (1922), cols. 35–37.

⁴⁶ Samuel Roberts, Electoral Reform, 28 March 1928, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 215 (1928), cols. 1277–79.

William Coote, a Unionist MP for South Tyrone, argued that Westminster had created the state of Northern Ireland so that Unionists could remain “British” rather than having to answer to a Catholic parliament in Dublin. If proportional representation were to be maintained, Coote argued, Unionists would ultimately lose the right to maintain Imperial interests in Ulster, which would defeat the purpose of the state of Northern Ireland.⁴⁷ He even went so far as to claim that under proportional representation it might be certain voters would “allow a class of men to come into these councils who will not be careful of the public funds,” implying that the subsidies which Ulster received from Britain would be squandered if the wrong people were in charge.⁴⁸ In Stormont Craig reasoned that “Proportional Representation would produce a . . . combination of motley groups making for instability and enforced coalition and enforced dictation for a minority group.”⁴⁹ While such debates did not make much of an impression on MPs in Westminster, the British government ultimately backed down when Craig threatened to resign—which would have placed Northern Ireland under Westminster’s direct jurisdiction again, something they desired to avoid.⁵⁰

Britain had a long-standing tradition of keeping all issues Irish at arm’s length. Although its “Irish Question” was one that occupied government proceedings more so than other colonies, once the settlements between the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland were finalized, the British Government largely viewed that Question as having

⁴⁷ William Coote, Irish Free State (Agreement) Bill, 17 February 1922, House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers*, 5th ser., vol. 150 (1922), cols. 1440–41.

⁴⁸ William Coote, Local Government (Ireland) Bill, 24 March 1919, House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers*, 5th ser., vol. 114 (1919), cols. 141–44.

⁴⁹ James Craig, House of Commons (Method of Voting and Redistribution of Seats) Bill, 5 March 1929, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 10 (1929), col. 434.

⁵⁰ McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 11.

been answered.⁵¹ Britain was eager to leave Stormont to legislate for itself, letting Irish affairs stay in Ireland. However, when Craig proposed abolishing proportional representation, some in Westminster opposed, feeling that such a proposition fell under Section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act which stated: “the supreme authority of the Parliament of the United Kingdom shall remain unaffected and undiminished over all persons, matters, and things in Ireland and every part thereof.”⁵² Those against Craig’s proposal viewed that Section 75 gave Westminster the right to keep proportional representation in place.⁵³ However, in 1923, at almost the exact same time the issue of proportional representation was being discussed, the Speaker of the House in Westminster, John Whitley, declared:

With regard to those subjects which have been delegated to the Government of Northern Ireland, questions must be asked of Ministers in Northern Ireland, and not in this House. In the case of those subjects which were reserved to this Parliament, questions can be addressed here to the appropriate Ministers . . . but . . . I would say that this right does not cover matters of administration for which a Minister in Northern Ireland is responsible. We give a subvention in aid of police, but outside the metropolitan area the administration and responsibility are local.⁵⁴

This declaration set a dangerous precedent which effectively inhibited MPs in Westminster from either discussing Northern Ireland or interfering with affairs they felt were for the “concern of the Belfast Parliament.”⁵⁵ Even though Section 75 did give

⁵¹ Loughlin, *The Ulster Question since 1945*, 22.

⁵² “Government of Ireland Act, 1920,” Saving for supreme authority of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, p. 61, Revised and Enacted UK Legislation, 1267–Present, The National Archives, Kew, accessed 3 March 2018, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1920/67/pdfs/ukpga_19200067_en.pdf.

⁵³ McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 11; Loughlin, *The Ulster Question since 1945*, 24; Kevin McNamara, “Reflections on Aspects of Labour’s Policy Towards Northern Ireland, 1966–70: A Personal Narrative,” in *The British Labour Party and Twentieth-Century Ireland: The Cause of Ireland, the Cause of Labour*, ed. Laurence Marley (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2016), 155; and Peter Rose, *How the Troubles Came to Northern Ireland*, Contemporary History in Context Series (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), 20–21.

⁵⁴ John Whitley, Questions to Ministers (Northern Ireland), 3 May 1923, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 163 (1923), col. 1625.

⁵⁵ McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 11.

Westminster the right to intercede and ensure that equal representation was maintained in Ulster, because of the precedent set by Whitely, Westminster would effectively turn a blind eye to any and all dealings in Stormont, no matter how questionable.

Aided by this statute, Craig abolished proportional representation and put in its place a system referred to as first-past-the-post. This system guaranteed that the person winning the majority of votes would be elected. One MP from Westminster, Herbert Samuel, who was in favor of retaining proportional representation, described first-past-the-post as “whether you take a number of people competing for precedence, or a number of horses competing for victory on the strength of their individual prowess or capacity, clearly you want to select one from among several and give the prize, whatever it may be.”⁵⁶ However, in Westminster’s House of Lords, MPs such as Viscount Ullswater, countered such logic by arguing “you can only make a Government out of a homogeneous majority. Under such a system [proportional representation] you do not get a homogeneous majority, you get a mongrel majority.” He declared his support of implementing first-past-the-post in Ulster, even though he and his fellow members in the House of Lords acknowledged that the system “shall probably have minorities wiped out in many counties, not appearing at all; the majorities will be inflated; there will be huge majorities in many cases, and the minorities will, I suppose, as usual, have to suffer.”⁵⁷ Members in the House of Lords argued that any electoral system had the potential to produced “anomalies,” such as minorities receiving little representation, but that did not necessarily mean that it was a biased system. Although an honest assessment of first-past-

⁵⁶ Herbert Samuel, Clause 1.—(Voting at Parliamentary elections to be my method of alternative vote), 4 March 1931, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 249 (1931), col. 473.

⁵⁷ Viscount Ullswater (James Lowther) and Lord Passfield (Sidney Webb), Representation of the People (No. 2) Bill, 2 July 1931, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Lords, 5th ser., 81 (1931), cols. 573–74, 582–83.

the-post revealed that it was an attempt to ensure only one party was voted into office, by claiming that proportional representation never allowed for a unified parliament, Unionists were able to further their own aims of creating a “Protestant Parliament and a Protestant State.”⁵⁸ Although the biases of this system were evident, as were Stormont’s desired to use it over proportional representation, again Westminster did not prevent its passing into law.⁵⁹

Although first-past-the-post secured greater political influence for the Unionist party, it was not an absolute guarantee. Logically, it was not necessary for Craig to implement so many measures to ensure that the Unionist party was not overwhelmed by the Nationalist party. Proportional representation, in the long run, was actually an absolute guarantee that they would always have a serving body in Stormont. Considering that by 1937 the Catholic population in Derry had increased by ten percent from 1926, while the overall population had only increased by five per cent, proportional representation was a safety net for Unionists interests to live fairly next to Catholic ones.⁶⁰ Sadly though, Craig did not appear to be interested in fair representation and took

⁵⁸ James Craig, Rights of the Minority, 24 April 1934, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 16 (1933–1934), 1091–95.

⁵⁹ Edward Fitzroy, Statute of Westminster Bill, 20 November 1931, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 259 (1931), col. 1232–33.

⁶⁰ Londonderry Co. Borough, Table II, Population, p. x, 1937, County and County Borough of Londonderry, *Census of Population of Northern Ireland 1937*, Government of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Statistical Notes, Census, Online Historical Population Reports, accessed 4 March 2018, [http://www.histpop.org/ohpr/servlet/PageBrowser?path=Browse/Census%20\(by%20date\)/1937&active=yes&mno=341&tocstate=expandnew&tocseq=1800&display=sections&display=tables&display=pagetitles&pageseq=first-nonblank](http://www.histpop.org/ohpr/servlet/PageBrowser?path=Browse/Census%20(by%20date)/1937&active=yes&mno=341&tocstate=expandnew&tocseq=1800&display=sections&display=tables&display=pagetitles&pageseq=first-nonblank); and Roman Catholics, Table XX, Religions, p. xxiv, 1937, County and County Borough of Londonderry, *Census of Population of Northern Ireland 1937*, Government of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Statistical Notes, Census, Online Historical Population Reports, accessed 4 March 2018, [http://www.histpop.org/ohpr/servlet/PageBrowser?path=Browse/Census%20\(by%20date\)/1937&active=yes&mno=341&tocstate=expandnew&display=sections&display=tables&display=pagetitles&pageseq=24](http://www.histpop.org/ohpr/servlet/PageBrowser?path=Browse/Census%20(by%20date)/1937&active=yes&mno=341&tocstate=expandnew&display=sections&display=tables&display=pagetitles&pageseq=24).

one final measure to ensure that Stormont remained dominated by Protestants, sacrificing long-term stability for short-lived political dominance.

In order to further ensure that the first-past-the-post system always returned the desired candidate, Craig ordered that the electoral boundaries of each major constituency be redrawn to ensure that votes weighed in the Unionists' favor. This practice, commonly called gerrymandering, had been in existence since the nineteenth century, instituted by Elbridge Gerry of Boston, Massachusetts, who in the early nineteenth century redrew the electoral boundary lines in Massachusetts in order to give Republicans the advantage over the Federalists in senatorial elections.⁶¹ The practice was so effective that Joseph Devlin, Nationalist MP for Belfast, Central, reported in Westminster that due to the redrawing of the boundaries "it took about 40,000 voters to return me to the Northern Parliament while in the case of the Chief Whip of the Unionist party of Northern Ireland it required only 29,000 voters."⁶² Others argued that together these systems "would have the effect of disfranchising a quarter of the population."⁶³ In Derry the result of gerrymandering was so blatant even Unionist MPs looking back at Craig's actions would admit that Catholics had every right to claim they had been discriminated against.⁶⁴ In Westminster, Unionist MPs did not deny this was so, but no actions were taken to correct this blatant manipulation of political power.⁶⁵

⁶¹ "Elbridge Gerry, 5th Vice President (1813–1814)," United States Senate, accessed 3 March 2018, https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/VP_Elbridge_Gerry.htm.

⁶² Joseph Devlin, Representation of the People (No. 2) Bill, 3 February 1931, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 247 (1931), cols. 1713–14.

⁶³ "Unionist Gerrymandering in Six Counties," *Derry (N.I.) Journal*, 17 October 1934, p. 4, British Newspaper Archive.

⁶⁴ Unidentified Unionist Cabinet Member quoted in McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 9.

⁶⁵ James Gardner, Unemployment Insurance (Northern Ireland Agreement) [Money], 26 February 1929, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 225 (1929), col. 1819.

As early as 1929, debates in Stormont reveal that Nationalist MPs were fully aware of this dynamic and accused the Corporation of neglecting housing development schemes for rural country laborers—who happened to be Nationalists.⁶⁶ By controlling housing development, both private and publicly funded, it kept the status quo of Protestant hegemony. Protestants controlled the Corporation, which meant they simultaneously benefited from gerrymandering and that it was in their best interest to see to it that those lines remained unchanged.⁶⁷ By May of 1936, Catholics in Derry demanded that an inquiry be held to investigate the voting results of the gerrymandered wards.⁶⁸ However, by June according to the Stormont parliamentary papers, even if the inquiry did turn up wrongdoing, it was clear that Unionist ministers did not plan to acknowledge it. The Minister of Home Affairs, Dawson Bates, denied in Stormont that his department was not going to acknowledge the evidence of the inquiry's inspector, but considering that ward boundaries were not redrawn, it would be possible to infer that Bates did disregard any evidence of wrongdoing turned up by the inquiry.⁶⁹ Building delays continued, which Unionist MPs never did have an adequate explanation for, and successive prime ministers never did question.⁷⁰ In Westminster, in keeping with the 1923 precedent of not discussing matters pertaining to Northern Ireland, British MPs

⁶⁶ Cahir Healy, Appropriation Bill—Second Reading, 5 December 1929, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 11 (1929–1930), cols. 1843–1848.

⁶⁷ Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites*, xvi–xvii, 24.

⁶⁸ “Derry Gerrymander Proposal: An Inquiry to Be Held,” *Donegal (Ire.) News*, 2 May 1936, p. 5, Irish Newspaper Archive.

⁶⁹ Dawson Bates, Redistribution in Omagh and Derry, 8 June 1937, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 19 (1936–1937), cols. 1473–74.

⁷⁰ John (Jack) Beattie, Oral Answers: Housing in Londonderry Rural Area, 30 November 1937, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 20 (1937–1938), col. 138; and “Derry Councillor’s Position,” *Belfast Newsletter*, 12 February 1937, p. 5, Irish Newspaper Archive.

refused to listen to accusations voiced by Nationalist MPs.⁷¹ The ward boundaries were redrawn and unfortunately, housing would be used as a means to ensure the boundary lines remained as they were until the late 1960s.

The 1930s saw little change from the 1920s, with newspapers carrying almost the exact headlines that had peppered news stories ten years prior. Although this was the era of Depression, Northern Ireland was mainly affected by the Crash in terms of the subsidies which it received from Britain. As early as May of 1930, Hugh MacDowell Pollock, Minister of Finance told his fellow MPs in Stormont “between our Revenue and Expenditure, the financial position of the State has now reached the verge of danger point . . . in respect of State assistance, the limit has been reached, and that they [Local Authorities] must rely on their own resources for any further expenditure they contemplate. The only alternative is heavy additional taxation.”⁷² Although the Depression might have affected the amount of money Northern Ireland received from Britain and therefore made building schemes difficult, it cannot be ignored that had the Londonderry Corporation and Stormont addressed the housing shortage in the 1920s, when the funds were available, some of the discomfort felt by the population might have been avoided.

As it was, by the mid-1930s, newspapers were once again reporting “there are many houses in occupation unfit for human habitation, and the occupants have no alternative than to shelter in circumstances disgraceful to civilization . . . overcrowding

⁷¹ “Derry Gerrymander Proposal: An Inquiry to be Held,” *Donegal (Ire.) News*, 2 May 1936, p. 5, Irish Newspaper Archive; Cahir Healy, Statue of Westminster Bill, 20 November 1931, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 259 (1931), cols. 1232–35.

⁷² Hugh MacDowell Pollock, The Budget, 27 May 1930, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 12 (1930), cols. 1543–44.

was still a marked feature . . . and the housing shortage was outstanding in working class districts. Many families were . . . confined to single room accommodations.”⁷³ By 1936 a report published in the *Londonderry Sentinel* by Dr. W. R. Abernethy, a city medical superintendent officer of health, found that “it is a matter for regret that under this (housing conditions) head there is no material progress to note since the last annual report was submitted [1935]. The number of working-class houses erected by private enterprise is totally inadequate to meet the requirements of a growing population and deteriorating property.”⁷⁴ Abernethy went on to state that repairs to existing structures had been made, but that many of them were “beyond repair or are otherwise unsuitable for human habitation.” Stormont could no longer ignore the situation and between 1938 and 1939, a new housing bill was presented and debated, which was designed to address the issue of substandard housing in urban districts.⁷⁵ The *Derry Journal* reported that the “Government would be willing to contribute one-third of the cost,” but that it would only “provide 25 or 30 houses which were very much needed in the town.”⁷⁶ Given that Derry had had a housing shortage since 1920, thirty homes was hardly enough to address overcrowding. Additionally, it did not appear that any development actually did take place. It must be taken into account that the Depression did have a hand to play in the dearth of new homes going up, but few could deny that still Stormont and the

⁷³ “Conditions in Derry: Many Houses Unfit for Habitation,” *Donegal (Ire.) News*, 31 August 1935, p. 5, Irish Newspaper Archive.

⁷⁴ “Housing in Derry,” *Londonderry (N.I.) Sentinel*, 25 August 1936, p. 5, British Newspaper Archive.

⁷⁵ “Proposed Bill,” 3 March 1938–1 November 1938, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 21 (1938), cols. 109, 124, 307, 832, 1994–95; and “Housing Bill,” 28 March 1939, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 22 (1938–1939), cols. 819–20. 1939 was the year the Bill finally passed, however, there were still numerous debates about its pros and cons this year.

⁷⁶ “Limavady Urban Council,” *Derry (N.I.) Journal*, 8 March 1939, p. 8, British Newspaper Archive.

Londonderry Corporation were not actively seeking ways to address substandard dwellings or overcrowding.

In part because of financial strains brought on by the Great Depression and in part because of Stormont's delays in initiating new housing schemes, by the 1940s the housing crisis was severe. The *Belfast Newsletter* reported that "the census returns revealed, there are in Belfast and Londonderry too many people occupying a single room or two rooms, and in many other towns there is overcrowding."⁷⁷ In 1944 the Housing Committee of the Planning Advisory Board found that "about 50,000 houses only, or an average of 2,500 per annum, were built between 1919 and 1939."⁷⁸ Overcrowding was so severe that as many as ten to eighteen people were living in a two-bedroom apartment.⁷⁹ Things were becoming so bad that it was becoming harder for Stormont to ignore the situation, however, they were also unwilling to take measures which would give Nationalists greater political power. The electoral lines were dependent upon maintaining the literal shape of Catholic neighborhoods. If they were to start widespread housing schemes, they would either have to redraw the lines or concede that Catholics would gain greater political power.

Conditions in the Bogside, a small subdivision in Derry, were especially acute, and by 1946 citizens of Derry claimed that the "[Londonderry] Corporation [was] directly

⁷⁷ "Housing in Ulster," *Belfast Newsletter*, 31 May 1943, p. 4, Irish Newspaper Archive; and Niall Ó Dochartaigh, "The Politics of Housing: Social Change and Collective Action in Derry in the 1960s," in *Derry and Londonderry: History and Society*, ed. Gerard O'Brien (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1999), 626.

⁷⁸ Lucius O'Brien, "The Northern Ireland Housing Trust," *Dublin: Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland* 29, part I (1952–1953): 60, Trinity College University, accessed 8 March 2018, <http://www.tara.tcd.ie/handle/2262/3970>; and Henry Diamond, Housing, 18 October 1945, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 29 (1945–1946), cols. 764–65.

⁷⁹ "Ulster's Housing Problem," *Londonderry (N.I.) Sentinel*, 2 November 1943, p. 4, British Newspaper Archive.

responsible for the housing shortage in the city.”⁸⁰ In Stormont William Grant, Minister of Health and Local Government, countered that “with their small administrative and technical staff they could not possibly make progress with housing at a rate which would satisfy them or the citizens.”⁸¹ Whether this was true or the ministers were attempting to stall once again on any new building schemes, as World War II came to a close they no longer had a choice in the matter. Urban decay and overcrowding was a problem facing the entire United Kingdom, and Westminster’s newly elected Labour Government realized that it could no longer allow its working classes to live in congested and substandard housing.⁸² After the war, it was found that the U.K. had a shortage of roughly two million homes, the largest shortage recorded, to which it “declared in its statement of post-war housing policy that its first objective . . . was the provision of ‘a separate dwelling for every family that wishes to have one.’”⁸³ A welfare state was implemented which saw “a massive expansion of the public health service, of public education and of related areas in the public sector,” but which the Northern Ireland government only “reluctantly implemented.”⁸⁴ This welfare state was built with the intention of improving the lives of UK citizens, however, in the issues of housing, Northern Irish officials found that they had to be cautious with how they followed the new public welfare policies.

In an effort to comply with the policies of the new welfare state, in 1945 Stormont created the Northern Ireland Housing Trust (NIHT), a public body, “consist[ing] of five

⁸⁰ “Housing Shortage in Derry: Corporation Blamed,” *Strabane (Tyrone, N.I.) Chronicle*, 13 April 1946, p. 6, Irish Newspaper Archive.

⁸¹ William Gran, Housing, 18 October 1945, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 29 (1945–1946), cols. 748–49.

⁸² A. E. Holmans, *Housing Policy in Britain, A History* (Kent, U.K.: Croom Helm, 1987), 76–77.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁸⁴ Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites*, xix–xv.

members, appointed by the Minister of Health and Local Government, who serve[d] without salary or fee,” which “had the power to build and manage housing estates—allocating tenancies without any regard to religion.”⁸⁵ In order to address the housing shortage, “local authorities [in Ulster] were to build half of the 100,000 new houses needed and private builders, with the help of government subsidies, were to build a quarter,” and the NIHT were to build the remaining 25,000 houses.⁸⁶ What made the NIHT and their task of housing improvement different from bodies like the Londonderry or Belfast corporations was that these houses were to be public, or subsidized, housing for the working class and unemployed. Prior to the 1940s, houses were in private hands or maintained by landlords. In Derry, the new welfare program created “a novel phenomenon; systematic and extensive discrimination in the allocation of public housing. Previously there had been little public housing to discriminate over.”⁸⁷ In theory, the NIHT was meant to work independently of local authorities and allocate houses based on need, not on faith or political affiliation. However, they were also dependent on the local Council’s allocation of land in order to build the new houses and were required to work with the local authorities on any new building sites.⁸⁸ As Grant had pointed out, the Londonderry Corporation was too small a body to deal with the housing situation on its own, so the NIHT had little choice but to coordinate their building efforts with the Corporation.⁸⁹ However, the Corporation’s main objective was to “ensure that the NIHT building would not destabilise the delicate territorial arrangements which allowed

⁸⁵ O’Brien, “The Northern Ireland Housing Trust,” 60; Simon Prince, *Northern Ireland’s ‘68: Civil Rights, Global Revolt, and the Origins of The Troubles* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007), 19.

⁸⁶ O’Brien, “The Northern Ireland Housing Trust,” 61; and Ó Dochartaigh, “The Politics of Housing,” 625.

⁸⁷ Ó Dochartaigh, “The Politics of Housing,” 625.

⁸⁸ Gran, *Housing*, 18 October 1945, col. 748.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Unionist to maintain control of [local councils].”⁹⁰ Although they could not stop development entirely, they could delay the NIHT. One such example was that of the Creggan Estates.⁹¹

Intended to start in 1945, in 1948 the NIHT began construction of the Creggan Estates—situated on the west side of the River Foyle, not far from the Bogside. The agreement between the NIHT and the Corporation was that the NIHT would build 537 house estates on Corporation-owned land at Creggan, “which it would then sell half of these houses to the Corporation on completion.”⁹² However, considering Derry’s Catholic population alone, these were not nearly enough residences to address the overcrowding in the city. In the annual report of the NIHTs progress in 1953, Mr. Bell said that those who conducted the initial assessment of how many homes were needed in order to address the shortage, “seriously under-estimated the need.” Instead of taking the population into consideration “only one new house was allowed for to replace each unfit house, disregarding the fact that the unfit houses were also frequently the most fantastically overcrowded . . . a better analysis would have increased the general total by at least 10%, and there must have been further decay and obsolescence of many houses since 1944 to add to the 100,000 then estimated as needed.” However, Bell acknowledged the fact that, “the standards for over-crowding and unfitness for habitation were set deliberately low,” which seems to indicate the possibility that there were some who did not seem concerned by the issue of overcrowding.⁹³ Realizing that they were not building enough homes for

⁹⁰ Ó Dochartaigh, “The Politics of Housing,” 626.

⁹¹ “Derry Housing Scheme,” *Belfast Newsletter*, 10 March 1945, p. 4, Irish Newspaper Archive.

⁹² Ó Dochartaigh, “The Politics of Housing,” 627.

⁹³ O’Brien, “The Northern Ireland Housing Trust,” 70. Although Lucius O’Brien is credited as the author of this piece, at this point in the document it seems to be a recorded discussion and Mr. Bell is accusing O’Brien of not acknowledging that Derry had a much more severe housing shortage than the estimated 100,000.

the size of Derry's overall population, and as building was progressing on the Creggan Estates at such a slow rate, in the interim, the Londonderry Corporation suggested converting "the former U.S. Navy camp at Springtown . . . to use as temporary housing accommodation," in order to alleviate some of the overcrowding in Derry until the Creggan Estates could be completed.⁹⁴

At first members of the Corporation and the Trust thought that converting the huts Springtown would offer "great possibilities for a temporary housing scheme and later as the site for a permanent housing estate."⁹⁵ However, by April, the scheme had been abandoned.⁹⁶ The justification for this was that each hut would cost between £290–390 in order to make them habitable (which would include getting hot water to each hut), costing the state roughly "£70,000 on this avowedly temporary measure . . . a scandalous waste of public money."⁹⁷ Although this caused outrage among the Catholic community, because the Corporation continued to delay further building in Derry, many people started squatting in the Springtown camp, which lasted until well in the 1960s.⁹⁸ The Corporation, seeing that over one hundred families who had moved in by 1946, agreed to "where possible, provided light, water and other amenities," but insisted that the squatters pay rent.⁹⁹ By December of 1947, Stormont Nationalist MP, Eddie McAteer, who would

⁹⁴ "Londonderry Housing: U.S. Camp as Temporary Accommodation," *Belfast Newsletter*, 6 March 1945, p. 3, Irish Newspaper Archive.

⁹⁵ "Houses in Derry: N.I. Trust Chairman's Visit, Inspection of Creggan and Springtown," *Londonderry (N.I.) Sentinel*, 10 March 1945, p. 4, British Newspaper Archive.

⁹⁶ "Housing in Derry: Unionist Turn Down Nationalist Proposal," *Strabane (Tyrone, N.I.) Chronicle*, 4 January 1947, p. 6, Irish Newspaper Archive.

⁹⁷ "Londonderry Housing: Camp Conversation Scheme Abandoned," *Belfast Newsletter*, 28 April 1945, p. 3, Irish Newspaper Archive; and "The Springtown Camp Scheme: To-morrow's Meeting of Corporation," *Londonderry (N.I.) Sentinel*, 26 April 1945, p. 4, British Newspaper Archive.

⁹⁸ Dean McLaughlin, "Springtown Camp: Naval Base Squatters Reunite in Derry," 14 October 2017, BBC News, accessed 4 March 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-foyle-west-41607601>.

⁹⁹ "Over 100 Families Squat in Derry," *Northern Whig* (Belfast, N.I.), 26 August 1946, p. 1, British Newspaper Archive; and "Derry 'Squatters,'" *Belfast Newsletter*, 28 August 1947, p. 3, Irish Newspaper Archive; and Ó Dochartaigh, "The Politics of Housing," 627.

later become a key figure during the civil rights movement, lobbied to have, at the very least, Stormont install electricity in those huts which were occupied before the winter truly set in. The Minister of Health and Local Government informed him that this would not be possible and that the squatters were at Springtown without Stormont's authorization, so they were not technically under any obligation to improve the squatter's quality of life.¹⁰⁰

By 1949, the *Londonderry Sentinel* reported that only 153 of the promised 537 houses in the Creggan were completed and that the NIHT had acquired land in the North Ward (split between Catholics and Protestants) to build eighty-two houses.¹⁰¹ Some of the reasons given for the delays were bad weather, not enough workmen, and scarcity of building materials.¹⁰² Although the Springtown Camp seemed like a ready-made housing estate and an answer to many of the housing problems facing Derry, the reasons behind the delays and abandoned plans had once again to do with voting and Protestant control.

Until the outbreak of the civil rights movement in 1968, the few Nationalist MPs who still attended Westminster debates pled their case as often as they could. Sadly, however, in keeping with its non-interference rule, Westminster refused to discuss the subject.¹⁰³ Anthony Mulvey, Nationalist MP for Fermanagh and Tyrone, in 1948 made a thirty-two-minute long speech in the House of Commons arguing "The result of the gerrymander in Northern Ireland is that one Tory vote has the electoral value of two Nationalist or Labour votes. The gerrymander prevents democratic representation in any

¹⁰⁰ Eddie McAteer, Oral Answers: Springtown Camp, 9 December 1947, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 31 (1947–1948), cols. 3250–51.

¹⁰¹ "Housing," *Londonderry (N.I.) Sentinel*, 1 January 1949, p. 6, British Newspaper Archive.

¹⁰² "Derry Housing," *Belfast Newsletter*, 29 January 1947, p. 3, Irish Newspaper Archive.

¹⁰³ Anthony Mulvey, Debate on the Address, 27 October 1948, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 457 (1948), cols. 213–14.

country, but I know of no other country in Europe in which this form of administration is carried on except Northern Ireland. . . . [in Derry] 29,000 Nationalist and Labour voters get eight seats, while 18,000 Tories get 12 seats.” Although he offered numerous examples of how this system undermined the representation of Catholics in Ulster, the next speaker, Major Legge-Bourke, responded only by saying “the hon. Member for Fermanagh and Tyrone will presumably be answered by His Majesty’s Government later in the Debate. I dare say that the answer is that the matter is having urgent consideration, but, if so, I do not suppose that the hon. Member will be satisfied with that answer. . . . I do not propose to follow him any further than that,” and then turns the attention of the House to a bill that is about to be amended.¹⁰⁴ It is noteworthy that none of the Westminster MPs choose to pick up the subject again.

A year later, a Cabinet Minute revealed that on the point of gerrymandering in Northern Ireland, the British government’s position was decidedly non-interference, and seemingly unconcerned with the state of affairs in Stormont. In 1948 while on a tour of Canada, John Costello, prime minister of the Irish Free State, made the announcement that Ireland was leaving the British Commonwealth. The British government, lacking the ability to stop Costello, started drafting what came to be known as the Ireland Act of 1949. Although the majority of the Act was the United Kingdom’s official relationship with Ireland, it also outlined voting rights and requirements for Northern Ireland. These requirements, although potentially an odd addition to an act that was between Britain and Irish Free State (called Éire after 1949), forced Britain to, briefly, acknowledge that perhaps they were not dealing with Ulster’s political situation in a fair manner.

¹⁰⁴ Anthony Mulvey, Debate on the Address, 27 October 1948, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 457 (1948), cols. 209–217.

Unionists feared that once Southern Ireland left the Commonwealth, in places like Derry where the border was so close to the Irish Free State, and were in the North “only a temporary capacity,” to do work or business, might attempt to vote in local elections, swaying them in favor of the Nationalist party.¹⁰⁵ Whether this was a legitimate fear or not, they demanded that Westminster put in a “new clause seeking to ensure that there shall be a residence qualification,” in order to vote in the North.¹⁰⁶ Clement Attlee, then British prime minister, wrote in a draft for the Ireland Bill, “there is undoubtedly some risk in this respect and it is difficult to deny Northern Ireland the protection for which it asks.”¹⁰⁷ Westminster, somewhat begrudgingly, conceded to Stormont’s demand, and the final draft of the Ireland Act stipulated that “a person shall not be entitled to vote as an elector at an election of a person to serve as a Member of the Parliament of the United Kingdom for a constituency in Northern Ireland unless he was resident in Northern Ireland during the whole of the period of three months ending on the qualifying date for that election.”¹⁰⁸ Although this phrase did not seem to hold much significance in terms of housing requirements, in terms of defining political rights it revealed how much Westminster desired to remain uninvolved in Northern Ireland’s affairs.

¹⁰⁵ John Beattie, Representation of the People Bill, 8 March 1945, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 28 (1945), cols. 309–10.

¹⁰⁶ “Votes in Ulster,” *Belfast Newsletter*, 22 April 1948, p. 4, Irish Newspaper Archive; “Residence Qualification: Further Ulster Safeguard Proposed,” *Londonderry (NI.) Sentinel*, 20 March 1948, p. 5, British Newspaper Archive; John Foster, Clause 5.—(Residence Qualification for Electors in Constituencies in Northern Ireland.), 16 May 1949, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 465 (1949), cols. 210–14; and Clement R. Attlee, “Ireland,” 10 January 1949, copy no. 31, CAB 129/32/5, p. 3, National Archives, Kew, accessed 3 March 2018, <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7655590>.

¹⁰⁷ Attlee, “Ireland,” p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ “Ireland Act 1949,” Residence Qualification for electors in constituencies in Northern Ireland, Revised and Enacted UK Legislation, 1267–Present, The National Archive, Kew, accessed 3 March 2018, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/12-13-14/41/enacted>.

When the Ireland Act was being drafted, discussions about how voting rights were defined caused those in the Labour government to recognize that the manner in which the Unionist party ran Ulster was not entirely above board. However, despite this knowledge, Attlee's government did not seem concerned with addressing the North's political imbalance. An exchange between Attlee, his deputy prime minister, Herbert Morrison, and Aneurin Bevan, Minister of Health, during a Cabinet discussion of the Ireland Act revealed this attitude.

A.B.: Cond[itions] of elect[ion] in N.I. casts doubt on rep[resentitive] characters of N.I. Parl[iament] . . . [lack of discussion] means we are conniving at gerrymandering.

P.M.: Both sides cheat on elections.

H.M.: Not our business—don't burn our fingers.

Agreed: p[ost]pone disc[ussion] of this.¹⁰⁹

Although Attlee and his Cabinet may have been troubled by the Unionist party's manipulation of the ward boundaries in Ulster, they still did not wish to involve themselves in what they considered to be Irish affairs. The section in the Ireland Act which outlined who did and did not have a right to vote could have potentially raised a debate on the subject in Westminster, a topic Nationalist MPs would have been happy to exploit. Calling into question the fact that in most of the North's constituencies Unionists won the elections before a vote was even cast, and the elections were by this point mere formalities, would have forced Westminster to acknowledge they were not putting a stop to a practice that denied half of Ulster's population political representation.¹¹⁰ By not drawing great attention to who were eligible to vote in the North, the British government sidestepped the issue of gerrymandering, which would have brought up the issue of

¹⁰⁹ "C.M.34(49)," 12 May 1949, CAB 195/7/30, p. 131, National Archives, Kew, accessed 3 March 2018, <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7739427>.

¹¹⁰ McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 10.

jurisdiction in parliament. Westminster once again seemed content to let Unionists run Northern Ireland as they wanted.¹¹¹

At the same time that the Ireland Act was being finalized, the Representation of the People Bill was passed, first in Westminster, and then in Stormont, which was intended to be an extension of the universal male suffrage act which had been introduced in England in 1918. In Northern Ireland, this bill had the potential of destabilizing Unionist control in the North. Stormont took one final measure to ensure that political power remained weighted in their favor. An amendment was added to the Representation of the People Bill, the Elections and Franchise Bill, which stipulated that tenants, subtenants, children living with parents, and any other individual who did not own a home could no longer vote in local elections.¹¹² Conversely, for those who did own a home, their spouse was allowed a vote, although not their adult children if they lived with their parents.¹¹³ As the ownership Creggan was split between the Londonderry Corporation and the NIHT as subsidized housing, this disqualified any person(s) who did not own one of those flats or houses outright.¹¹⁴

By the mid-1950s, Eddie McAteer accused “the Corporation’s big new Creggan Estate is in the South Ward where, however big the Nationalist vote, the same number of members are returned.”¹¹⁵ Westminster did argue against any such amendment, but the Bill passed Stormont and effectively excluded all persons in Northern Ireland from voting

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹¹² John Edmond Warnock, Elections and Franchise Bill—Second Reading, 9 January 1946, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 29 (1945–1946), cols. 1716–17, 1990–91; and “Gerrymandering Out-Moded: New Six Counties Bill of Disfranchisement,” *Irish Examiner* (Dublin), 28 December 1945, p. 3, Irish Newspaper Archive.

¹¹³ “Belfast Wants Vote Amended,” *Irish Press* (Dublin), 8 January 1946, p. 1, Irish Newspaper Archive

¹¹⁴ Ó Dochartaigh, “The Politics of Housing,” 629.

¹¹⁵ “Census Adds Proof of Derry City Gerrymandering,” *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 19 August 1954, p. 7, Irish Newspaper Archive.

who were not householders.¹¹⁶ Through these efforts, the Unionists maintained control of local councils and of parliament in Northern Ireland without worrying if the new housing developments shifted the electoral lines. All these measures and attitudes created a culture of resentment in Ulster, as Catholics lost more and more of their political power. This was only made all the more poignant by the fact that their quality of life was tied directly to their political rights.

Although all of the actions taken by Stormont from the 1920s to the 1960s—gerrymandering, abolishing proportional representation, failing to address the housing shortage, restrict the vote to householders, etc.—might have added tinder to the fire, it was the issue of housing allocation which ultimately proved to be the catalyst for the emergence of the civil rights movement in 1968. The effects of the Unionist party’s political maneuvering was felt across Ulster, but at the local level in Derry, the issue of who got a house and when was a more immediate and long-term effect of the Unionist party’s sectarian policies towards the Catholic community. Ultimately, housing proved to be Northern Ireland’s undoing, as those who finally decided to challenge Unionist control of Derry in the late 1960s used housing as a rallying point for disenfranchised Catholics.¹¹⁷

The system which the NIHT used in order to allocate the houses which they built was simply referred to as the point system. Even though housing developments like the Creggan Estates were supposed to be “allocated to the applicants most in need,” this did

¹¹⁶ Meredith Titterington, Representation of the People Bill, 16 February 1948, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 447 (1948), cols. 883–84; “Bill Restricts Vote to Householders,” *Irish Press* (Dublin), 8 January 1946, p. 1, Irish Newspaper Archive; and Ó Dochartaigh, “The Politics of Housing,” 626n6.

¹¹⁷ Bloomfield, *A Tragedy of Errors*, 168.

not always prove to be the case.¹¹⁸ The point system was in theory supposed to be nonpartisan and anonymous; “no names were submitted to the Council. Applicants for houses were referred to by letters and the number of points were placed opposite the various letters. The Council allocated the houses without knowing who the applicants were.”¹¹⁹ However, once those lists were compiled, the Mayor of Derry filtered “in consultation with the city housing manager, a Corporation employee,” likely a Unionist, and then proceeded to assign houses “in accordance with his personal judgment.”¹²⁰ Eamonn McCann, who would later be one of the key figures of the civil rights movement, recalled in his memoir, *War in an Irish Town*, “the only way to get a Corporation house . . . was to convince the mayor that you *ought* to get one, and members of his local Orange lodge were obviously better placed than Bogsiders to do this. One of the most common sights in Derry Guildhall was that of a gaunt woman from our [Catholic] area down with her children pleading with the mayor in the corridor: ‘Please, Mr. Anderson, we have been on the list for fifteen years.’”¹²¹ Nationalists spoke out against the system, claiming “houses are allocated, not for the purpose of providing houses for the people and greatest need to, but rather for the building up of the Unionist elements in certain Nationalist areas.”¹²²

The point system, rather than being the unbiased system it was intended to be, became one more way for the Unionist party to reinforce their political control of the

¹¹⁸ O’Brien, “The Northern Ireland Housing Trust,” 65; and Ó Dochartaigh, “The Politics of Housing,” 626.

¹¹⁹ “Unionist Senator Says Housing Points Plan is Fair,” *Ulster Herald* (Tyrone, N.I.), 26 January 1952, p. 7, Irish Newspaper Archive.

¹²⁰ “Religious Segregation in Derry Housing Allocations,” *Derry (N.I.) Journal*, 29 May 1953, p. 1, British Newspaper Archive; and Ó Dochartaigh, “The Politics of Housing,” 626–27.

¹²¹ McCann, *War and an Irish Town*, 80.

¹²² “Another Demand for Justice in Allocation of Houses,” *Fermanagh (N.I.) Herald*, 6 December 1952, p. 5, Irish Newspaper Archive.

North. Newspapers in the early 1950s relayed that after the Mayor had made his decision on house allocation in the North Ward in Derry, “of the 228 houses allocated in January last seven of them were allocated to Catholics, or a percentage of 3 per cent, in an area which was 40 percent Catholic.”¹²³ There were numerous accusations of large Catholic families living in one room “hovels” being passed over for newly-wed Protestant couples and single individuals, for which Stormont officials never did offer adequate explanations.¹²⁴ By 1958 Stormont’s Minister of Health and Local Government, John Andrews, seemed to think that the 192 houses completed between 1950 and 1959 were a sufficient number to satisfy the need in Derry, even though Eddie McAteer reminded the minister that there was a “backlog of 1,500 applications.” As was almost always the case, the minister offered no response to what McAteer called “quite a pitiful contribution” to the housing shortage.¹²⁵ The point system was designed to house people in need in a nonpartisan manner, but as the 1960s neared, the lists of those waiting for subsidized housing lengthened, and housing development retained its slow pace.¹²⁶

Until the 1960s, the protests to Stormont’s conduct, the failure to erect new houses, and the issues with housing allocation were relatively small.¹²⁷ The few Nationalist MPs like McAteer and Healy were rarely, if ever, listened to when they

¹²³ “Indictment of Derry Housing Allocation Policy,” *Derry (N.I.) Journal*, 18 May 1955, p. 1, British Newspaper Archive.

¹²⁴ “Religious Segregation in Derry Housing Allocations”; and Cahir Healy, Oral Answers: Housing, Selection of Tenants, 25 April 1950, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 34 (1950–1951), cols. 527–28.

¹²⁵ Eddie McAteer, Housing: Londonderry: Construction Programme by Corporation and Trust, 25 November 1958, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 43 (1958–1959), cols. 822–23.

¹²⁶ “Derry R.D.C. Protest Against Continued Use of Springtown Camp,” *Londonderry (N.I.) Sentinel*, 4 February 1958, p. 2, British Newspaper Archive; Eddie McAteer, Oral Answers: Londonderry, 12 June 1956, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 40 (1956–1957), cols. 1897–98; and Frederick Vivian Simpson, Consolidated Fund Bill—Second Reading, 11 March 1959, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 44 (1959), cols. 677–78.

¹²⁷ Ó Dochartaigh, 20.

brought up any topic in Stormont that had to do with the Catholic community and discrimination.¹²⁸ Westminster still did not want to get involved, and even though life was difficult for those waiting for houses, they did not move to fight against the unjust treatment of bodies like the Londonderry Corporation.¹²⁹ However, 1960 opened with a small episode which indicated that the Catholic community was beginning to tire of the status quo, and foreshadowed the explosion which went off in 1968.

Those who had been squatting in the Springtown camp since the mid-1940s, enduring its terrible conditions but having little option to go elsewhere, in 1959 had experienced a fire that was not fatal but revealed how precarious the situation at Springtown was.¹³⁰ McAteer urged his fellow MPs that the Londonderry Corporation be instructed to address their situation, but by December of 1960, only two families from the camp had been rehoused.¹³¹ Well over four hundred families lived in the camp, so McAteer challenged the Minister of Health and Local Government, Andrews, if he believed that sufficient progress on the matter was being made. Andrews replied that “this camp is not situated in the Londonderry rural district area. It is not a direct obligation of this council to clear the camp and provide alternative accommodation, but it is doing what it can to help.”¹³² Although this was a civilized debate in Stormont, in October, actions of desperate men and women proved that the citizens of Ulster were growing tired of Stormont’s inaction.

¹²⁸ McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 25.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 27–28.

¹³⁰ “Twelve Escape in Derry Hut Fire,” *Sunday Independent* (Dublin), 1 November 1959, p. 4, Irish Newspaper Archive.

¹³¹ Eddie McAteer, Fire at Springtown Camp, Londonderry, 10 November 1959, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 45 (1959–1960), cols. 657–58; and Ó Dochartaigh, “The Politics of Housing,” 630.

¹³² John Andrews, Housing: Work of Londonderry Rural District Council, 13 December 1960, *Stormont Papers*, House of Commons, vol. 47 (1960–61), cols. 1949–50.

During a meeting of the Londonderry Corporation and the Derry's Town Council, twelve women and two men refused to leave the public gallery in the Guildhall, the building where the local council of Derry met, until they had voiced their grievances on the Corporation's slow progress of rehousing them and the other residents of Springtown. Although the Corporation had initially promised houses on Coach Street in Derry to the residents of the camp, they had instead decided to give the houses to another group of people. Unionist leader and Chairman of the Londonderry Corporation housing sub-committee, G. S. Glover, told the group from Springtown "it is distressing [to] take away houses which we genuinely wanted to hand over to deserving cases in Springtown Camp but unfortunately they will have to wait a little longer."¹³³ Although this was hardly a riot, it revealed that the general population was no longer willing to sit and wait for another forty years while Unionist MPs made more excuses about why they could not house those of a certain faith, or why new housing developments were not going up. This seen indicated that change, led by the people, was on the horizon.

Although this episode hinted at what was to come, it would not be until 1968 that the citizens of Derry decided that they had finally had enough. The NIHT was failing to make any progress because "the Corporation limited most of the NIHT's activities to the [Catholic] South Ward . . . by 1966, the NIHT was giving notice that there was 'virtually no land left for housing within the city boundary'. The Corporation's housing police had made Derry one of the most overcrowded cities in the whole of Britain and Ireland."¹³⁴ The Creggan by the 1960s housed approximately 15,000 people, which was almost one-

¹³³ "Homeless Housewives Defy Derry Corporation, Police Were Called—But Women Remained," *Ulster Herald* (Tyrone, N.I.), 1 October 1960, p. 2, Irish Newspaper Archive.

¹³⁴ Prince, *Northern Ireland's '68*, 127.

third of the total population of Derry and was overwhelmingly Catholic.¹³⁵ Nationalists accused that when it came to housing allocation, rather than the needs of the applicant being taken into considerations, those in charge of appointing first considered, “‘are we going to hold Derry?’ Are we going to keep a hold on the gerrymander which had taken place in Derry? We cannot give control of the city [to the Catholics].”¹³⁶ However, people were beginning to accept that the Unionist element simply was not fazed by such accusations, and discontent on the ground was beginning to grow louder.

Westminster too had not relented on its 1923 statute, even though younger Labour MPs were beginning to raise issues like equality before the law.¹³⁷ In 1965 Labour MP, Eric Heffer, dared to raise the issue of discrimination in housing allocation in Westminster. The Deputy Speaker of the House, Samuel Storey, informed Heffer that he was out of order, to which he responded “I wish to ask why it was out of order for the question of discrimination to be discussed. I ask because I understand that under Section 75 we have ultimate responsibility for Northern Ireland. Therefore, it seems that in any discussion of Northern Ireland any relevant matters connected with Northern Ireland are in order. I should like you to explain this point.” To which Storey replied, “what is in order in this debate is what the United Kingdom Government are responsible for. For instance, discrimination in housing in Northern Ireland is not a matter for the United Kingdom Government; it is a matter for the Northern Ireland Government. If there is any discrimination it would be contrary to the [Government of Ireland] Act and would be

¹³⁵ Ó Dochartaigh, “The Politics of Housing,” 627.

¹³⁶ “Derry Housing Estate ‘A Unionist Stronghold,’” *Donegal (Ire.) News*, 6 August 1960, p. 3, Irish Newspaper Archive.

¹³⁷ McNamara, “Reflections on Aspects of Labour’s Policy Towards Northern Ireland, 1966–70,” 154.

actionable in the courts. There is no responsibility on Ministers in this House.”¹³⁸ In response to this seemingly unending cycle of inaction, the Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC) formed, which was a group that would finally move to challenge the status quo of Derry’s housing issue.

Although the agitation led by the DHAC on the street in 1968 about Derry’s housing situation would ultimately be the event which what would spark Northern Ireland’s civil rights movement and ensuing Troubles, housing was an issue long before the DHAC used it as a rallying point in the North’s fight for its civil liberties. The Unionist Party’s use of housing as a means to retain their political control of the North was a point of contention from the day of Northern Ireland’s birth, which current histories of Northern Ireland have not given great attention too. Gerrymandering, abolishing proportional representation, and making home ownership mandatory to vote in local elections were far older issues in Ulster’s political history, but because the DHAC led the charge in the streets about the outcomes of those actions, current historians have generally started their stories at the moment the DHAC was founded. The DHAC and other groups interested in fighting for equality, like the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, were more successful in their aims than were the Nationalist MPs, but by examining the lead up to the DHAC’s founding, the story of Northern Ireland’s housing crisis becomes all the more poignant. Overcrowding in houses standing since the nineteenth century were truly unacceptable living conditions to subject half of Ulster’s population too, which gives more gravity to the actions of the DHAC in their fight for civil rights.

¹³⁸ Eric Heffer and Samuel Storey, Northern Ireland, 26 October 1965, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 718 (1965), cols. 45–46.

* * *

Chapter 2

South Boston

Histories of Boston ignore housing as being one of the contributing factors to the South Boston Busing Crisis. Rather housing is talked about as an isolated aspect of life in Boston, one that created a “city of neighborhoods,” where Catholic Irish, Catholic Italian, Jewish, and Protestant Yankee never intermixed. Boston was defined by its “turf” lines that separated certain neighborhoods which “outsiders” never crossed.¹³⁹ However, in the case of South Boston, while all those things were true of the neighborhood, poor housing conditions were a problem from the 1920s, right up to 1974 when the busing order was handed down.

In the early 1970s, Michael Patrick MacDonald, who lived in South Boston as a young boy and witnessed the busing crisis first hand, described in his memoir, *All Souls: A Family Story from Southie*, that in the early 1970s, owning a “breakthrough,” apartment, meaning that the wall between two apartments was knocked down, doubling the apartment’s size, made a family the envy of the neighborhood. However, MacDonald vividly recalls that his mother had to pull discarded furniture out of the dumpster in order to furnish their extend apartment, an act that deeply embarrassed him.¹⁴⁰ Later, MacDonald suggested that poor housing had only contributed to the distribution of drugs and gang violence, something that he argues, state lawmakers could not be bothered to address.¹⁴¹ Subsidized housing, like in Derry, did not become a divisive issue until the

¹³⁹ O’Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 174–77.

¹⁴⁰ MacDonald, *All Souls*, 109.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1–6. Throughout his memoir MacDonald subtly accuses Boston’s government of never trying to improve conditions in the housing projects, but rather only maintained a status quo of welfare dependency and substandard living conditions.

early 1960s; yet, Boston did not welcome its coming, whereas in Derry people fought for its implementation. Although the order to desegregate South Boston's high school was the issue that set the neighborhood alight, its history of poor housing did ultimately play a part in the frustration felt by the residents of South Boston towards their local government.

At the start of the nineteenth century, Boston's two political parties, the Republicans who were almost exclusively of Protestant Anglo-Saxon descent, and the Democrats who, after the mid-nineteenth century, were almost exclusively Irish Catholics, developed an eye for an eye mentality towards one another. When the Democrats were in power, namely in the position of the mayor, they denied downtown Boston, the historic domain of the Republicans, the support of municipal projects, and only focused on the "other" Boston. The Boston made up of working-class Irish Catholics, who, in return for expanded municipal projects and jobs, gave their vote to the candidate running in the local election that was one of "their" people. When the Republicans were in charge, either with one of their own, or with an "acceptable" Catholic, one they could control, jobs and salaries were cut, building projects cancelled, and as the case with housing would be, they tended to turn a blind eye to the poor conditions of neighborhoods who had inflicted a Democrat on the city. Housing played a key role in solidifying the animosity between the Yankee Republicans and the Irish Catholics, one that would have damaging consequences for the latter half of the twentieth century.

Starting in the 1920s, Boston's need for an expanded housing development was directly influenced by its population spike in the mid-nineteenth century. From the 1850s

to the mid-1920s, with the passing of the Immigrant Act of 1924, the population of Boston more than doubled in size. In the nineteenth century the city of Boston had annexed the surrounding townships—South Boston (1804), Roxbury (1868), Dorchester (1870), Charleston, West Roxbury, and Brighton (1873)—to only then start receiving thousands of Irish immigrants fleeing the effects of the Great Famine (1845–1852).¹⁴² In 1840 the population of Boston had been just under 85,000.¹⁴³ By 1850, it was just short of 150,000 and by 1860, it was just shy of 193,000.¹⁴⁴ South Boston absorbed many of these new arrivals, its population increasing from six thousand in 1835 to ten thousand in 1845, and “by 1855 there were over sixteen thousand people living in the peninsula, a significant number of whom were recent [Irish] immigrants.”¹⁴⁵ The majority of these immigrants situated themselves in South Boston because of the better job opportunities which the peninsula had to offer (glass and ironworks), yet their housing situation followed similar patterns to other cities receiving tidal waves of Irish immigrants in the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² O’Connor, *The Hub*, 144; and O’Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 17.

¹⁴³ Suffolk, Counties, Massachusetts, 1840, p. 8–9, Counties and Principal Towns, Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, *Sixth Census of the United States*, Washington, D.C., Publications, United States Census Bureau, accessed 9 March 2018, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1840/1840v3/1840c-02.pdf>.

¹⁴⁴ Suffolk County, Table II, p. 52, 1850, Statistics of Massachusetts, Population by Subdivisions of Counties, *Seventh Census of the United States*, Washington, D.C., Massachusetts, Publications, United States Census Bureau, accessed 9 March 2018, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1850/1850a/1850a-19.pdf>; and Suffolk, Counties, Table No. 2, p. 220, 1860, State of Massachusetts, Population by Color and Condition, *Eighth Census of the United States*, Washington, D.C., Massachusetts, Publications, United States Census Bureau, accessed 9 March 2018, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1860/population/1860a-19.pdf>.

¹⁴⁵ O’Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 40. The above census reports do not break down the population in terms of ethnicity, therefore I had to rely on O’Connor to get how many Irish specifically were in the city.

¹⁴⁶ O’Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 38. For a detailed account of the Irish and tenement houses see Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The 19th Century New York City Neighborhood that Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World’s Most Notorious Slum* (New York: Free Press, 2010).

Tenement houses were designed to accommodate as many people as possible, for as cheaply as possible.¹⁴⁷ The Famine Irish, lacking the means or the ability to seek other accommodations, often had little choice but to accept the conditions of life in a tenement house.¹⁴⁸ In Boston, as more immigrants flooded into the city, the Protestant element worried about the “vices” which would flow out the tenement neighborhoods, but little was done to address the situation.¹⁴⁹ By the twentieth century, the public recognized that these buildings were unfit for human habitation and that new housing developments were needed to alleviate their squalid conditions.¹⁵⁰ A poem published in the *Sacred Heart Review* lamented: “The children, oh! The children / Of want and woe and need, – / From rows of teeming tenements / Their little faces plead! / From airless blocks of buildings, / From the furnace of the street, / The voices of the children / All the summer long entreat.”¹⁵¹ The issue of health among the working classes was becoming of greater concern, and newspapers started to call on lawmakers to address the situation.¹⁵² However, it was not until the 1920s that the issue received any serious attention.¹⁵³

In 1920 much of the discussion surrounding housing in Boston was the shortage of homes and the funds needed in order to alleviate overcrowding. Numerous editorials

¹⁴⁷ Anbinder, *Five Points*, 72.

¹⁴⁸ “Ship Fever,” *Boston Pilot*, 26 June 1847, p. 7, Boston College Newspapers.

¹⁴⁹ “Mortality Among the Poor,” *Sacred Heart Review* (Boston, Mass.), 21 July 1894, p. 2, Boston College Newspapers; “The City and the Slums,” *Boston Sunday Globe*, 18 January 1903, p. 13, Newspaper Archive; and Sam Bass Warner Jr., *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston (1870–1900)*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 19.

¹⁵⁰ “Tenement Problems in the Big Cities,” *New York Times*, 9 December 1900, p. 17, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁵¹ Jenni Betts Hartwick, “A Breath of Air,” *Sacred Heart Review* (Boston, Mass.), 22 June 1901, p. 394, Boston College Newspapers.

¹⁵² “Housing of the Poor,” *Sacred Heart Review* (Boston, Mass.), 29 October 1910, p. 338; and “The Housing Problem is the Root,” *Sacred Heart Review* (Boston, Mass.), 18 November 1911, p. 345, both in Boston College Newspapers.

¹⁵³ Edward McLaughlin, Information Asked, Housing Facilities, 16 February 1920, *City of Boston, Proceedings of the City Council, 1920–1921* (Boston, Mass.: Municipal Printing Office), 18, Hathi Trust, accessed 11 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.096608943?urlappend=%3Bseq=70>.

referred to the shortage as “acute,” and urged the city to take steps to address the situation.¹⁵⁴ Although the city council had been asking the mayor at the time Andrew James Peters, to address the situation since 1919, in March of 1920 Peters appointed a Rents and Housing Commission (RHC) in order to investigate complaints made about high rent prices and substandard living conditions.¹⁵⁵ The Commission found that in areas like South Boston, Charlestown, Dorchester, and Roxbury, all immigrant-heavy areas, there were 3300 tenements standing vacant “because the houses afforded no bathtubs and because single toilets for all tenants were located in the cellar.”¹⁵⁶ Some of these homes were generational, going back in a family’s possession as far as the Famine, but the tenements were now dark, had no running water, and were unsanitary.¹⁵⁷ The areas that were receiving those fleeing these conditions were becoming congested and overcrowded. The RHC and the Commission on the Necessaries of Life (CNL), told city officials this would only be eased if new construction began, or if the existing tenements were updated to higher standards of living.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Frederic Fay, Housing Facilities for Boston, *City of Boston, Proceedings of the City Council, 1920–1921* (Boston, Mass.: Municipal Printing Office), 89, Hathi Trust, accessed 11 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.096608943?urlappend=%3Bseq=154>; “Expects Big Falling off in Weddings, Shortage of Houses Will Cause Drop, Says Registrar,” *Boston Post*, 2 June 1920, p. 10; “Great Need of Building Emphasized,” *Boston Post*, 6 June 1920, p. 23; and “Says Banks Ask Bonus, Realty Man Makes Claim at Rent Hearing,” *Boston Post*, 10 July 1920, p. 14, all in Newspapers by Ancestry.

¹⁵⁵ Edward McLaughlin, Executive Committee Reports, 10 May 1920, *City of Boston, Proceedings of the City Council, 1920–1921* (Boston, Mass.: Municipal Printing Office), 92–93, Hathi Trust, accessed 11 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.096608943?urlappend=%3Bseq=158>; and Local Rent and Housing Committees, February 1920, House No. 1500, *Report of the Commission on the Necessaries of Life* (Boston: Write and Potter Printing, 1920), 61, Hathi Trust, accessed 10 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015066997910?urlappend=%3Bseq=865>.

¹⁵⁶ “Report 3300 Unoccupied Tenements: Former Tenants Move to Better Equipped Buildings,” *Boston Post*, 19 March 1920, p. 2, Newspaper Archive; and “Report 3300 Slum Tenements Vacant: Migration Causes Congestion, Jordan Says—Conference on Fund for Housing,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 19 March 1920, p. 20, Boston Globe Archive.

¹⁵⁷ O’Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 174.

¹⁵⁸ “To Rehabilitate Untenanted Areas,” *Boston Post*, 7 April 1920, p. 6, Newspapers by Ancestry; and “Seeks Legislative Aid in Making a Housing Survey; Mayor Peters’ Committee Points Out Need of Immediate Action,” *Boston Globe*, 11 May 1920, p. 12, Newspaper Archive.

The chairman of the CNL (a body also created at the beginning of 1920 tasked with overseeing the city's overall well-being much like the Londonderry Corporation), John Sherburne, suggested that "steps be taken to have the landlords in these sections put their buildings in first-class conditions . . . [which] would tend to send people back into the isolated sections and relieve other districts which are congested."¹⁵⁹ Not only could updating standing structures potentially solve some of the housing shortage, and not require expensive new buildings, but it would keep neighborhoods in Boston from becoming intermixed between immigrant Catholics and native Protestants. Similar to their Protestant counterparts in Ulster, religious segregation was something that native Boston Protestants encouraged and maintained when they were able. By enabling residents of South Boston or Charlestown to move back into "their neighborhood," with "their own kind," downtown Boston, which had historically been the domain of wealthy Protestants, would be kept clear of the poor immigrant element.¹⁶⁰ By improving the already standing tenement houses in South Boston, the rest of the city could remain separated between its different ethnicities and religions.

Despite the initial recommendation to improve those structures to achieve this, however, in the spring of 1920, the initial report made by the RHC and CNL estimated that in reality Boston required at least 3,000 to 4,000 new homes to solve the immediate housing shortage and to alleviate overcrowding, but by the fall, Boston would need an

¹⁵⁹ "Report 3300 Unoccupied Tenements"; and Front Matter, February 1920, House No. 1500, *Report of the Commission on the Necessaries of Life* (Boston: Write and Potter Printing, 1920), 3, Google Books, accessed 10 March 2018, https://books.google.com/books?id=n1pBAAAAYAAJ&dq=commission+on+the+necessaries+of+life+history&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

¹⁶⁰ "Concern Over Boston's Drop," *Boston Post*, 19 June 1920, p. 1, 3, Newspapers by Ancestry; and O'Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 127. O'Connor talks at length that the attitude of the native Protestant population in Boston encouraged separation of the neighborhoods, i.e., Catholics and Protestants should not intermingle.

additional 10,000 homes.¹⁶¹ The chairman of the RHC, Malcolm Nichols, who would later serve as Boston's last Republican mayor from 1926 to 1930, warned that the situation would grow considerably worse by the fall if the city did not do something to meet the needs of those citizens living in overcrowded areas.¹⁶² Although these various committees had uncovered what other city officials said, "every wide-awake, sane, intelligent man," already knew, Mayor Peters did not make any definite move to address the situation.¹⁶³

Peters objected to state intervention on the grounds that the city would lose money, but Councilman Henry Hagan countered that the city would never see great profit if land taxes were never raised in downtown Boston, the wealthiest part of the city, while in South Boston, one of the poorest parts of the city, land taxes were kept well above what residents there had the means to pay.¹⁶⁴ Council members accuse Peters of "dillydallying" and ignoring the terrible health situation that poor housing created.¹⁶⁵ Hagen went so far as to insinuate that Peters was no better than the "rent profiteers," those landlords "who can get any price they ask for apartments, no matter what the condition of the apartments may be because people must be housed."¹⁶⁶ High rents would ultimately be the crux of the issue as the 1920s wore on, but initially, Boston's City

¹⁶¹ "One Solution of Housing Puzzle," *Boston Sunday Post*, 23 May 1920, p. 18, Newspaper Archive; and "Great Need of Building Emphasized."

¹⁶² Malcolm Nichols, Appropriation for Committee on Rent and Housing, 28 June 1920, *City of Boston, Proceedings of the City Council, 1920–1921* (Boston, Mass.: Municipal Printing Office), 128, Hathi Trust, accessed 11 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.096608943?urlappend=%3Bseq=198>; and Anne Steele, "A Look Back at the Mayors of Boston," 14 April 2013, boston.com, accessed 13 March 2018, <https://www.boston.com/uncategorized/noprimarytagmatch/2013/04/14/a-look-back-at-the-mayors-of-boston>.

¹⁶³ McLaughlin, Executive Committee Reports, 93.

¹⁶⁴ Henry Hagan, Executive Committee Reports, 10 May 1920, *City of Boston, Proceedings of the City Council, 1920–1921* (Boston, Mass.: Municipal Printing Office), 93, Hathi Trust, accessed 11 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.096608943?urlappend=%3Bseq=158>.

¹⁶⁵ McLaughlin, Executive Committee Reports, 93.

¹⁶⁶ Hagan, Executive Committee Reports, 93.

Council did attempt to increase the number of homes in the city so that overcrowding would not be so severe.

By the summer, the RHC and the CNL reported that statewide, an estimated \$365,000,000 was needed to start development, and that Boston would require at least \$20,000,000 to provide an estimated 4,500 homes.¹⁶⁷ Boston's City Council, knowing that the city did not have the means fund such a large undertaking, came up with several plans in order to raise the funds necessary to start construction. The first of these plans turned out to be short-lived and hinted that the lack of housing development across the city was due to more than just monetary concerns. In order to offset the predicted twenty million needed to start building, the city proposed that "Boston bankers and business men . . . create a building loan fund of generous proportions to build or assist in the erection of homes by way of relieving the existing housing shortage."¹⁶⁸ Many banks promised that they would "do all they could to make [a] housing corporation successful," but stipulated that in order to start loaning large sums of money to private contractors, the intended purchaser of the house had to have at least a \$1,000 deposit in the bank in order for work to begin.¹⁶⁹

At the beginning of 1920, the CNL had found that over eighty per cent of Boston's residents were tenants.¹⁷⁰ For those who were already living in the dilapidated areas like South Boston, coming up with such a large sum of money meant that they

¹⁶⁷ "Short More Than 3000 Homes," *Boston Post*, 13 July 1920, p. 3, Newspaper Archive; and "One Solution of Housing Puzzle."

¹⁶⁸ "Build Loan Fund Will Be Discussed," *Boston Daily Globe*, 28 May 1920, p. 22, Boston Globe Archive.

¹⁶⁹ "Holyoke Plan to be Told Housing Board," *Boston Post*, 1 June 1920, p. 4; "Banks to Aid in Housing Idea," *Boston Post*, 23 June 1920, p. 7, both in Newspapers by Ancestry; and "Banks Offer Aid in Housing," *Boston Daily Globe*, 23 June 1920, p. 15, Boston Globe Archive.

¹⁷⁰ Home Ownership, February 1920, House No. 1500, *Report of the Commission on the Necessaries of Life* (Boston: Write and Potter Printing, 1920), 63, Hathi Trust, accessed 10 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015066997910?urlappend=%3Bseq=867>.

would have to accept a fifteen or even twenty-year mortgage in order to pay back their debt.¹⁷¹ Although Peters was not unaware that other large cities with housing shortages had overcome this issue by building “standardized houses,” and then either renting the house until the occupant could buy it or selling the house to those who could afford it, he did not pursue that option.¹⁷² When the City Council realized that it would take too long to negotiate a deal with local banks to fund building projects, they turned to the state constitution in the hopes that emergency laws could succeed in addressing the housing shortage where cooperation between the city and banks had failed.¹⁷³

During World War I, Article 47 had been amended to the Constitution of Massachusetts, which gave the state the responsibility of “the maintenance and distribution at reasonable rates, during time of war, public exigency, emergency or distress, or a sufficient supply of food and other common necessities of life and the providing of shelter, are public functions, and the commonwealth and the cities and towns therein may take and may provide the same for their inhabitants in such manner as the general court shall determine.”¹⁷⁴ Although this particular amendment referred specifically to the needs of the city during wartime, some members of Boston’s City Council believed that this article provided city officials the means to address the housing shortage without having to go through the process of enacting new legislation which would have taken months to obtain approval.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ “Great Need of Building Emphasized.”

¹⁷² “Federal Housing Methods Urged,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, Mass.), 8 June 1920, p. 10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁷³ “One Solution of Housing Puzzle.”

¹⁷⁴ Massachusetts Constitution, Articles of Amendment, article XLVII, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, accessed 11 March 2018, <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/Constitution#articlesOfAmendment>.

¹⁷⁵ “One Solution of Housing Puzzle.”

In August councilmen Hagan and Edward McLaughlin made a formal declaration that “in the opinion of the members of the City Council a public exigency or emergency or public distress exists because of an insufficient supply of shelter or available dwellings in the City of Boston for its inhabitants; . . . his Honor the Mayor be hereby requested to issue the proclamation provided for in chapter 554 of the Acts of 1920, and to take immediate steps under the provisions of said act to relieve the present situation.”¹⁷⁶ By adding chapter 554 to Article 47, which was “an act to authorize cities and towns to provide shelter for their inhabitants in case of emergency,” the city had the right to declare eminent domain in areas where the housing need was critical.¹⁷⁷ In practical terms, this article and chapter combined allowed the city to borrow up to \$15,000,000 outside the city’s debt limit.¹⁷⁸ By utilizing Article 47, Boston’s lawmakers could bypass the process of passing new legislation; put building in the hands of the city; and prevent the investable rent increases in the fall.¹⁷⁹

Despite the City Council’s defense of Article 47, Mayor Peters declined to act. He told Hagan and the other members of the Council that this “particular legislative act . . . was never intended to be applied to present conditions, but was only to be applied in the case of a conflagration or something of a very serious nature in our community.”¹⁸⁰ One

¹⁷⁶ Henry Hagan, Dwellings for the Inhabitants of Boston, 9 August 1920, *City of Boston, Proceedings of the City Council, 1920–1921* (Boston, Mass.: Municipal Printing Office), 166–67, Hathi Trust, accessed 11 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.096608943?urlappend=%3Bseq=238>.

¹⁷⁷ “Chap. 554,” in *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts*, vol. 1 (Boston, Mass.: Write and Porter Printing, 1920), 561, Google Book, accessed 11 March 2018, https://books.google.com/books?id=NldNAQAAMAAJ&dq=n+Act+to+Authorize+Cities+and+Towns+to+Provide+Shelter+for+Their+Inhabitants+Cases+Emergency.+chapter+554&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

¹⁷⁸ “Asks City to Borrow and Build: City Council Urges \$15,000,000 for Housing Shortage,” *Boston Post*, 10 August 1920, Newspapers by Ancestry.

¹⁷⁹ Hagan, Dwellings for the Inhabitants of Boston, 167.

¹⁸⁰ Henry Hagan, Housing Condition Relief, 20 September 1920, *City of Boston, Proceedings of the City Council, 1920–1921* (Boston, Mass.: Municipal Printing Office), 196, Hathi Trust, accessed 11 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.096608943?urlappend=%3Bseq=270>.

of his advisors, Arthur Hill, told Peters that they did not believe high rent prices or a shortage of dwellings warranted declaring a public emergency.¹⁸¹ Mayor Peters' decision not to take advantage of Article 47 caused widespread criticism—something Councilman Hagan warned of—however, it did not seem to sway his final decision.¹⁸² McLaughlin accused Hill and the other Republican legislature of deliberately working against Boston's city council to which Hill countered that the Democrats should work with State Representatives to force through a bill that would bring about the desired change.¹⁸³ Although all this might have been true, as time passed, Peters' failure to act did prove to be detrimental to Boston's housing situation, particularly in the matter of high rents.¹⁸⁴

In an effort to appease the city council, in late October Mayor Peters conceded to their demand that the RHC look into, for the second time in one year, the housing situation in Boston, with particular emphasis on if rents were really as high as Hagan and his fellow council members claimed.¹⁸⁵ The evidence seemed to support the council's worries, as the commission reported that they had dealt with 3,800 rent complaints since the spring and that it was currently dealing with nearly a 100 notices to vacate which were deemed illegal on part of the landlord.¹⁸⁶ In some cases, entire blocks of tenements

¹⁸¹ Arthur D. Hill to Andrew James Peters, Housing Situation in Boston, 20 September 1920, *City of Boston, Proceedings of the City Council, 1920–1921* (Boston, Mass.: Municipal Printing Office), 191, Hathi Trust, accessed 11 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.096608943?urlappend=%3Bseq=265>; and “No Relief in Housing Situation,” *Boston Post*, 5 October 1920, p. 30, Newspapers by Ancestry.

¹⁸² “Hagan Flays Mayor,” *Boston Post*, 19 October 1920, p. 9, Newspapers by Ancestry.

¹⁸³ “Legislature Scored in Debate on Housing,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 5 October 1920, p. 12, Boston Globe Archive.

¹⁸⁴ Henry Hagan, Information Asked on Boston Housing, 4 October 1920, *City of Boston, Proceedings of the City Council, 1920–1921* (Boston, Mass.: Municipal Printing Office), 206, Hathi Trust, accessed 12 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.096608943?urlappend=%3Bseq=281>.

¹⁸⁵ Hagan, Information Asked on Boston Housing, 206; and “Loans Urged for Building,” *Boston Post*, 7 October 1920, p. 17, Newspapers by Ancestry.

¹⁸⁶ “3800 Cases on Rents Heard,” *Boston Post*, 8 October 1920, p. 7, Newspapers by Ancestry.

received orders to vacate with little to no warning.¹⁸⁷ Occupants either had to agree to exorbitant rent increases or had to “double up” with other families who were willing to accommodate them during the winter months.¹⁸⁸ The mayor, unable to deny that rent gouging was an ongoing problem, assured the people of Boston and his City Council that the RHC—whose duty was to intercede on behalf of the tenants to stop evictions and unfair rent increases—would do everything in its power “relieve oppressed tenants.”¹⁸⁹ Boston’s citizens though did not seem to have a high opinion of the RHC, and newspapers like the *Boston Post* accused “Mayor Peters’ rent and housing commission is a pitiful joke. Its members are helpless because they have no sufficient authority, but worse than they [*sic*] are certain Massachusetts judges who have proved themselves blindly partial to the cause of the landlords.”¹⁹⁰ This incident would set the tone of how Boston’s city officials would continue to deal with the housing situation as the 1920s progressed.

Boston was not exceptional in its discussion of rent increases in the 1920s, for it was a discussion being held across the United States.¹⁹¹ What made Boston a unique case,

¹⁸⁷ “Rents and Housing,” February 1920, House No. 1500, *Report of the Commission on the Necessaries of Life* (Boston: Write and Potter Printing, 1920), 96, Google Books, accessed 10 March 2018, https://books.google.com/books?id=n1pBAAAAYAAJ&dq=commission+on+the+necessaries+of+life+history&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

¹⁸⁸ “Rents and Housing,” February 1920, 96; and Henry Hagan, Advice on Housing Situation, 20 September 1920, *City of Boston, Proceedings of the City Council, 1920–1921* (Boston, Mass.: Municipal Printing Office), 213, Hathi Trust, accessed 13 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.096608943?urlappend=%3Bseq=289>.

¹⁸⁹ Andrew James Peters to the City Council, The Housing Situation, 22 October 1920, *City of Boston, Proceedings of the City Council, 1920–1921* (Boston, Mass.: Municipal Printing Office), 217, Hathi Trust, accessed 13 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.096608943?urlappend=%3Bseq=294>; and “Peters Confident in Housing Committee,” *Boston Post*, 26 October 1920, p. 14, Newspapers by Ancestry.

¹⁹⁰ “Big League is Started by Tenants,” *Boston Post*, 14 November 1920, p. 2, Newspapers by Ancestry.

¹⁹¹ Gustavus Myers, “The World’s Housing Shortage,” in *Current History, A Monthly Magazine of the New York Times*, vol. 14 (New York: New York Times Company, 1921), 613, Google Books, accessed 13 March 2018, https://books.google.com/books?id=l7UqAAAAYAAJ&dq=rent+increase+boston+1920&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

was that similar to the situation in Derry, although there was a great demand for new houses in both cities, their respective governments were not implementing any new developments. In the view of those tenants who had to live in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in Boston, this was giving landlords the opportunity to raise rents without any fear of reprisals because their tenant's options of finding other means of shelter were so limited.¹⁹² Although Boston had a law in place that clearly stated any rent increase of more than 25 per cent in one year would be considered "presumptively unjust, unreasonable and oppressive," the CNL pointed out that there was "no penalty for violation of this statute . . . therefore the burden and risk is upon the tenant."¹⁹³ This did not seem to be an unfounded criticism, as the CNL learned that "the population of Boston during the last decade [the 1920s] increased by 11.6 per cent [while] the number of dwellings by but 10.8 per cent."¹⁹⁴ Boston's rent prices were the highest recorded in the state's history and that "numbers of tenants have . . . surrendered to the demands of the landlords," owing to the fact that if he did not, "he will be served with a notice to vacate."¹⁹⁵ Although a delay in building may not have been influenced by the manipulation of political power as it was in Derry, it cannot be denied that the building delay in Boston, particularly in immigrant-heavy areas, seemed to indicate that in the 1920s, certain levels of Boston's ruling class did not seem to find the plight of the Irish of great importance.

¹⁹² "Shelter," January 1921, House No. 1260, *Report of the Commission on the Necessaries of Life* (Boston: Write and Potter Printing, 1920), 49, Google Books, accessed 13 March 2018, https://books.google.com/books?id=OwEfaQAAMAAJ&dq=Report+of+the+Special+Commission+on+the+Necessaries+of+Life&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

¹⁹³ "Shelter," *Report of the Commission on the Necessaries of Life*, 49.

¹⁹⁴ "Housing," *Monthly Labor Review* 13, no. 6 (1921): 146, HeinOnline, accessed 13 March 2018, <http://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/month13&i=1322>.

¹⁹⁵ "Housing," *Monthly Labor Review*, 145; and "Shelter," *Report of the Commission on the Necessaries of Life*, 48.

One example of Peters' administration's unsympathetic attitude towards its immigrant population was published in 1921. *The Little Blue Book for Immigrants in Boston* was written with the intent to help not only those who were recent arrivals to Boston but also to instruct those who were already part of the "American body politic," to become good citizens.¹⁹⁶ In the chapter titled "Health," the writers suggested that because "the immigrant often lives in a crowded part of the city. . . . [where] the streets are narrow the houses are old; the rooms are small; there is not much sunshine. The immigrant should try to move into a better part of the city or to a town nearby, where there are wide streets and new houses and little gardens."¹⁹⁷ The chapter listed measures for the immigrant to take in order to keep hearth and home clean, yet did not state if the city was responsible for aiding in the care of these "crowded parts of the city." Nor did the writers seem to consider if the immigrant had the financial means to move out of the tenement areas. No doubt the mayor's office viewed such an "aid" as a means of enlightening the immigrant about the fact that he did not have to live in unsanitary or overcrowded conditions. However, given that the mayor's office had spent the better part of 1920 fighting with the City Council over the housing shortage, by this point these suggestions only served as a reminder of how inadequately the City of Boston was dealing with the housing situation.

This changed somewhat by the mid-1920s, as building projects started to appear with more frequency throughout the city. However, as needed as such projects were,

¹⁹⁶ Andrew James Peters, forward to *The Little Book for Immigrants in Boston* (Boston, Mass.: Committee for Americanism of the City of Boston, 1921), 3, Internet Archive, accessed 13 March 2018, <https://archive.org/stream/littlebookforimm00bost#page/n9/mode/2up>.

¹⁹⁷ *The Little Book for Immigrants in Boston*, accessed 13 March 2018, <https://archive.org/stream/littlebookforimm00bost#page/22/mode/2up/search/health>.

placement of these new housing developments was telling in the government's attitude of Boston's immigrant population. By 1925 the *Boston Daily Globe* reported that although CNL had found that since 1924 "the construction of new dwelling progressed at a more rapid rate than in any year since the war . . . however, [construction] has not materially reduced rents, although it has mitigated the rental conditions of those able to pay high rents. Those tenants able to pay medium rents have, as yet, received little or no relief by lower rents."¹⁹⁸ The state appeared to only be addressing housing issues for those who could afford them.

One such example was the construction of the Cleveland apartments in 1925, situated on Beacon Street and Chestnut Hill Avenue, which was in the backyard of the Back Bay, one of Boston's older and wealthier neighborhoods.¹⁹⁹ The Cleveland was "six stories high and . . . contains 102 apartments consisting of two to five rooms."²⁰⁰ These "modern apartments," also catered to greater convenience for the housekeeper, having better-lighted kitchens for them to eat and work. A year later, Mayor Malcolm Nichols, who had been the chairman of the CNL in 1920 and was Boston's first and last Republican mayor of the twentieth century, informed South Boston that construction of a bathing house (a necessary establishment since so few homes had running water), was being cancelled.²⁰¹ This was due to the treasury being empty, thanks to the actions of the previous mayor, and a high tax rate, which Malcolm insisted "citizens should not be

¹⁹⁸ "Need Emergency Housing Laws: Danger if They Lapse, Says State Commission," *Boston Daily Globe*, 11 February 1925, p. A24, Boston Globe Archive.

¹⁹⁹ O'Connor, *The Hub*, 142–43.

²⁰⁰ "Real Estate Development Continues Active in Boston," *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, Mass.), 28 November 1925, p. 4B, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁰¹ O'Connor, *The Hub*, 143.

obligated to pay for [such] luxuries.”²⁰² Although this was not an unfair argument it did seem to indicate that a level of indifference was present towards Boston’s immigrant population on the part of the Protestant-dominated Republican Party.²⁰³

The construction of the Cleveland apartments was an improvement in the overall need in Boston for new housing, but much like the fact that they were situated in one of the more affluent areas, they also only catered to the upper-middle classes and the wealthy. Rents remained high in the tenements areas, and the working and poorer classes of the city remained at the mercy of private landlords. Since 1923 emergency rent laws had been on Boston’s statute books, which stipulated that if a landlord planned to evict a tenant they had to give them from two to six months warning so that said tenant would have enough time to find other accommodations.²⁰⁴ They were supposed to end by 1924, but in 1925, the CNL ward city officials “that if the emergency housing laws . . . ‘are allowed to lapse this Spring, the old method used by unscrupulous speculators and landlords of putting tenants out of their homes . . . in 48 hours will again become prevalent.”²⁰⁵ The CNL also reported:

It is impossible at present for these tenants to find lower-priced quarters. When dwellings occupied by those able to pay a high rent were exploited by speculators, it resulted in stimulating new building. . . . The situation of the tenants with small incomes at present time is entirely different. High wages and regular employment during the past several years enabled tenants to meet high rental demands, but with smaller wages and part-time employment, excessively high rents result in disaster to the family. When this condition affects large groups, it greatly restricts the purchasing power and prosperity of the community.²⁰⁶

²⁰² “Repeal of \$380,000 City Fund Asked,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, Mass.), 12 January 1926, p. 5B, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁰³ O’Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 104.

²⁰⁴ “Ask Emergency Rent Laws Be Continued,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 8 December 1923, p. 5, Boston Globe Archive.

²⁰⁵ “Need Emergency Housing Laws,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 11 February 1925, p. A24, Boston Globe Archive.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Although building developments might have eased the situation of housing in certain part of Boston, the new construction was not having the effect of improving the condition the lower classes.

By 1927 the CNL reported as much, stating that while there had been fewer complaints about high rent prices across the city, “it is impossible under present high construction costs to build new housing for families whose income allows them to pay less than \$35 a month for rent,” yet there was a great demand for accommodations at or lower than \$35 a month.²⁰⁷ The Commission outlined the number of homes which had been built in 1926 (1,654) but made the point of stating that none of those houses were affordable for the working classes.²⁰⁸ The *Christian Science Monitor* reported, “the apartment situation in Boston . . . today is peculiar in that the higher-priced apartments that were designed especially for people of wealth and refinement . . . are not proving popular among [the working] class and are not nearly as much in demand as the cheaper apartments.”²⁰⁹ For example, in South Boston, the CNL found that it “is populated mostly entirely by wage earners of which the greater part consists of mechanics and laborers whose income prohibits the payment of anything but a very moderate rental. The average rental in South Boston is considerably lower than at the rate of \$30 per month, many being in the vicinity of \$15.”²¹⁰ The failure to cater the needs of the work classes had led

²⁰⁷ “Rent and Housing,” House No. 1100, February 1927, *Report of the Commission on the Necessaries of Life* (Boston: Write and Potter Printing, 1920), 20, Hathi Trust, accessed 14 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b2996561?urlappend=%3Bseq=24>.

²⁰⁸ Table, “New Dwellings Planned,” House No. 1100, February 1927, *Report of the Commission on the Necessaries of Life* (Boston: Write and Potter Printing, 1920), 20, Hathi Trust, accessed 14 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b2996561?urlappend=%3Bseq=83>.

²⁰⁹ “Lower Real Estate Market Offers Investment Change,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, Mass.), 1 June 1927, p. 4B, ProQuest Historical Newspaper.

²¹⁰ “Rent and Housing,” *Report of the Commission on the Necessaries of Life*, 88, accessed 14 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b2996561?urlappend=%3Bseq=92>.

to a “surplus supply of high-rent property,” and had caused overcrowding to be a persistent issue, with a population reaching a “suffocating density of 799 persons per gross acre.”²¹¹

Although these housing issues may not have been unique to the city of Boston in the 1920s, what proved Boston’s history of housing to be similar to the case of Derry was that housing development, or the lack thereof, was often bound up in the decades-old animosity between the Protestant financial district of the city and the Irish Catholic political machines of the mayor’s office. From the turn of the twentieth-century Boston was subjected to a tug of war between the Irish Catholic Democrats and the Yankee Protestant Republicans, one that had, among other things, an adverse effect on housing.

One of the most notable ways in which Boston differed from Derry, is that its Irish Catholic population, mostly through sheer weight of numbers, and because they did not have the same voting restraints that were present in Northern Ireland, had been able to elect one of their own to the position of mayor since the turn of the twentieth century.²¹² Although the Irish Catholics of Boston were able to secure more political representation than their counterparts in Northern Ireland, the situation of the Boston Irish was still dominated by a form of Protestant control in Boston’s financial district, situated in Beacon Hill. Although the relationship between the Yankee businessmen and the Irish

²¹¹ “Rent and Housing,” *Report of the Commission on the Necessaries of Life*, 75, 80, accessed 14 March 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b2996561?urlappend=%3Bseq=79>; and Charles H. Trout, *Boston, The Great Depression, and the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 14.

²¹² For a complete history of Boston’s Irish Catholic mayors, see Gerard O’Neill, *Rogues and Redeemers: When Politics Was King in Irish Boston* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012); and Thomas H. O’Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Old Saybrook, Conn.: Konecky and Konecky, 1995). Boston’s Irish Catholic Mayors prior to 1930: John F. Fitzgerald, 1906–1907, 1910–1913, James Michael Curley, 1914–1917, 1922–1927, 1930–1933. Although two other Irish Catholics preceded Fitzgerald (Huge O’Brien 1885–1889 and Patrick Collins 1903–1905), they were under the sponsorship of the Good Government Association (see below), and historians tend not to count them as being of true representatives of the Irish Catholic community.

Catholic mayors had not been without its enmity prior to the 1920s, it was not until James Michael Curley came to power (for the second time) in 1922 that tensions between the two groups came to a head.²¹³

Perhaps one of the more notable and infamous mayors of Boston, Curley was a “rogue” and a “masterful salesman” who ran Boston as he saw fit.²¹⁴ He did not care to follow the rules and was unafraid of consequences. In 1903 himself and a friend impersonated two Irish immigrants and took the Post Office civil service test in their place to be letter carriers in the city of Boston. They were found out and charged with fraud, which they served sixty days jail time for. Curley’s only explanation was that he “did it for a friend.”²¹⁵ Although the Irish American community did not seem especially troubled by Curley’s colorful career, his animosity with the Protestant financiers of the city ultimately proved more harmful in the long run for the Irish of Boston, as the situation with housing would prove to demonstrate.²¹⁶ From the time that the Irish had arrived, the Protestant natives of Boston had regarded the Irish as “menaces to the city and obvious threats to democratic institutions everywhere,” which men like Curley only confirmed to be true during their times as mayor.²¹⁷ Although the Yankee establishment had long since lost control of the mayor’s office, they ensured a level of control over Boston by implementing what was known as the Good Government Association (GGA).

²¹³ O’Connor, *The Boston Irish*, 225.

²¹⁴ O’Neill, *Rogues and Redeemers*, 65. For a complete history of Curley, see Jack Beatty, *The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley (1874–1958)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2000).

²¹⁵ “Curley’s To Go to Jail,” *Boston Post*, 22 April 1904, p. 1, Newspapers by Ancestry; “The Case of Thomas F. Curley,” *Sacred Heart Review* (Boston, Mass.), 14 January 1905, p. 37, Boston College Newspapers; and O’Connor, *The Hub*, 189.

²¹⁶ O’Neill, *Rogues and Redeemers*, 65.

²¹⁷ O’Connor, *The Hub*, 153.

The GGA was founded 1903 by Yankee Republican businessmen who saw their power come under threat with the election of John F. Fitzgerald to the office of mayor (first in 1906 and again in 1910), who was not only an Irish Catholic but also the ward boss of the North End.²¹⁸ Although Boston's ward boss system was not as strong or as consolidated as the system run by the New York Irish, men like Fitzgerald still held enough power and sway to secure the votes necessary to gain control of the city.²¹⁹ Once they brought their Democratic machine to City Hall, the Yankee establishment feared they would run the city as they did their wards—excessive jobs, contracts, handouts, and personal favors in exchange for loyalty.²²⁰ The GGA came together to ensure that either only “good” Irishmen, ones that would be compliant with their wishes (low taxes, few contracts, and honest administration) were voted into office, or better yet, one of their own Republicans.²²¹ If the GGA was forced to accept that the Irish would almost always outvote a Republican candidate they wanted a Catholic Democrat in office who would serve as representatives of their ethnic constituencies but not engage in “ethnic politics.” Men who would run the city in an orderly and conservative manner, but who would ultimately not pose a threat “of a large takeover by a permanent Irish political apparatus.”²²² Although even here, they were not always successful, as Henry Hagan,

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

²¹⁹ See Anbinder, *Five Points*.

²²⁰ O'Connor, *The Hub*, 165; and O'Connor, *The Boston Irish*, 148–49.

²²¹ The GGA set up a Finance Commission as a watchdog on all government spending, but they also introduced a new city charter that restructured the entire government. The mayor would serve for four years, not two, the Board of Aldermen and the Common Council were abolished, a new city council was introduced, and the mayor would have more power, veto, etc., and the elections would be nonpartisan. The GGA hoped these measures would disrupt some of the ethnic power base. This was supposed to ensure more “acceptable” Catholics and Republicans were elected, but it backfired on them when Curley was elected again. For a full history of the GGA see O'Connor, *The Hub*, 185–99; and O'Connor, *The Boston Irish*, 175–96.

²²² O'Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 94–95.

who had led the charge on the housing issues against Mayor Peters in 1920, had been sponsored by the GGA, and still insisted on spending what money was needed to address the housing shortage.²²³ However, once Fitzgerald institutionalized the Irish Democratic machine in Boston's local government, it proved difficult to fight against their support base. As the 1930s neared, the animosity between the GGA and Irish Democrats dictated how the city was maintained, which ultimately contributed to the housing shortage.

Despite the GGA's best efforts to keep the Irish ward bosses out of the mayor's office, they had only marginal success. James Michael Curley had been voted in as the city's mayor in 1914, and when he decided to run for reelection in 1917, his main competitor was the GGA's candidate Andrew James Peters.²²⁴ Curley's administration from 1914 to 1917 had been rocked by financial scandal and excessive spending, causing the downtown financiers to tighten their control on loans which they suspected would not be used for their intended purpose. Such fears were not unjustified when, after Peters defeated Curley, it came to light that he had mismanaged funds from Washington to expand the "South Boston Cut," a terminal planned to widen railway lanes in and out of South Boston.²²⁵ Once Peters was in office, he was left to deal with Washington asking if the 18 million dollars awarded for the job was being used for its intended purpose, and why a Curley's schoolhouse commissioner was awarded the contract for the job and not Hugh Nawn Contracting Company, who was recommended to be awarded the contract originally.²²⁶ Additionally, Curley possessed a house on Jamaica Way valued well above

²²³ O'Neill, *Rogues and Redeemers*, 218.

²²⁴ "Curley Reiterates Intent to Run Again," *Boston Daily Globe*, 1 January 1917, p. 1, Boston Globe Archive.

²²⁵ "Chamber Approves 'South Boston Cut,'" *Boston Daily Globe*, 13 February 1917, p. 14, Boston Globe Archive; and "That Great Terminal," *Boston Post*, 9 March 1918, p. 10, Newspapers by Ancestry.

²²⁶ "Address of His Honor Andrew J. Peters, Mayor of Boston, At the Twenty-Fifth Annual Convention, New England Hardware Dealers, Mechanics Building, February 22, 1918," *City Record* 10, no. 8 (Boston,

the means of a mayor's income.²²⁷ Only two examples among many, Curley essentially destroyed any semblance of trust or respect between Irish Catholics and Yankee Protestants in Boston, which was reflected in the Yankee's dealing with City Hall as the years progressed.

The GGA, tired of Curley's outrageous and questionable spending habits, and his endless attacks of the Association wanted someone in the position of the mayor's office who would not institute large spending programs but would rather balance the budget and not ask for more money. Andrew James Peters presented himself as an honest candidate.²²⁸ The GGA hoped he would inspire voters in Boston to support impeccable, obedient, candidates for the offices of city officials. Although Peters was a Yankee Democratic, he came from a long line of Puritan ascendancy, had attended Harvard Law School, and fit the GGA's model of a moral and prudent leader.²²⁹ As Curley was Peters' main opponent during the race, Peters played off the domination of Curley's political machine, claiming that he would run the city as a democracy as opposed to Curley's autocracy.²³⁰

Mass.: Official Publican of the City of Boston, 1918), 159–60, Google Books, accessed 4 March 2018, https://books.google.com/books?id=6gFQAAAAYAAJ&dq=embarkation+terminal+south+boston+1918&source=gbs_navlinks_s; and “Politics Holds Up Terminal: Mayor in Washington to Straighten Out Tangle,” *Boston Post*, 9 March 1918, p. 2, Newspaper by Ancestry.

²²⁷ James Michael Curley, *I'll Do It Again: A Record of All My Uproarious Years* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1957), 128–32.

²²⁸ “Says G.G.A Reforms Cheat City: Mayor Calls Goo-Goos Allied Tax Dodgers of Boston,” *Boston Post*, 7 December 1915, p. 20, Newspaper Archive; “Peters Thinking of Slashing Salaries,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 8 February 1918, p. 14, Boston Newspaper Archive; and O'Connor, *The Hub*, 189. Curley talks at length in his autobiography, *I'll Do It Again*, that his business dealings were completely above board and that the Finance Commission and the GGA were simply biased against him.

²²⁹ M. E. Hennessy, “City for the People' Peters' Motto,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 23 December 1917, p. 39; and John D. Merrill, “Gallivan's Step Causes Surprise,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 16 September 1917, p. 2; “Mayoralty Situation Now Hinges on Good Government Association,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 16 September 1917, p. 2, all in the Boston Globe Archive. However, it must be stated that Peters sexually abused his eleven-year-old niece.

²³⁰ “Curley Reiterates Intent to Run Again,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 1 January 1917, p. 1, Boston Globe Archive; and “Mayor-Elect Plans to Upbuild Boston: Andrew J. Peters, Winning Over James M. Curley,

Although during and after his time as mayor, Curley claimed that all of his financial schemes were only to the benefit of the people of Boston, in reality, when it came to the issue of housing, he ultimately did more damage than good. Irish Americans dismissed his excessive spending and under the table financial deals “as righteous payback [to the Protestants] for decades of collective grief [on behalf of the Irish community].”²³¹ During his race against Peters, the leaders of major Irish American Society in Boston (the Ancient Order to Hibernians, Irish National Foresters, and Irish County Clubs) came out in support of Curley, urging their members to vote for him.²³² However, it was not just that the Irish turned a blind eye to his corruption, it was that Curley, in the traditional role of a ward boss, delivered on the two things his constituents needed most: benefits and jobs.²³³ In his autobiography, *I’ll Do It Again*, Curley boasted that when he became mayor in 1914 he “took people off welfare rolls and restored their self-respect by providing them with jobs.”²³⁴ In 1922 Curley attended a game at Boston College (founded specifically for “the sons of Irish immigrants”), and “when it was a certainty that Boston was the victor Mayor Curley presented a gift of \$100 to President Riley of Sophomore with the wish that it be used in entertaining the team.”²³⁵ By ensuring that “his” people had jobs and the occasional gift to ensure their continued support, the Irish of Boston were able to turn a blind eye to his other antics. By having

Proposes to Give the Municipality a Government of the People,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, Mass.), 19 December 1917, p. 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²³¹ “Full Text of Mayor Peters’ Address,” *Boston Globe*, 4 February 1918, p. 3, Newspaper Archive; and O’Neill, *Rogues, and Redeemers*, 65. During his address, Peters talks about how only those areas in dire need of new housing will be addressed.

²³² “Curley Says Murphy Tries for Indictment,” *Boston Globe*, 10 December 1917, p. 11, Newspaper Archive.

²³³ O’Connor, *The Hub*, 197.

²³⁴ Curley, *I’ll Do It Again*, 126.

²³⁵ “Mayor Curley Gives \$100 to Sophs,” *The Heights* (Boston, Mass.), 15 December 1922, p. 3, Boston College Newspapers; and O’Connor, *The Hub*, 142.

one of “their own” in a position of the mayor, the Irish were able to ensure that their needs came first, something that the Yankee Republicans tended to neglect.

In the long run, however, the Irish community’s support of Curley only worked against them. During his time as mayor, Peters had to prove himself more financially thrifty than Curley, and housing in particular suffered because of Curley’s legacy. The Republican Yankee bankers and private lenders were unwilling to spend more than was needed in order to keep Boston from collapsing, and even then, little money was invested in improving Boston’s infrastructure.²³⁶ When new housing developments did go up during Peters’ time as mayor, as the CNL found, areas like South Boston, with its overwhelming majority of Irish Catholics, were not designated for new building schemes, and, perhaps more common, the new developments in other parts of the city were outside the financial means of those in dire need of better living conditions.²³⁷

So despite Peters’ backing by the GGA, as a responsible leader who had Boston’s best interests in mind, because of his inaction to address the housing crisis, it shouldn’t have come as great surprise when Curley was voted back into the mayor’s office in 1922, defeating the GGA candidate John Murphy, and then again in 1930, defeating GGA endorsed candidate Frederick Mansfield, only to then become the Governor of Massachusetts in 1934.²³⁸ Although Curley might have ensured that the Irish American

²³⁶ “Loans Urged for Building,” *Boston Post*, 7 October 1920, p. 17; and “Banks to Aid Housing Idea,” *Boston Post*, 23 June 1920, p. 7, both in Newspapers by Ancestry.

²³⁷ “Inquiry on Housing is Promised: Mayor to Investigate Boston Tenement Conditions,” *Boston Sunday Post*, 23 June 1918, p. 20, Newspapers by Ancestry. Throughout this article, he states, “if improvements need to be made,” with regards to housing.

²³⁸ F. W. Coker, ed., “Notes on Municipal Affairs,” *American Political Science Review* 16, no. 1 (February 1922): 86, HeinOnline, accessed 4 March 2018, <http://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/amepscir16&i=90>; “Curley to Become Mayor Tomorrow,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 5 January 1930, p. A1; “Mansfield Attacks Career of Curley,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 8 October 1929, p. 9, both in the Boston Globe Archive; and O’Connor, *The Hub*, 199.

community had the upper hand during his times as mayor, in doing so, he failed to see that his actions hurt the very community he professed to represent. When he left city hall, and either a Republican or a GGA sponsored Irish Democrat took his place, there was little he could do to stop them from neglecting areas like South Boston and Roxbury as payback for his actions.

This dynamic had especially dire consequences during the Great Depression. The Depression left few places in American unaffected by unemployment, homelessness, and hunger.²³⁹ Boston felt the Crash especially hard with its already shaky economy and its combative financial situation. It developed its own Hooverville, foreclosures on mortgages and high rents were rampant, and homelessness plagued certain parts of the city.²⁴⁰ While these scenarios were repeated all over the nation and globe, with its record of neglecting tenement buildings and failure to address the housing shortage, the population in Boston was desperate for any solution which would elevate its destitution. When Curley was elected as mayor for the third time in 1930, he “called for an ambitious Fifty-Year Plan to develop industry, commerce, and municipal construction.”²⁴¹ However, despite hiring men to pour concrete for a walkway to Castle Island, this only offered temporary work in South Boston. Overall, he failed to initiate any programs that stemmed the tide of mass unemployment.

Additionally, at a time when Boston could have used federal money to ease everyday life, or even local loans to help with the crisis, Curley had burned too many

²³⁹ For a complete history of the Great Depression, see Liaquat Ahamed, *Lord of Finance: The Bankers Who Broke the World* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009). For the effects of the Depression in Boston see O'Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 181–190.

²⁴⁰ O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 8–9.

²⁴¹ O'Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 182.

bridges. He drained the City Treasury attempting to generate work in the city, which forced him to blackmail the president of the First National Bank in Boston to get a loan for his municipal projects, and even attempted to lower taxes in 1932.²⁴² On the national level as early as 1930 “some ten million dollars in federal money had been assigned to Massachusetts for two hundred different road construction projections . . . but none of those funds were earmarked for the city of Boston.”²⁴³ Federal welfare too became an issue as it was “distributed only to places that meet the standards of aid set by the Government.”²⁴⁴ Because of this, when President Roosevelt introduced his New Deal in 1933, many of the Irish in Boston were hopeful this would ease some of their hardships.²⁴⁵

The New Deal addressed a number of issues facing the nation during the Depression, and on the point of housing, it established the framework for what would become the program of urban renewal in the 1950s. With the passing of the National Housing Act in 1934, Washington officials started identifying those areas that were in need of slum clearance and new construction.²⁴⁶ The National Housing Act was an attempt on the part of the federal government to stem the tide of foreclosures across the nation and “for the first time, the federal government was beginning to commit itself to

²⁴² Curley, *I'll Do It Again*, 220–221; and “Mayor Calls Parley to Discuss Budget,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 19 November 1932, p. 12, Boston Globe Archive.

²⁴³ O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 14; and O'Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 187.

²⁴⁴ Louis Lyons, “11 Percent Fewer Welfare Cases,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 10 September 1933, p. A10, Boston Globe Archive.

²⁴⁵ James R. Green and Hugh Carter Donahue, “The Great Depression, the New Deal, and Labor in Boston,” chap. 7 in *Boston's Workers: A Labor History* (Boston: Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, 1979), 106. This author argues that Curley's spat with Roosevelt after he went on his campaign tour across America also hurt Boston's chance for more federal relief.

²⁴⁶ U.S. Congress, Senate, *National Housing Act*, 73d Cong., 2d sess., 1934, p. 26, ProQuest Congressional, accessed 5 March 2018, <https://congressional-proquest-com.libproxy.unm.edu/congressional/docview/t29.d30.hrg-1934-bcs-0024?accountid=14613>; and Lawrence J. Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 165.

the direct provision of housing for lower- and middle-income Americans.”²⁴⁷ The National Housing Act marked a change in American political thought: public housing for was now the responsibility of the federal government, which they hoped, would once and for all ward off the blight of slums.²⁴⁸

Once the National Housing Act took effect, the Boston Housing Association, founded in 1935, started to outline the areas that were in need of new construction so that slum clearance could begin, and the city could start receiving federal money.²⁴⁹ Washington, weary of Boston’s continual sparring match between the Yankee Republicans and the Irish Democrats, realized that they would have to be careful with the amount of money lent to the city of Boston.²⁵⁰ However, since it was now in the federal government’s interest to ensure that its population was better housed, federal authorities instituted a public housing program in Boston to provide “housing for low-income working families at rents they could afford.”²⁵¹ Eventually, a site was selected in South Boston and preparations began for the first federally funded housing project in New England.²⁵² The initial bid for the job was five million dollars, but given Boston’s history with the improper use of federal money, particularly Curley’s track record, the Government issued a strict warning that “the slightest indication of attempted

²⁴⁷ Jason Scott Smith, “Opposition and Backlash, 1937–1939,” chap. 5 in *A Concise History of the New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 137–38.

²⁴⁸ Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects*, 165.

²⁴⁹ “Urge Proposal to Wipe out Slums,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 3 March 1934, p. 13, Boston Globe Archive; O’Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 198; and Trout, *Boston, the Great Depression, and the New Deal*, 133.

²⁵⁰ Trout, *Boston, the Great Depression, and the New Deal*, 154–55.

²⁵¹ O’Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 198.

²⁵² Trout, *Boston, the Great Depression, and the New Deal*, 152; and Interview with Peggie Duggan Spitz, “Old Harbor Village,” in Patrick J. Loftus Jr., *That Old Gang of Mine, A History of South Boston* (South Boston, Mass.: TOGM-P.J.L., 1991), 501.

exploitation would result immediately in scrapping the whole project.”²⁵³ The new construction was intended to start in 1933, but due to “a complicated series of political delays, real estate fights and bureaucratic postponements . . . it was another five years before arrangements could be worked out.”²⁵⁴ The ground chosen for the site of what would come to be called the Old Harbor Village, was a “19-acre tract, fronting on Columbus Park, bounded by Old Harbor Avenue, Dorchester Street, Eighth Street and Old Harbor Street,” and it was estimated to hold around 960 homes.²⁵⁵ Although South Boston, in particular, was in desperate need of such housing developments, a report published in the *Christian Science Monitor* pointed out one problem.

There was already a large tenement on the land, having been there for over half a century, some residents having lived there for generations, and most of the rooms rented for \$5 to \$10 a month. The new apartments to be built in their place would run anywhere from \$20 to \$25, a price that even in good economic conditions would have been difficult for the residents to afford.²⁵⁶ The commissions involved in planning the development estimated that “about 1500 families would be affected by the housing plan [i.e. displaced]. It is expected that only about one-half of these can be accommodated in the new homes.” The land was obtained because of “low land costs,” and “for its nearness to the beach, Columbus Park and its accessibility to the city proper.” The landlords who

²⁵³ “New England Due to Follow Boston Housing,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, Mass.), 31 January 1935, p. 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁵⁴ Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects*, 187; and O’Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 198. South Boston’s slums were identified by their income level and the actual monetary value they required to stay afloat. See Carol Aronovici and Elizabeth McCalmont, *Catching Up with Housing* (Newark, N.J.: Beneficial Management Corporation, 1936), 38, Hathi Trust, accessed 5 March 2018, [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b281029?urlappend=%3Bseq=58](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b281029?urlappend=%3Bseq=58).

²⁵⁵ “New England Due to Follow Boston Housing,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, Mass.), 31 January 1935, p. 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁵⁶ Trout, *Boston, the Great Depression, and the New Deal*, 153.

sold the land did not seem bothered by the fact that their tenants would lose their homes, and the article concludes that “the problem of temporarily housing the residents while the project is underway is not yet solved.”²⁵⁷ Slum clearance was a goal of the federal government and these new houses were desperately needed, however, the fact that land slated for redevelopment was already occupied was seldom taken into account by those lending the money and building commissions.²⁵⁸ Although later the Old Harbor would be praised as a success, for those who could afford them, this episode would lay the groundwork for what would become a battle against urban renewal in the 1950s.

Despite this initial assessment of the desired land for the Old Harbor, it was not until the Housing Act of 1937—also known as the Wagner Housing Act—passed that the project actually began.²⁵⁹ By 1937 the number of homes estimated to be built in Old Harbor had risen from 960 to 1016, yet 2300 applicants were waiting to hear if they would have a home once building was completed.²⁶⁰ As building progressed efforts were made to keep the final rental costs down so that the projects truly could be for “low-income groups.” The *Daily Boston Globe* reported that “the buildings are to be of simple, yet durable construction, with all unnecessary exterior details and unessential features eliminated.”²⁶¹ However, well before construction was complete, Frank Creadon, the

²⁵⁷ “New England Due to Follow Boston Housing.”

²⁵⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate, *District Court for Massachusetts to Hear Claims of Certain Property Holders in Old Harbor Village Area of Boston*, 75th Cong., 3d sess., 1938, HR 1948, 1–3. This is a lawsuit filed on behalf of those who displaced by the construction of the Old Harbor Village. There does not appear to be any follow up.

²⁵⁹ John I. Robinson, “Public Housing in Massachusetts,” *Boston University Law Review* 18, no. 1 (January 1938): 84, HeinOnline, accessed 5 March 2018, <http://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/bulr18&i=85>; “Boston Firm Submits Low Bid in South Boston Housing Project,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 18 June 1936, p. 19, Boston Globe Archive; and Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects*, 185.

²⁶⁰ “Big Demand for Low-Rend Homes,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 9 April 1937, p. 9, Boston Globe Archive.

²⁶¹ “Boston Firm Submits Low Bid in South Boston Housing Project,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 18 June 1936, p. 19, Boston Globe Archive.

district manager for the projects, was faced with charges that the walls of the Old Harbor projects were “porous and leaking moisture into [the] rooms,” and that extra waterproofing substances were being applied to the exterior walls.²⁶² Creadon argued that such measures were to prevent the buildup of white salt on the exterior brick because of the project’s proximity to the ocean. Although there appears to be no follow up to the issue that such problems were revealing themselves so early in the project’s development did not bode well for their condition in the coming decades. Regardless, in May of 1938, the projects finally opened. The only drawback to these projects was that they were too expensive for “anyone on municipal welfare” to afford, which meant that of the 4,500 applicants waiting for a home, “at least half of these applicants will not be able to qualify.”²⁶³ Perhaps in order to address this shortcoming, the following year the Boston Housing Authority (BHA), the group in charge of development, announced that a second housing project was planned for South Boston, this one soon to be dubbed the Old Colony.²⁶⁴

The second development was planned to better accommodate those of low-income and dependent on welfare. The rents would be “graded according to the income of the tenant . . . for example, a three-room apartment may be obtained for \$14, \$17, or

²⁶² “South Boston Leaky Housing Charge Denied: Boston’s Share in the Federal Government’s Housing Plan,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, Mass.), 20 August 1937, p. 9, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁶³ “Harbor Village to Open May 1: An Evolution in Boston Housing Conditions,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, Mass.), 31 March 1938, p. 10; “Dust Flies as South Boston’s New Housing Site is Cleared: Soon to Be Transformed Into Homes for Low Income Families,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, Mass.), 27 November 1939, p. 12, both in the ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Trout, *Boston, the Great Depression, and the New Deal*, 153, 301; and O’Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 198.

²⁶⁴ “\$11,521,000 More for Hub Housing,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 5 May 1939, p. 16, Boston Globe Archive; “Boston Gets \$1,125,000 on Slum Project: U.S. Hands \$1,125,000 to Boston,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, Mass.), 22 May 1939, p. 9, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; and Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects*, 191.

\$21,” as opposed to the \$25 for three rooms in Old Colony.²⁶⁵ Additionally, preferences would be given to applicants who had formerly lived in the areas taken for the projects, and to families having children under sixteen years of age. However, even as excitement built in South Boston as “the old and dingy is coming down, and the new and lovely about to go up,” again the issue of the state taking the needed land to construct these housing projects through eminent domain displaced many of the residents of the tenements which were demolished to make way for the Old Colony. There were several lawsuits filed by those who were due to lose their home on the grounds that the BHA had wrongly categorized their homes as substandard. The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled in favor of the BHA, claiming that they had the ultimate authority in deciding what qualified as a substandard dwelling, which ultimately qualified it for demolition.²⁶⁶ These actions proved detrimental to South Boston’s relationship with Boston’s lawmakers, one that would have larger ramifications once the issue of desegregating South Boston’s high school was a center of conversations in the 1970s.

At the time these projects, particularly the Old Harbor projects, were “generally considered one of the finest examples of Government housing projects because of the wide variety of its accommodations and of its unsurpassed location in the South Boston park and beach system.” However, future commentators would term them “unmitigated disasters,” not only in terms of their racial segregation, as it became a heated topic after

²⁶⁵ “New Housing Units to Hold 3,291 Low-Income Families: Boon to Low-Income Families,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, Mass.), 5 August 1940, p. 10; W. Clifford Harvey, “Better Housing Is Said to Lie in Boston’s Hands: Before and After of Boston Housing,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, Mass.), 7 March 1939, p. 1, both in ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁶⁶ “Hundreds Lose Their Homes in Housing Areas,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 21 May 1939, p. B1; “Owners Fail to Halt Housing Landtaking,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 28 June 1939, p. 13; “Owners Lose Last Housing Protest,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 16 December 1939, p. 2, all in the Boston Globe Archive; and Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects*, 198–99.

World War II, but also in terms of how they worked to further divide the city.²⁶⁷ The housing developments of the 1930s brought both relief and new problems for the residents of South Boston. On the one hand, subsidized housing was a much-needed relief program during the Depression. On the other hand, in the act of acquiring the land for said “relief” programs, many improvised residents of decades-old tenement houses were displaced by the process of eminent domain. Additionally, they only worked to reinforce the idea that certain neighborhoods belonged to certain ethnic groups, causing Boston to become even more divided.²⁶⁸ Unfortunately, as the issue of housing became a matter of concern both at the national and state levels again after World War II, those problems would start to manifest themselves in rapid succession, hinting at what was to come in the 1970s.

World War II postponed any further discussion of housing in Boston and only gained attention again in the 1950s.²⁶⁹ However, even though the 1950s proved to be a period of intense growth and development, particularly in the case of housing, one case of urban renewal irrevocably damaged relations between the neighborhood of South Boston and the city’s government. Although the act of displacing hundreds of residents when the Old Colony and Old Harbor projects were built had been a shocking case of the city’s government claiming eminent domain, in the 1950s with the distraction of the West End, a predominantly Italian neighborhood, the residents of South Boston put a stop to any further urban development in their neighborhood, fearing that if they allowed their own

²⁶⁷ O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 124.

²⁶⁸ Trout, *Boston, the Great Depression, and the New Deal*, 257; and O’Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 174.

²⁶⁹ O’Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 199.

blight areas to be renovated, they too would be displaced from their traditional communities, with nowhere to go.

In the late 1940s, Boston finally witnessed the downfall of James Michael Curley and the rise of John B. Hynes. Hynes entered the civil service as a county clerk with little ambition of becoming mayor of Boston.²⁷⁰ However, in 1947 he was asked to serve as acting mayor while Curley served some jail time for mail fraud. When Curley returned several months early when his sentence was commuted, rather than thanking Hynes for taking care of the city for him and discussing what had happened in his absence, Curley barricaded himself in his office and “during the next frantic few hours, he interviewed sixty people, found jobs for every one of them, and made a series of decisions involving millions of dollars for [public] contracts.” When he emerged he flippantly told some reporters “I have accomplished more in one day than has been done in the five months of my absence.”²⁷¹ Although a seemingly harmless comment, Hynes viewed this as a slight against his capabilities of seeing to the city’s needs. Furious, he declared that he would run for mayor in the next city election, which in 1949, he won by a comfortable majority, effectively marking the end of an era “and the beginning of another.”²⁷²

Hynes’s election to the office of the mayor marked a shift not only in the political life of Boston’s residents but also in the relationship between the Irish Democrats and the Yankee Protestants. When Hynes came to office, some feared he would fall in line with Boston’s previous Irish Catholic mayors, owing to the fact that he was “the product of

²⁷⁰ O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 46.

²⁷¹ O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 20–23.

²⁷² “Mayor-Elect Hynes on Victory Tour of Downtown Area,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 9 November 1949, p. 6, Boston Globe Archive; and *Daily Boston Globe* quoted in O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 32. For a complete history of Hynes’s campaign and his years as mayor, see O’Neill, *Rogues, and Redeemers*, esp. chap. 6.

Irish Catholic neighborhoods, he was a career bureaucrat, [and] he had received his job as chief clerk from James Michael Curley.”²⁷³ However, as time went on, Yankee Protestants, still largely in control of Boston’s finances in the 1950s, realized that when Hynes “did not try to rekindle only ethnic antagonism; he avoided setting the needs of the outlying neighborhoods against the interest of the central city; and he refused to employ the old divisive political tactics of pitting Catholics against Protestants,” their fears were eased and gradually agreed to give him the financial backing for municipal projects they had so long denied Curley. Although this would later cause accusations from the Irish community that he was “‘in the pocket’ of the downtown bankers,” much as were the GGA Irish Democrats of the 1930s, Hynes worked to mend the relationship with the Republicans, so much so that he was largely successful in his mission to revitalized the city he referred to as “old Dame Boston.”²⁷⁴ In fact, Hynes was so successful at this balancing act that he remained in the mayor’s office until 1960, serving for an impressive ten years.

Throughout Hynes’s tenure, Boston saw massive building projects expand across the city, including extensive housing developments.²⁷⁵ Boston’s new responsible mayor was partly to thank for this, but these projects were also helped when Congress passed the Title I of the Housing Act in 1949, which appropriated “\$500 million to aid cities in undertaking urban development projects,” because “the general welfare and security of the Nation and the health and living standards of its people require housing production and related community development sufficient to remedy the serious housing shortage,

²⁷³ O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 44.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 45–47.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 55. By looking over the numerous articles of the *Daily Boston Globe* from 1950 to 1954 it becomes obvious that Boston’s housing development did spread rapidly across the city.

the elimination of substandard and other inadequate housing through the clearance of slums and blighted areas.”²⁷⁶ Aided by this Act, the BHA started to select those areas across the city which it deemed to be the most seriously blighted areas.²⁷⁷ In theory, this program of relief should have finally addressed the housing shortage and substandard living conditions that Boston had been dealing with since 1920. Sadly though, much like the episode of the BHA’s slum clearance plan for South Boston in the 1930s, this new housing act would prove to be detrimental for the relationship between Boston lawmakers and her ethnic citizens.

By 1953 slum clearance was taking over the city in a way never seen before. Although this was a great improvement to the years of inaction, it still came with consequences which, considering what had happened in the 1930s, the city should have been able to better accommodate for. The *Christian Science Monitor* reported that fifteen million in federal aid had been slotted for Boston’s urban development plan and that the BHA had designated the South End, West End, and Mattapan districts for slum clearance and redevelopment. However, the article also stated that at least 600 people would be displaced by the “razing of the substandard South End structures.”²⁷⁸ The residents of the South End loudly denounced this plan and told the BHA that they would be “unable to find suitable homes elsewhere within their rental budget.”²⁷⁹ However, the BHA was

²⁷⁶ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Housing Act of 1949*, 81st Cong., 1st sess., HR 4009, 1949, p. 1, ProQuest Congressional, accessed 18 March 2018, [²⁷⁷ O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 75–76.](https://congressionalproquestcom.libproxy.unm.edu/congressional/result/pqresultpage.gispdfhitspanel.pdflink/$2fappbin$2fgishearing$2fe$2f5$2f1$2f4$2fhr$2f-1949-bcu-0006_0001_from_1_to_50.pdf/entitlementkeys=1234%7Capp-gis%7Chearing%7Chrg-1949-bcu-0006; and O’Connor, <i>Building a New Boston</i>, 75.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

²⁷⁸ George B. Merry, “\$15 Million Slum Project Looms for Hub: Plans Readied for Federal Approval City Council Sanction,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, Mass.), 16 November 1953, p. 14, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; and O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 126.

²⁷⁹ “Residents Blast City’s Program for South End,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 1 August 1953, p. 12, Boston Globe Archive.

confident that they could “easily be accommodated in a few months by normal vacancies in BHA public housing units in other parts of the city.”²⁸⁰ Much like the episode of South Boston in the 1930s, there was a lawsuit filed on the behalf of the citizens, but by 1956 the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court upheld that the BHA had the authority to take and redevelop the land under the Housing Act of 1949.²⁸¹ The bulldozers eventually came, but the land “lay fallow for a decade,” never being utilized for its intended purpose of building new housing developments.²⁸² Although this would be a devastating consequence of the urban renewal program of the 1950s, it paled in comparison to the fate of one of Boston’s oldest neighborhoods, the West End.²⁸³

What made the destruction of the West End so devastating, “and nearly stopped neighborhood renewal in its tracks with permanent damage to Hynes’s legacy,” was its sheer volume.²⁸⁴ The BHA had chosen this neighborhood for a slum clearance plan because the neighborhood had become a place the city viewed as outdated, improvised, overcrowded, and a dangerous slum area with its “narrow ‘European streets,’” which could harbor any number of unwelcome things, that should be “wiped out as soon as possible.”²⁸⁵ When the twenty million bid was submitted for approval of the project in 1953, the *Daily Boston Globe* reported that 682 houses would be demolished to “make way for over 2000 families.”²⁸⁶ The project was slated to start in 1954, and in order to alleviate fears that the those displaced would not have anywhere to go once the city seized

²⁸⁰ Merry, “\$15 Million Slum Project Looms for Hub.”

²⁸¹ “Court Upholds Seizures for So. End Redevelopment,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 3 April 1956, p. 14, Boston Globe Archive.

²⁸² O’Neill, *Rogues and Redeemers*, 134.

²⁸³ O’Connor, *The Hub*, 217.

²⁸⁴ O’Neill, *Rogues and Redeemers*, 134; and O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 126.

²⁸⁵ O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 127–28.

²⁸⁶ “\$20 Million Home Project for West End Revealed,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 12 April 1953, p. C1, Boston Globe Archive.

their property, the BHA published a pamphlet which assured the citizens of the West End that when the time came, “decent, safe and sanitary dwelling unit within their means to pay” were guaranteed, and that “families displaced by the West End project will be given top priority to get into public housing.”²⁸⁷ Mayor Hynes said that it was even possible that the job would not be approved and that no one would lose their home. Given the city’s track record on housing developments, this was not to be the case.

When the approval came through in 1957 to begin development, the city proved to be more eager to begin development than following through on its promise of not displacing the residents of the West End.²⁸⁸ Because the project had taken so long to receive approval “financial investment took precedence over community resettlement, references to the availability of public housing became fewer in number and less explicit in description. By the time the tenants finally received their official eviction notices in the spring of 1958, there was no mention at all of low-rent public housing.”²⁸⁹ The estimated number of those who would lose their homes to make way for “high-rise luxury apartments, modern shopping centers, [and] massive garages,” was 2700 families.²⁹⁰ The majority of those displaced were poor, Italian immigrants, and refugees.²⁹¹ Unlike in past episodes of displaced tenants, lawsuits were not filed and in December of 1959, the *Daily Boston Globe* ran an editorial which cheerfully informed its readers “if the West End can be switched from dilapidation to delight as was New York’s East Side, it may be the trail-

²⁸⁷ Joseph Keblinsky, “At City Hall: West Enders Reassured by Project,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 17 January 1954, p. C29, Boston Globe Archive; and O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 126.

²⁸⁸ Joseph Keblinsky, “City Council OK’s \$30 Million Urban West End Project,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 23 July 1957, p. 8, Boston Globe Archive.

²⁸⁹ O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 126.

²⁹⁰ O’Connor, *The Hub*, 218; and Joseph Keblinsky, “June to See Mass Exodus in West End,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 20 April 1958, p. 16, Boston Globe Archive.

²⁹¹ O’Connor, *The Hub*, 218.

blazing spark which could revitalize Boston.”²⁹² This action, above all others, caused deep reverberations throughout Boston’s other ethnic neighborhoods, which would ultimately cause the other neighborhoods to reject the very thing that they needed most.²⁹³ They had decided the cost was too high to pay.²⁹⁴

The destruction of the West End put a halt to any and all further developments in Boston’s outlying ethnic neighborhoods. After the West End had been so ruthlessly demolished, it “damaged race relations and revived dormant class and enmity in the old Irish neighborhoods of Charleston and South Boston. The Yankee overlords were replaced by bow-tied urban planners who pored over maps without seeing any of the people.”²⁹⁵ This would be echoed during the lead up to the Busing Crisis, as city councilman Lawrence DiCara noted, “two professors from Boston University with no connection to Boston, came up with a busing plan which pitted the poorest White neighborhoods against the poorest black neighborhoods.”²⁹⁶ In South Boston in the years just before the busing order was handed down, the residents organized themselves to prevent any “outsider interests’ coming into the peninsula district and transform a peaceful family community into an area of high-rise apartments and expensive condominiums.”²⁹⁷ In 1972 the BHA had planned to demolish six of South Boston’s schools, repave the roads, and rezone the area to allow for more industry, but “the united resistance of angry South Boston residents, who feared that these ambitious plans would

²⁹² Robert Hanron, “West End Project Could Be Spark to Revitalize Boston,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 20 December 1959, p. A_14, Boston Globe Archive.

²⁹³ Uncle Dudley, “Two Housing Problems,” *Daily Boston Globe*, 6 January 1959, p. 14, Boston Globe Archive.

²⁹⁴ O’Connor, *The Hub*, 219.

²⁹⁵ O’Neill, *Rogues and Redeemers*, 137.

²⁹⁶ Lawrence S. DiCara, *Turmoil and Transition in Boston: A Political Memoir from the Busing Era* (New York: Hamilton Books, 2013), 72.

²⁹⁷ O’Connor, *South Boston, My Home Town*, 206.

destroy the family character of their community and displace the old-time residents as they had seen happen in the West End, stopped [those] plans cold.”²⁹⁸ After the destruction of the West End, and during its own experiences with the Old Colony and Old Harbor, South Boston had had enough.

Owing to the fact that the local government had never tried to ease relations between the Irish Catholics and the lawmakers on the Hill, the residents of South Boston ultimately considered housing to be a means by which old, ethnic neighborhoods were destroyed rather than updated. So, unlike their counterparts in Derry, the Irish of South Boston did not allow outside interference to disrupt their community, and as a consequence, South Boston did not receive the housing developments it so desperately needed. Once the busing order was handed down, and the residents of South Boston realize that this was not something they could prevent, the neighborhood “blew up.”²⁹⁹ DiCara, although not from South Boston, had grown up in the equally Irish neighborhood in Dorchester. He said that for the residents of South Boston, the busing order “represented the final indignity,” and this was one of the reasons the neighborhood’s reaction to busing was so immediate and violent.³⁰⁰ Decades of neglect coupled with the ruthless demolition of ethnic neighborhoods did not work to assure the citizens of South Boston that their government respected their concerns or needs. Even John Hynes who came from an Irish neighborhood did not seem especially troubled by the mass evictions and displaced peoples who bore their lot all in the name of progress. Housing in Boston,

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 205.

²⁹⁹ DiCara, *Turmoil and Transition in Boston*, 72.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 74.

rather than alleviating the animosity between the Irish Catholic and Yankee Protestant,
only severed to further divide the communities.

* * *

Conclusion

Derry, Northern Ireland and South Boston, Massachusetts are separated by 3,000 miles of ocean, yet the histories of these two small towns mirror one another, until the 1970s. Irish Catholics in Derry marched in 1968 in order to demand they be granted the same civil liberties as their Protestant neighbors. Irish American Catholics in South Boston marched in the streets in order to show their displeasure at the government's decision to desegregate South Boston High. Although on opposite sides of the civil rights issue, both movements would lead to years of civil unrest and extreme episodes of violence. Neither movement would ultimately prove to be a success. Although the Good Friday Agreement finally brought the Troubles to an end, that agreement was not achieved about without assistance from the United States and several years of negotiations with the British government. Organizations like the Derry Housing Action Committee failed to win civil rights for the people of Northern Ireland. Rather they unleashed several decades' worth of pent-up frustration which ultimately threw the North into thirty years of brutal conflict.

In South Boston, the marchers who demanded that the busing order be rescinded earned South Boston the title of "the Little Rock of the North."³⁰¹ Although the residents themselves would later argue that they were not racists, but rather argued that they were not given a choice in the decision, the greater United States refused to listen to their explanations for their reaction. By 1976, when it became obvious that their protests were falling on deaf ears, those who could afford it moved to the suburbs. For those who could not, they either gave up their protests and sent their child to the few private Catholic

³⁰¹ Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 1.

schools in South Boston or turned a blind eye to their child's perpetual absence from school. Neither option addressed their qualms about the busing order, but only served to further divide the Irish American community not only from state lawmakers but also from the African American community. However, although these two communities took radically different paths in the 1970s, the years leading up to those events reveal that these cities had, until that time, had very similar experiences. By comparing these cities' histories of housing, this thesis has examined one of those similarities and revealed that many of the same issues which were present in Derry were also present in South Boston, the first and foremost being the antagonistic relationship between the Protestant and Catholics.

Both were founded by Protestants who had no love for those of the Catholic denomination and were defined by their religious and ethnic segregation. They both faced severe housing shortages that their respective governments did not address. Either by design or due to insufficient funds to pursue large development plans, there is no denying that such actions fostered resentment in both Irish Catholic communities. By raising these similarities, it will now enable further research into why these two communities took such drastically different turns in their history once their various movements began. By doing so it might be possible to offer a broader examination of the Irish experience in the latter half of the twentieth century.

There is no denying that Irish Catholics in South Boston made a questionable decision to protest busing in the way that they did. It is not possible to examine the history of the Busing Crisis without acknowledging that racism did have a part to play in the backlash Massachusetts witnessed in the fall of 1974. However, that is not the whole

story. South Boston did have a unique history, one that has been well documented, but there is currently little discussion on the backdrop of South Boston's history leading up to 1974 which examines the problems facing the neighborhood when the busing order was finalized. This thesis has shown that housing did ultimately contribute to the disquiet of the neighborhood in terms of being distrustful of those in positions of power. By doing this, this thesis has demonstrated how housing played an integral part in creating a cycle of animosity between Irish Catholics and Yankee Protestants.

In the case of Derry, the history of its housing has only been placed at the introductions of the many histories of the Troubles. There has been little discussion on housing in the early twentieth century, which has had the unfortunate consequence of portraying the housing as being an issue that only gained prominence in the 1950s. By showing that, in fact, housing was a problem facing Derry community as early as 1920, it becomes easier to understand Catholics were so irate with the Unionist Party's manipulation of political representation by controlling housing. Starting in Derry enabled this comparison to link the experiences of Irish Americans back to their native land, and showed that, in the area of housing, Irish Catholics in the North of Ireland were not alone in their predicament.

Although this examination of how housing shaped the political ideology of both cities has revealed a great deal, it is but one chapter in a much larger story. In issues such as the economy, unemployment, identity, family, society, culture, and after the movements began, the defense of the neighborhoods, are still in need of an in-depth analysis. Additionally, these cities early histories, particularly during the Famine, the late nineteenth century, and the turn of the century, would also shed light on how these eras shaped these communities. The next phase of this research project will be to expand and

refine the history of housing, especially an examination of how citizens in these communities were reacting to, and if at all, attempting to influence change via any grassroots movements. This is where archival research will be an asset to this continued analysis and shed light on the voices of the people themselves who lived through this time period.

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