

Remaking Boston's Chinatown:  
Race, Space, and Urban Development, 1943-1994

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Thomas C. Chen was born in New London, Connecticut on September 29, 1982. He received a B.A. in American Studies from Tufts University in 2004 and an M.A. in Public Humanities from Brown University in 2007. He received the Jacob K. Javits Doctoral Fellowship in 2006. In 2010, he co-edited *Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader* with Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu for Rutgers University Press.

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## INTRODUCTION

The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination.

– John H. Schaar, *Legitimacy in the Modern State*, 1981<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation examines the politics of race and urban space in Boston's Chinatown from 1943 to 1994. A diverse downtown neighborhood that survived multiple cycles of disinvestment and reinvestment while remaining home to a racialized immigrant community, New England's oldest and last remaining Chinatown epitomizes the complexity of U.S. racial formation and urban development processes despite its small geographic size. Using city and state archives, previously unexamined community organization records, and original oral histories with key Chinatown figures, I explore the spatial production of Chinatown, the conflicting visions for its development, and the ways in which Chinese Bostonians participated in the physical and cultural transformation of the city.

To a great extent, Boston's identity as a city continues to be rooted in its colonial past and in stories of clashes between its Yankee elites and its white ethnic immigrants.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John H. Schaar, *Legitimacy in the Modern State* (New Brunswick, NJ, Transaction Publishers, 1981), 321.

<sup>2</sup> See Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Athens of America: Boston, 1825-1845* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006); Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995); Thomas H. O'Connor, *Bibles, Brahmins, and Bosses: A Short History of Boston* (Boston: Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, 1976); Dennis P. Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box: A Social History of the Boston Irish, 1845-1917* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989); Gerard O'Neill, *Rogues and Redeemers: When Politics Was King in Irish Boston* (New York: Crown, 2012); Walter Muir Whitehill, *Boston: A Topographical History*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000); Brian Deming, *Boston and the Dawn*

Still begging to be explored are the activities, perspectives, and contributions to the city made by a great many other groups, the Chinese among them, whose participation in the making of the city enlarges and alters these stories and extends them into the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> Though Boston's Chinese community was relatively small in size, their experiences add new dimension to our understanding of the city and offer a unique vantage point from which to examine its historical and geographical development. Furthermore, by drawing attention to the enduring role of an Asian American community in the making of Boston and New England more generally, this project makes contributions to scholarship in Asian American history, which has tended to emphasize Asian American populations on the West Coast and in New York over other regions of the United States.<sup>4</sup>

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*of American Independence* (Yardley, PA: Westholme, 2013); Benjamin Carp, *Defiance of the Patriots: The Boston Tea Party & The Making of America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Scholarship addressing Boston's past and present diversity is growing. See for example Barry Bluestone and Mary Huff Stevenson, eds. *The Boston Renaissance: Race, Space, and Economic Change in an American Metropolis* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000); Nancy John Smith-Hefner, *Khmer American: Identity and Moral Education in a Diasporic Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Gerald Gamm, *Urban Exodus: Why the Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Mel King, *Chain of Change: Struggles for Black Community Development* (Boston: South End Press, 1981); J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985); Mark Schneider, *Boston Confronts Jim Crow, 1890-1920* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997); Adelaide Cromwell, *The Other Brahmins: Boston's Black Upper Class, 1750-1950* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994); James Jennings, ed. *Black, Latinos, and Asians in Urban America: Status and Prospects for Politics and Activism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994); George Levesque, *Black Boston: African American Life and Culture in Urban America, 1750-1860* (New York: Garland, 1994); Karin Aguilar-San Juan, *Little Saigons: Staying Vietnamese in America* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> A full-length historical monograph on Boston's Chinatown has yet to be published. On the history of Asian Americans in Boston and New England, see Doris C. J. Chu, *Chinese in Massachusetts: Their Experiences and Contributions* (Boston: Chinese Culture Institute, 1987); Wing-kai To and Chinese Historical Society of New England, *Chinese in Boston, 1870-1965*. (Portsmouth: Arcadia Publishing, 2008); Monica Chiu, ed. *Asian Americans in New England: Culture and Community* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2009); K. Scott Wong, "'The Eagle Seeks a Helpless Quarry': Chinatown, the Police, and the Press; The 1903 Boston Chinatown Raid Revisited," *Amerasia Journal* 22:3 (1996), 81-103. The scholarship on Asian Americans in the American West and in New York is vast. See Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1994); Mae Ngai, *The Lucky Ones: One Family and the Extraordinary Invention of*

While much research remains to be done on the Chinese presence in Boston in the nineteenth century and dating back to the China Trade, my claim in this project is that the second half of the twentieth century represents a critical period for Chinese Americans and that the city represents a crucial setting. Boston was one of a number of cities that saw the formation of urban Chinese communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as Chinese people migrated eastward to escape the violent anti-Chinese movement that had gripped the American West. This migration contributed to Chinese Americans becoming a predominately urban population, with nine out of ten Chinese people in the United States living in urban areas by 1940.<sup>5</sup> The urbanization of Chinese America was followed by the repeal of Chinese Exclusion and the advent urban renewal. In the context of vast new immigration and massive urban change, cities became a key site for Chinese Americans to negotiate citizenship and belonging during World War II and in the postwar era. In this period, Boston's Chinatown became a site of

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*Chinese America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010); Kathleen S. Yep, *Outside the Paint: When Basketball Ruled at the Chinese Playground* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009); Estella Habal, *San Francisco's International Hotel: Mobilizing the Filipino American Community in the Anti-Eviction Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008); Timothy Fong, *The First Suburban Chinatown: The Remaking of Monterey Park, California* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Dorothy B. Fujita-Rony *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Peter Kwong, *The New Chinatown* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); Peter Kwong, *Chinatown, New York: Labor and Politics, 1930-1950* (New York: New Press, 2001); Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Shelley Sang-Hee Lee, *Claiming the Oriental Gateway: Prewar Seattle and Japanese America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012); Mary Ting Yi Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Sucheng Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 239.

intense contestation as an increasingly large and diverse Chinese American community vied for space with an array of public and private entities, each of which construed the city and Chinatown's place in it in different terms. These struggles over urban space would reshape and redefine Chinatown over the next five decades, with consequences for the emergence of Chinese American and Asian American identities and communities in this period.

By situating Boston's Chinatown within its urban context, this project locates new points of intersection between postwar American cities and their racialized communities.<sup>6</sup> Unlike studies of urban America that confine their racial analyses to black and white, and unlike studies of Asian America that treat cities as passive settings against which Asian Americans lived their lives, my project advances a more distinctly spatial and specifically urban approach to Asian American history.<sup>7</sup> In doing so, it joins an exciting conversation

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<sup>6</sup> The literature is immense. Those most influential to my work include Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2005); Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> On spatial theory and critical geographic approaches, see David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (New York: Routledge, 2001); David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2006); Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (New York: Blackwell, 1991); Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York: Verso, 1989); Yi-fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1994); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, eds. *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Boston: South End Press, 2007); Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (New York: Verso, 2000); George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011); Wendy Cheng, *The Changs Next Door to the Diazes: Remapping Race in Suburban California* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Richard H. Schein, ed. *Landscape and Race in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Elsa Berkeley Brown

begun by the scholarship of historians such as Nayan Shah, Mary Ting Lui, and John Kuo-Wei Tchen, among others, whose important work recasts new modes of understanding the urban social and cultural worlds in which Asian Americans lived.<sup>8</sup> Building on their work, my project demonstrates that postwar formations of Chinese American identity and community were deeply intertwined with the urban transformation that Boston and other American cities underwent in this period. Likewise, it shows how the reconfiguration of Chinatown as an urban ethnic place was key to the emergence of a racial and political Asian American consciousness in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which had consequences for subsequent phases of urban development in the Chinatown and its surrounding city. Complicating what are often considered fixed race and place identities in the urban environment, “Remaking Boston’s Chinatown” illustrates how the changing urban landscape constituted a crucial terrain for Chinese American identity and community formation in the second half of the twentieth century.

Through analysis of their social and spatial practices, I investigate how Chinese Bostonians confronted urban change and grappled with competing visions for the development of the Chinatown neighborhood and its surrounding city. Far from a

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and Gregg D. Kimball, “Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond,” in *The New African American Urban History* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 66-116.

<sup>8</sup> Shah, *Contagious Divides*; Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery*; Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*; Kay Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Buffalo: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991); Charlotte Brooks, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends: Asian Americans, Housing and the Transformation of Urban California* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Hillary Jenks, “Home is Little Tokyo’: Race, Community, and Memory in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2008); Isabella Seong-Leong Quintana, “National Borders, Neighborhood Boundaries: Gender, Space and Border Formation in Chinese and Mexican Los Angeles, 1871-1938” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2010); Yong Chen, “Chinatown, City and Nation-State: Towards a New Understanding of Asian American Urbanity,” *Journal of Urban History* 30:4 (2004), 604-615. My work takes up Chen’s call for scholars “to more consciously develop an urban approach to Asian American history, . . . to stop treating Asian Americans as accidental urban dwellers, . . . to more systematically comprehend the intrinsic connections between Asian American urban residents and American urbanity, [and to] explore ways in which not only to understand Asian Americans as part of the city but also to appreciate the significance of the city in Asian American life” (ibid., 613).

monolithic community, Chinese Bostonians responded to uneven geographic development in a range of ways. They deployed heterogeneous urban strategies and articulated multiple visions for Chinatown's future, which conflicted with one another almost as often as they did with official development visions. In some cases, Boston's Chinese community met dominant geographic projects like highway construction and urban renewal with direct challenges while in others they responded with strategies of accommodation and negotiation. As Chinese Bostonians made their lives in the city and struggled over its future, the choices they made changed them while at same time changing the city around them. These choices provide the prism through which we can begin to understand the social and cultural worlds in which they lived and thereby introduce new ways to determine the social significance of the era for Chinese Americans in the city.

In addition to drawing connections among urban history, Boston history, and Asian American history, this project's combination of research methods and modes of analysis makes a contribution to how scholars traditionally approach these subjects. My analysis draws on a range of textual, visual, and aural evidence both inside and outside of the archives, including: letters, meeting minutes, public hearings, city government reports, city directories, traffic studies, urban planning documents, redevelopment proposals, environmental impact reports, maps, building permits, building plans, newsletters, newspapers, magazines, editorial cartoons, flyers, photographs, television programs, films, video recordings, murals, and oral histories with people who lived or worked in Chinatown. Through their words and actions, I show how urban planners, traffic engineers, city officials, civic leaders, business owners, property owners, lawyers,

activists, residents, teachers, parents, and students fought over the shape and meaning of Boston's Chinatown. Examined concurrently, these new sources and voices illuminate Chinatown's postwar history within a larger story of urban change.

## **Chapter Overview**

Chapter 1, "Planning from Below: Postwar Chinese American Urbanism," introduces Boston's Chinatown and examines how Chinese Bostonians engaged in a range of urban spatial practices, which transformed the neighborhood from a vice district to a residential and commercial space during and immediately after World War II. It focuses on how ethnic elites refurbished and rebuilt the physical environment of Chinatown and on how working class residents created a rich multiethnic social world through their negotiation of the lived spaces of the home and the street.

Chapter 2, "Desire Lines: Urban Highways and Visions of Decline and Renewal in Midcentury Boston," examines the discourses of urban decline that drove Boston towards large-scale urban renewal, focusing in particular on how urban highways were embraced as a key remedy for the economic revival of what was widely perceived to be a dying central city. This chapter focuses on how urban planners, traffic engineers, city officials, downtown property owners, and business leaders, in their drive to remedy "urban decline," discounted the long-established urban neighborhoods that stood in the way of their vision for a reconstructed city. It places Chinatown's encounter with urban highways into a broader historical context of midcentury urban planning.

Chapter 3, "Contesting Race and Space: Confronting the Central Artery and the Massachusetts Turnpike in Chinatown," examines how Chinese Bostonians contested the

construction of two urban highways through Chinatown, and it discusses how these projects reconfigured the neighborhood. It analyzes the year-long campaign led by the Chinese Merchants Association in 1953-54 to challenge the routing of the Central Artery through Chinatown as well as the subsequent decimation of the Hudson Street residential community by the Massachusetts Turnpike extension in 1962.

Chapter 4, “‘Planning with People’: Tufts-New England Medical Center and Urban Renewal in Chinatown, 1955-1971,” investigates how a non-profit medical center drove the renewal process in Chinatown, and it considers the significance and impact of urban renewal on the neighborhood. Research and medical institutions played a decisive role in bringing the long-desired “New Boston” into being in the 1960s and setting in motion Boston’s economic resurgence in 1980s. While the roots of this economic resurgence were federally supported and steered by local politicians and institutional actors, it was also subsidized by the people of neighborhoods like Chinatown, whose participation was necessary for this urban transformation to occur. This chapter also analyzes the principle of “planning with people” that the Boston Redevelopment Authority embraced in the 1960s. While many view this as an improvement over the brutal urban policies of the 1950s, I argue that “planning with people” generated new configurations of exclusion, and engendered new forms and sites of violence by exploiting existing community divisions in ways that intensified rather than resolved conflicts over space.

Chapter 5, “From Urban Renewal to Urban Revolt: New Landscapes of Struggle, 1967-1985,” examines a set of urban struggles that were fought in and through Chinatown from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s. Chinatown activism in the 1950s and



1960s focused primarily on mitigating the most disruptive impacts of urban redevelopment and maneuvering for limited benefits within the city's existing development program. In contrast, the battles fought in the 1970s and 1980s expanded the terrain of political struggle to encompass a broader set of economic and social rights including access to jobs, equal education, affordable housing, health and safety. In vying for more resources and for an adequate standard of living, community activists also wrestled publicly over the meaning of Chinatown, shattering the brittle façade of the quaint ethnic enclave that community elites had struggled so mightily to establish in the 1950s. By making public claims to economic and social rights as a racialized urban community, activists narrated Chinatown through an alternative set of histories and memories and reimagined Chinatown as a site of resistance.

Chapter 6, “‘Because This Land is Sacred’: The Struggle for Parcel C, 1978-1994,” examines an extended struggle for community control of an undeveloped urban renewal parcel in Chinatown over sixteen years. The battle for this land was a major event in Chinatown's development trajectory. It articulated a profound critique of unequal power relations, and it pointed to the ways in which multiple forms of domination joined together over decades to create and maintain a system of racial, spatial, and environmental inequality in Chinatown. A final eighteen-month struggle over this land in 1993 and 1994 expressed the culmination of four decades of highway construction, urban renewal, and institutional expansion and over a century of uneven development in Chinatown.

## CHAPTER 1

### **Planning from Below: Postwar Chinese American Urbanism**

#### **Introduction**

When Boston's City Planning Board released its *General Plan for Boston* in 1950, the city was just beginning to embark on the massive undertaking that would later come to be known as urban renewal. Like many American cities, Boston had been losing people, capital, and industry since the 1920s, and many saw a bleak future for the city if these trends were not reversed. Over several decades, planners, politicians, engineers, real estate owners, and businessmen produced scores of studies and recommendations, which were aimed at combating urban decline and restoring the city to a position of prominence and profitability. These proposals were incorporated into the *General Plan for Boston*, which presented a vision for economic growth wrought by the construction of new roads, new traffic patterns, and a reconstructed physical environment.<sup>1</sup>

Amid this surge in official urban planning activity, Chinese Bostonians were engaged in their own informal program of urban renewal, which was focused on remaking the physical and cultural landscape of the Chinatown neighborhood. Through a range of creative spatial practices, Chinese Bostonians actively engaged in what Leonie

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<sup>1</sup> Boston City Planning Board, *General Plan for Boston: Preliminary Report* (Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1950).

Sandercock has called “planning from below.”<sup>2</sup> Although the *General Plan for Boston* simply folded Chinatown into its vision for a rebuilt and expanded downtown commercial district, Chinatown’s constituents asserted visions of place that disputed this official narrative of urban progress.<sup>3</sup> Through their uses and exploits of urban space, Chinese Bostonians articulated ideas of home and community that embraced Chinatown’s value as a unique residential and commercial place in the city, above and beyond its value as downtown real estate.

This chapter introduces Boston’s Chinatown and examines the features of a distinctive Chinese American urbanism that emerged here from the 1920s through the 1950s. Chinese Americans confronted and participated in urban change in varied ways, which reflected internal divisions within the Chinese community as well these groups’ differential relations to the city’s larger urban growth regime. Chinatown’s ethnic elites, for example, leveraged their resources as merchants and business owners to upgrade the physical environment of Chinatown and to reform its public image. In doing so, they legitimized their position as representatives of the Chinese community in the eyes of Boston’s civic elites, and they promoted a vision for a modernized Chinatown that would be compatible with official planners’ visions for a rebuilt urban core. In contrast, non-elite working class residents constructed a rich, multiethnic social world on the streets of Chinatown, which confounded the accepted frameworks that both the ethnic elites and the city’s official planners used to make sense of the city. Though their spatial practices were invisible to most outsiders, these residents were no less active participants in place-making than were their elite counterparts.

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<sup>2</sup> Leonie Sandercock, introduction to *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History*, ed. Leonie Sandercock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> “Proposed Land-Use,” in Boston City Planning Board, *General Plan for Boston*, insert, back cover.

Attending to the ways in which Chinese American people contributed to the production of the Chinatown landscape reveals how processes of Chinese American identity and community formation were intertwined with the production of urban space and place. Furthermore, their stories show that, while postwar Chinese American urbanism contained significant challenges to state-sponsored urban renewal, they did not always oppose or resist it. At times, Chinese Americans borrowed and reproduced dominant strategies for urban redevelopment even as they challenged their most damaging effects.

### **The Origins of Boston's Chinatown**

Boston's Chinatown is located in an area adjacent to downtown Boston called the South Cove, which was made by the South Cove Corporation in the 1830s by landfilling the tidal flats along the Roxbury neck of the old Boston peninsula.<sup>4</sup> Though the South Cove was once sited for ambitious industrial waterfront projects, the financial panic of 1837 curtailed those plans. Instead, developers built tenements to house the city's growing immigrant population. In 1840, the Boston and Albany Railroad built its Boston terminus—South Station—on the Cove's southeastern perimeter. The railroad tracks limited further residential development and depressed land values in adjacent lots. Low land values, in addition to the area's proximity to the railway, attracted leather and garment manufacturing, which were labor-intensive industries that required substantial

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<sup>4</sup> Nancy S. Seasholes, *Gaining Ground: A History of Landmaking in Boston* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 237-254.

space. All of these factors kept rents low for waves of Irish, Jewish, Syrian, Italian, and later Chinese immigrants that settled in the area.<sup>5</sup>

Boston's first documented Chinese businesses—laundries on Beach Street and Harrison Avenue—appear in the 1875 City Directory. Five years earlier, in 1870, shoe manufacturer Calvin T. Sampson recruited seventy-five Chinese workers from San Francisco to break a strike staged by the Order of the Knights of St. Crispin at his shoe factory in North Adams, Massachusetts. Finding success with this strategy, Sampson hired an additional fifty Chinese workers in 1871. After their initial three-year contract with Sampson was fulfilled, some of these workers sought new employment in Boston, where they were joined by other Chinese people fleeing the violent anti-Chinese movement that had gripped the West Coast.<sup>6</sup> A small number of Chinese merchants and sailors that were part of the city's earlier maritime trading culture preceded these Chinese migrants. But it was in the mid-1870s that a small Chinese community began to form in the northern part of the South Cove, marking the beginnings of the city's Chinatown as an identifiable place on the urban landscape.

For a time, Boston's Chinese community followed the familiar settlement pattern of other immigrant groups, expanding from an initial settlement on Beach Street and Harrison Street to adjacent streets as other immigrants moved out to more desirable locales. Replicating the strategy employed by Chinese people in New York, where

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<sup>5</sup> Arthur Krim, *Chinatown-South-Cove Comprehensive Survey Project: Final Survey Report* (Boston: Boston Landmarks Commission, 1997); Charles Sullivan and Kathlyn Hatch, *The Chinese in Boston, 1970* (Boston: Action for Boston Community Development Planning and Evaluation Department, 1971); Todd Stevens, "Dinner at the Den: Chinese Restaurants in Boston, 1900-1950," (unpublished paper, Princeton University, 1998), 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> Rhoads Murphey, "Boston's Chinatown," *Economic Geography* 28, no. 3 (July 1952), 245-246. See also Anthony W. Lee, *A Shoemaker's Story: Being Chiefly about French Canadian Immigrants, Enterprising Photographers, Rascal Yankees, and Chinese Cobblers in a Nineteenth-Century Factory Town* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Chu, *Chinese in Massachusetts*; To and CHSNE, *Chinese in Boston*.

Chinatown developed along the Third Avenue 'El' train, Chinese immigrants in Boston tended to move into housing near the path of the Atlantic Avenue elevated railway, where rents were lowest. Erected in 1899, Boston's 'El' train ran along Atlantic Avenue and through Chinatown from 1901-1938. The sound of the train's screeching wheels lowered land values everywhere they could be heard, and this was especially true at the corner of Beach Street and Harrison Street where the train made a dangerously sharp ninety degree turn. The small Chinese community here grew from about two hundred people in 1890 to roughly nine hundred people in 1910, with the first Chinese-owned blocks of real estate appearing on Oxford Place in 1911-12. By 1935, a recognizable Chinatown had developed to encompass the area north of Kneeland Street, south of Essex Street and east of Washington Street, and it was expanding south down Tyler and Hudson Streets as some members of the Syrian community there relocated to Boston's suburbs.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Underdevelopment of Boston's Early Chinatown**

In addition to serving a small Chinese residential community, Chinatown before World War II was also a place where Chinese workers in other parts of the city came to rest on Sundays after a long workweek. This weekly migration of Boston's Chinese workers counters perceptions of Chinatown as a rigid ethnic container that separated Chinese people from the surrounding city. In fact, the majority of Chinese people in Boston worked outside of Chinatown. The 1931 Chinese Business Directory of New England lists 54 restaurants in Boston, only 17 of which were in Chinatown. The same

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<sup>7</sup> Stevens, "Dinner at the Den," 7-8; Murphey, "Boston's Chinatown," 248; Krim, "Chinatown-South Cove Survey District," (paper, Chinese Historical Society of New England, May 10, 1998), 2. The turn was so sharp, it in fact resulted in a fatal wreck in July of 1928. "Survivors Describe Crash on Elevated," *Daily Boston Globe*, July 23, 1928, 6; "'L' Crash Report Nearing Completion," *Daily Boston Globe*, July 25, 1928, 11.

was true of Chinese laundries, the other major occupation of Chinese Americans; of the 140 Chinese laundries in the Boston city limits in 1931, only 4 were in Chinatown.<sup>8</sup> Chinese laundrymen worked six days a week and usually slept in their shops. On their day off, these men took the train in from all over Boston and its suburbs, and even surrounding cities, to spend the day in Chinatown. For laundrymen who lived in their shops outside of Chinatown, the day offered a chance to purchase imported foodstuffs such as dried oysters, dried mushrooms, and bitter melon. For restaurant workers, the day was partly spent working with their suppliers to ensure delivery of the same imported ingredients in bulk.<sup>9</sup>

Although Chinese workers were able to move across urban space and find employment in different parts of the city, structural constraints circumscribed their life choices and limited the kinds of occupations they could enter. The 1940 census illustrates the limited occupational opportunities available to Chinese people in the 1930s. Despite a higher rate of employment than Boston residents as a whole, the census shows the majority of Boston's Chinese workers engaged in service trades and clustered around the lowest rung of the employment ladder.<sup>10</sup> These employment patterns are unexceptional when compared to most newly arrived immigrant groups. However, Chinese workers had lived in Boston in significant numbers since the turn of the century, and a comparison with the 1910 census records reveals virtually no change in the occupational distribution of Boston's Chinese workers. After fifty years in Boston, Chinese people had almost no representation in the skilled trades. The percentage of professionals remained below three

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<sup>8</sup> *Chinese Directory of New England* (Boston: Hop Yuen Company, 1931).

<sup>9</sup> Ren-ying Gao, "A Social Survey of Chinatown, Boston, Massachusetts" (M.A. thesis, Boston University, 1941), 33; Stevens, "Dinner at the Den," 14.

<sup>10</sup> Xiao-huang Yin, "The Population Pattern and Occupational Structure of Boston's Chinese Community in 1940," *The Maryland Historian* 20, no. 1 (1989): 59-69.

percent, and almost all of those classed as proprietors and managers worked in small businesses they had started themselves.<sup>11</sup>

The economic stagnation of Chinese immigrants contrasts sharply with theories of economic assimilation as applied to other immigrants in the U.S. Laundries, small shops, and restaurant work were not entry-level jobs for the Chinese. They were virtually the only employment options available to Chinese workers. This concentration in service work resulted from both legal and structural constraints. For example, until 1940, state laws in Massachusetts prohibited Chinese persons from entering more than twenty occupations, most of them professional jobs. Municipal and state government employment was similarly restricted to citizens. Union membership was necessary for employment in the majority of skilled trades, but Boston unions barred the Chinese based on their race.<sup>12</sup>

Chinese people also faced discrimination in the housing market, which contributed to the formation of a racially segregated Chinatown. Philip Chin, a Chinese immigrant whose family owned and operated a laundry in Cambridge in the 1930s and 1940s, recalled that:

Being Chinese, we experienced great frustrations and problems in purchasing a house. People simply refused to sell houses to Chinese. . . . Some Chinese people would go to a real estate agent and let the Caucasian buy the house for them. They did not dare to go to look at the house in which they were about to live. Sometimes Chinese were forced to move out of the house they already lived in, by the owner. . . . The older generation of the Caucasians really discriminated against the foreigners.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Yin, "Population Pattern," 62.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 65; Peter S. Li, "Ethnic Businesses among the Chinese in the United States," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 4, no. 3 (1976): 35-41; Xiaojian Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America: Immigration, Family, and Community, 1940-1965* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 8-28; Stevens, "Dinner at the Den," 16-18.

<sup>13</sup> Mr. Philip Chin, interviewed by Stanley Chan, Bet Har Wong, and Tony Wong, in *A Dialogue with the Past: Oral History Accounts of Boston's Ethnic Neighborhoods and People*, ed. Robert C. Hayden (Newton, MA: Education Development Center, 1979), 4.



While many were able to find residence outside of Chinatown—usually by living in their places of work—housing discrimination prevented Chinese people from establishing themselves more widely.

In addition to restricted opportunities in employment and housing, Chinese communities in the United States were also constrained by an unbalanced sex ratio that was a result of exclusionary immigration laws. Unlike other immigrant communities, the Chinese in the United States could not grow internally. Legal restrictions against Chinese female immigrants prevented the majority of Chinese men from bringing wives over and establishing families, and in 1940, women constituted only twelve percent of Boston's Chinese community. Instead, the Chinese population increased principally through a provision in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which allowed Chinese residents in the United States to visit China for a maximum of eighteen months and register the birth of two children during their stay. These "paper sons" could then later legally immigrate to the United States. This practice became a business as registration papers were bought and sold by merchant trading companies in the major cities of Guangdong Province. "Sons" of Boston's Chinatown, then, were typically born and raised to the age of fourteen in villages and cities of South China. Instead of a second generation of Chinese Americans born and raised in the urban environment of an ethnic neighborhood and educated in public schools, most of Chinatown's young people were recently arrived immigrants. Rather than finding ways to break into new industries, most of them were struggling to learn English. Due to the small number of nuclear families in Chinatown and the

prominence of “paper sons,” nearly half of the Chinese working-age population was foreign-born before the repeal of the Exclusion Act in 1943.<sup>14</sup>

Under these conditions, Chinese Americans developed alternative kinship arrangements, for which Chinatown served important social, cultural, political, and economic functions. Each Chinese man in Boston generally belonged to a clan organization from his hometown that rented out a clubhouse in Chinatown where members could receive their mail as well as messages from their families in China. On their one day off, Chinese workers came to Chinatown to see friends, to gamble, and to purchase a bath. Here, Chinese men could relax, read Chinese newspapers from the large cities in South China, eat Chinese food, and participate in the social life of a Chinese community.<sup>15</sup>

### **Chinatown as a Vice District**

In spite of this complex social world, many Bostonians regarded Chinatown as a dangerous and exotic space of vice and crime until at least the 1930s. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Chinatown was often depicted in popular representations as a shadowy vice district, and Chinese people were often caricatured as fearful and sub-human, likened to “panting sheep” and “rats.” Instead of a residential neighborhood or a commercial district, this imagined Chinatown was a maze of shadowy dens and alleyways. While this negative imagery did not preclude Chinese people from washing

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<sup>14</sup> Stevens, “Dinner at the Den,” 18-19; Yin, “Population Pattern,” 60, 64, 66; Li “Ethnic Businesses,” 39. On Chinese immigration during the exclusion era, see Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2003) and Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*.

<sup>15</sup> Stevens, “Dinner at the Den,” 14; Gao, “Social Survey,” 33.

other people's clothes, it certainly contributed to the Chinese community's socio-spatial marginalization.<sup>16</sup>

The image of Chinatown as a vice district was reflected in contemporary news coverage, which fixated on sensational stories that emphasized murder, drugs, and other illicit activities. Between 1912-1923, Boston papers devoted 1257 column inches to coverage of 104 murders involving Chinese Tongs around the country. Not unlike low-income neighborhoods today, Chinatown tended to appear in the news only when someone was killed or when the police broke down the door of a gambling operation or an opium den.<sup>17</sup>

Journalistic coverage of a police raid on Boston's Chinatown in 1903 stands as a infamous example of these sensationalized depictions of crime in Chinatown and their dire consequences for Chinese Bostonians. The story began five days before the raid with the murder of Wong Yak Chong, a thirty-year-old laundryman, in a Chinatown restaurant. Newspapers provided gruesome details of the killing, dwelling on the hunting axe murder weapon found by the police. The police linked the murder to a turf war between rival Tongs in Chinatown, which were Chinese fraternal secret societies that managed gambling, prostitution, opium dealing, and protection rackets in Chinatowns across the country. The police determined that the dispute involved protection money

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<sup>16</sup> On representations of Chinatown in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Ivan Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatowns, 1880-1940," *The Pacific Historical Review* 43, no. 3 (August 1974), 367-394; Ivan Light, "The Ethnic Vice Industry, 1880-1944," *American Sociological Review* 42, no. 3 (June 1977), 464-479; Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999); K. Scott Wong, "Chinatown: Conflicting Images, Contested Terrain," *MELUS* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1995), 3-15; John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats, *Yellow Peril!: An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear* (London: Verso Books, 2014); Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown*; Shah, *Contagious Divides*; Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery*; Anthony W. Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Gao, "A Social Survey," 36. Stevens, "Dinner at the Den," 20-21. See also Wong, "'The Eagle Seeks a Helpless Quarry'"; Wong, "Chinatown"; Shah, *Contagious Divides*.

paid by laborers without registration certificates, which enabled them to work in the United States despite being “aliens ineligible for citizenship.” On the night after Wong’s funeral, the Boston police surrounded Chinatown and proceeded to arrest every Chinese person they encountered who could not produce a registration certificate. Entering the two Tongs’ headquarters first, the police arrested 234 men.<sup>18</sup>

Newspapers routinely published fictional stories set in Chinatown as well, which were supported by numerous novels and films that depicted Chinatown as a shadowy vice district. In 1930, for instance, N.L. Brown published *Tong War!*, a sensationalized account of Chinatown vice by New York crime reporter Bruce Grant and alleged Chinese gangster, Eng Ying Gong. Blending police records, gangster’s confessions, and colorful storytelling, Grant and Gong portrayed Boston’s Chinatown as the scene of a violent criminal underworld. Newspaper readers in Boston would have recognized this picture as the *Boston Globe* and the *Boston Record American* covered the tong wars in Boston and around the country in great detail. Mixing gory details of killings with explanations of the shadowy Chinese tongs, newspapers and popular culture constructed an image of Chinatown as overrun by gangs, gambling, and prostitution.<sup>19</sup>

### **New Development Possibilities**

Beginning in the 1920s, however, and continuing through the 1940s, Chinatown would undergo a dramatic social, cultural, and physical transformation that would see the neighborhood’s image shift from that of a vice district to that of a tourist area and a

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<sup>18</sup> “After Bad Men,” *Boston Globe*, October 7, 1903, 8; “Funeral of Murdered Chinaman Free from All Disturbance,” *Boston Globe*, October 12, 1903, 8; Wong, “The Eagle Seeks a Helpless Quarry,” 81-103; Stevens, “Dinner at the Den,” 10-11, 28.

<sup>19</sup> Bruce Grant and Eng Ying Gong, *Tong War!: The First Complete History of Tongs in America* (New York: N. L. Brown, 1930); Stevens, “Dinner at the Den,” 20; Gao, “A Social Survey,” 49.

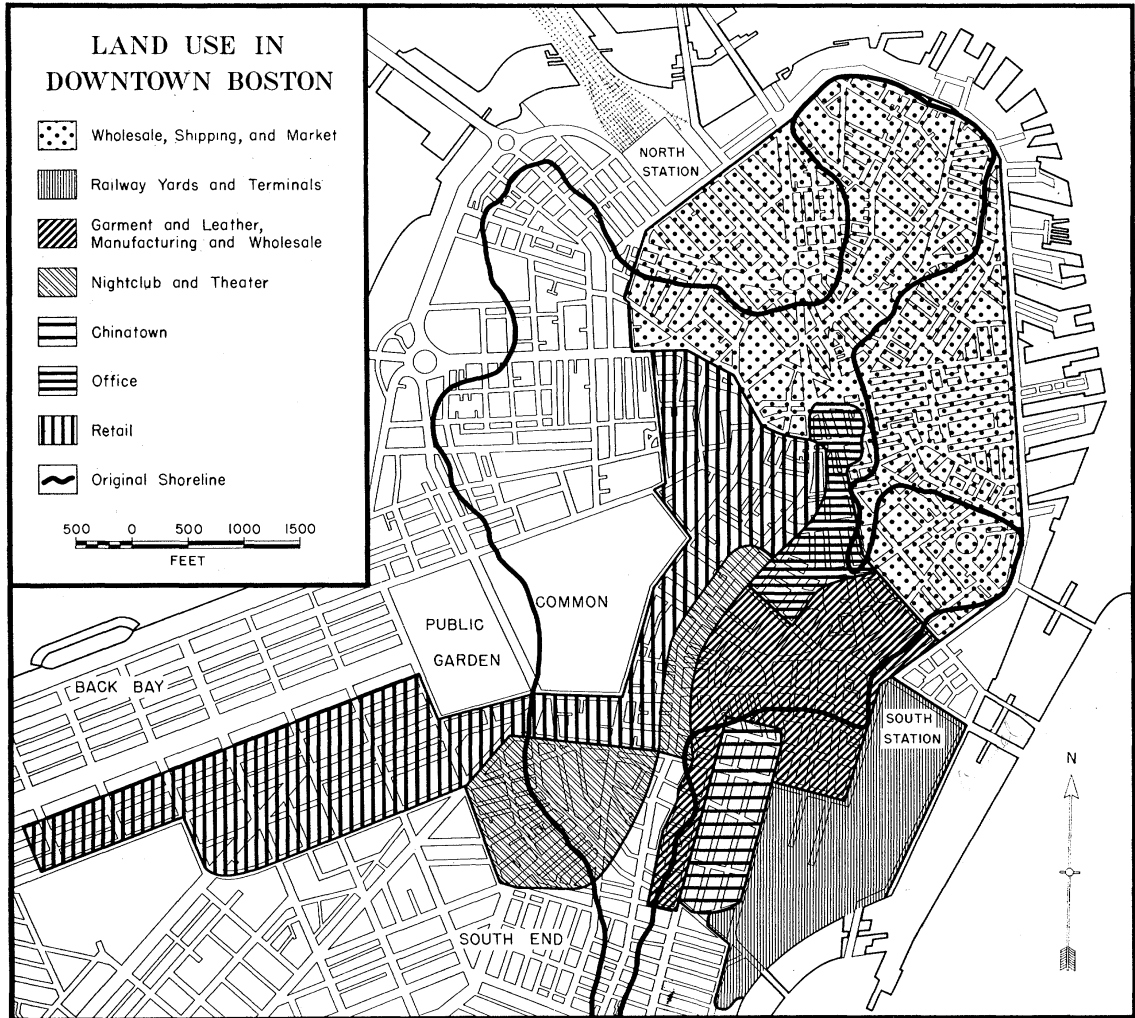


Figure 1.1. Land use in downtown Boston in relation to original shoreline and to Chinatown in 1952. Rhoads Murphey, *Economic Geography* 28, no. 3 (July 1952), 246.

residential neighborhood. By 1941, Chinatown occupied about seven city blocks, which were crowded with residential, commercial, and industrial units piled beside and on top of each other. Although its Chinese population did not exceed two thousand people, this made Boston's Chinatown the third largest in the United States after San Francisco and New York. On the eve of World War II, Chinatown had developed into a vital home place for an immigrant community that still spoke little English and that suffered from widespread racial discrimination. However, it had also reached certain spatial limits,

which prevented further physical expansion. To the north sat the enormous clothing factories of the garment district. To the east was the leather industry and the rail yard behind it. The central business district abutted Chinatown to the west. The only area that could accommodate new Chinese residents and businesses was to the south, where members of a longstanding Syrian community had begun to relocate to the suburbs. Yet even this southward expansion was limited to only a few blocks until the railroad tracks curved west from South Station and began their route to Albany, NY.<sup>20</sup>

But the possibilities for Chinatown's development were beginning to shift. One sign of this transformation was the removal of the Atlantic Avenue elevated railway in the spring of 1941. Since 1899, the 'El' train had generated terrible noise and blocked light from the streets below, lowering land values and decreasing Chinatown's attractiveness to both shoppers and shop owners.<sup>21</sup> Rising automobile ownership and the growing popularity of bus and subway transportation resulted in low ridership for the elevated railway, prompting the Boston Elevated Railway Company to shut down service in 1938 and to tear down the elevated tracks in 1941-42 under pressure from city and state officials.<sup>22</sup> No longer in the shadow of the 'El' train, Chinatown now occupied prime real estate just outside Boston's central business district, and Chinatown's business leaders seized the opportunity to refurbish the area's image and to attract new customers to its establishments. In a few years, signs for parking lots in Chinatown would boast that they were "only five minutes walk from Filenes," the city's largest retail store.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Stevens, "Dinner at the Den," 8-9; Seasholes, *Gaining Ground*, 237-254; Murphey, "Boston's Chinatown," 244-245; Gao, "A Social Survey," 5-13.

<sup>21</sup> Krim, "Chinatown-South Cove Survey District," 4-5.

<sup>22</sup> "Atlantic-Av. 'L' to Cease Oct. 1," *Boston Globe*, September 24, 1938, 7; "Elevated: Demolition Order Hailed as Boon to Salvage Drive," *Boston Globe*, January 10, 1942, 11; William Clark, "How Wreckers Are Tearing Down Atlantic-Av. Elevated," *Boston Globe*, March 29, 1942, C2.

<sup>23</sup> Stevens, "Dinner at the Den," 1, 8-9.

## **The Emergence of Commercial Chinatown**

The midcentury transformation of Boston's Chinatown from a vice district to a tourist area and a respectable family neighborhood owes much to the efforts of individual Chinese Bostonians who, over several decades, seized opportunities to transform Chinatown's built environment and its public image. Beginning in the late 1920s, Chinatown's merchant elites gradually remade the physical and cultural landscape of Chinatown both as individual entrepreneurs and collectively as an organized body. Examining the transformation of the Chinatown landscape from the perspective of the built environment allows us to appreciate some of the ways that Chinese Americans actively remade Chinatown space and place not as transparent expressions of ethnic culture but rather as prudent and resourceful human beings acting in response to changing circumstances.

Historian Todd Stevens has shown that in the 1920s and 1930s, Chinese restaurants in Boston gained increasing significance as a key site of contact where white consumers could come to experience and form ideas about Chinese America.<sup>24</sup> As Chinese laundries declined in the face of innovations in washing technology, Chinese entrepreneurs began opening new Chinese restaurants within walking distance of Boston's theater entertainment district to try to appeal to a white middle class clientele. Chinatown restaurants had always been important as spaces where Chinese people from all over New England came together, and they continued to serve this function. But during and after World War II, Chinese restaurants multiplied in number and broadened their customer base. Among the most prominent new construction in Chinatown during

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<sup>24</sup> Stevens, "Dinner at the Den."

this period was twelve new restaurants, which opened in Chinatown from 1942 to 1952.<sup>25</sup> Successful in attracting a wider base of consumers, Chinese restaurants played an important role in changing popular attitudes towards Chinese people.

From the 1920s to the 1950s, Chinese entrepreneurs invested in the remodeling and upgrading of a number of existing commercial spaces in Chinatown, and they implemented new advertising methods to attract a wider base of customers. Historian Alison Isenberg has shown that renovating storefronts with modern features and designs was a common Depression-era strategy that downtown businessmen used throughout the country to combat the problem of urban “obsolescence,” which they blamed for declining economic activity in downtown commercial centers.<sup>26</sup> Chinese businessmen used this strategy as well; however, storefront renovations in Chinatown not only modernized appearances with curved glass facades and neon signs, they also played up Chinatown’s exotic appeal to a non-Chinese clientele with exaggerated images of dragons and pagodas. Increasingly, restaurateurs deployed exotic stereotypes in their menus and decor, which helped to make Chinese food safe and inviting for white consumption. Business owners on Tyler Street, for example, redesigned their storefronts to attract the eye of English-speaking pedestrians. From the late 1920s to the early 1940s, several restaurants changed their names to emphasize the number of their address (e.g. “No. 9 Restaurant”) because non-Chinese speakers were better at pronouncing and remembering numbers as opposed to Chinese names. Proprietors of Chinese restaurants used this strategy at 9, 16, and 21 Tyler Street. Restaurateurs also changed their signage to feature blinking neon signs, some of which physically moved up and down to draw pedestrian

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<sup>25</sup> Yin, “The Population Pattern,” 64; Gao, “A Social Survey,” 78.

<sup>26</sup> Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 124-165.





Figure 1.2. Ruby Foo's Den at 6 Hudson Street in 1951. Ruby Foo was one of the first Chinese woman restaurant owners in the country. Her successful restaurant catered to non-Chinese clientele. CHSNE Collection.

eyes. And in the 1940s and 1950s, restaurants began also to get catchy names like Bob Lee's Lantern House, Lotus Inn, and Good Earth. Restaurateurs advertised the allure of exotic foods in foreign surroundings, emphasizing "atmosphere" as much as a cheap lunch. The Good Earth, for example advertised itself as "Boston's Most Unusual Eating Place," and signage for Cathay House in the 1940s advertised its "delightful atmosphere"

as well as its “air-conditioned” comfort.<sup>27</sup> Other midcentury streetscape interventions that helped establish an exotic sense of place included the refacing of a handful of red brick row houses north of Tyler Street with a buff-yellow brick exterior to resemble the off-white stucco facades typical of traditional Southern Chinese residential architecture. Another popular building upgrade was the insertion of upper-level balconies resembling “celestial platforms” of traditional style.<sup>28</sup> In 1925, the porticos of both the Joy Hong Low and King Wah Low restaurants had reflected a more western, almost Victorian sensibility with looping iron works and iron lamps. But by 1941, these restaurants were popping with neon dragons, tall signs, and glowing porticos.<sup>29</sup> While storefront renovations tended to rely on exotic depictions of Chinese culture, they also signaled Chinatown’s emergence as a dynamic commercial area. Observing these changes to the physical landscape of Chinatown offers a glimpse into the transformation of Chinatown from being primarily a central place for the Chinese people of New England to also being a restaurant and tourist district catering to broader publics.

## **The Context of World War II**

Of course, these changes to the look and feel of Chinatown did not occur in a vacuum. They took place within the context of significant national and international change. Japan’s invasion of Shanghai in 1937, the U.S. entry into World War II in 1941, changes to immigration laws, and the Communist victory in China in 1949 all contributed to Chinatown’s growth and cultural transformation from dangerous vice district to tourist-friendly area.

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<sup>27</sup> Stevens, “Dinner at the Den,” 34-35; To and CHSNE, *Chinese in Boston*, 50-53.

<sup>28</sup> Krim, *Chinatown-South Cove Comprehensive Survey Project*, 28.

<sup>29</sup> Stevens, “Dinner at the Den,” 34-35; To and CHSNE, *Chinese in Boston*, 49.

Boston's Chinatown was awash in patriotic feeling by the end of the 1930s. In 1931, tensions between Japan and China turned into war when Japan invaded Manchuria. After occupying China's main resource base, Japan continued aggression to undermine Chinese authority in China's treaty ports. The undeclared war exploded in 1937 with the invasion of Shanghai and Japan's drive to conquer all of China. Though most Chinese in Boston were not wealthy, they raised over \$750,000 for the war effort. Chinatown's most famous restaurateur, Ruby Foo, even adopted a war orphan in response to the now-famous 1937 photograph by H.S. "Newsreel" Wong of a Chinese infant crying amidst the rubble of Shanghai South Railway Station following a Japanese bombing attack.<sup>30</sup>

The war united Boston's Chinese community in support of their homeland and encouraged the formation of a unified Chinese American identity and community. New organizations were created and old ones revived as many in Chinatown worked together to resolve their differences and funnel resources back to China to help with the war effort. The United Chinese Association formed as an umbrella organization to supervise the anti-Japanese activities in Chinatown. It raised \$250,000 to support relief activities, \$550,000 for defense and arranged the purchase of \$115,980 in national salvation bonds. Their efforts also reflected another consequence of the Japanese invasion: the end of the Tong wars. Citing renewed support for China in her time of need and confronted by a declining market for hand laundries, Tongs kept their peace agreements for the first time. As a result, Chinatown became a safer place and more unified under the leadership of the merchants. Central to this transformation in leadership was a shift in focus from

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<sup>30</sup> Stevens, "Dinner at the Den," 20, 29.

protecting the turf of laundries in the suburbs to making Chinatown an attractive setting for non-Chinese consumers and upgrading the quality of life for all Chinese.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to transforming Chinese communities in the U.S. internally, the Japanese attack fostered a positive public image of Chinese people in the U.S. and abroad. The breakout of war between China and Japan in July 1937 strengthened popular sympathy for China as a victim of Japanese aggression. The rape of Nanjing in 1937-1938 and other Japanese atrocities were front-page news in America, and Lin Yutang's *My Country and My People* and *The Importance of Living* became best sellers, reflecting growing popular interest and sympathy for Chinese people in the U.S.<sup>32</sup>

U.S. entry into World War II was equally transformative as the attack on Pearl Harbor also made the U.S. and China allies in the fight against Japan. Increased economic activity in Boston's shipyards generated high paying jobs for Chinese laborers and new faces in Chinatown restaurants.<sup>33</sup> In a society where racism limited education and employment options, the war also gave Chinese American men the opportunity to demonstrate their patriotism and ability in the U.S. Armed Forces. Nationally, about

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<sup>31</sup> From 1937-1945, Chinese people in the United States raised \$25 million for the Chinese government, \$2.1 million coming from New England. The donations to the Nationalist government may have been a drain on the capital of Chinese entrepreneurs in Boston, but according to Ren-ying Gao, the process of raising money organized the Chinese community in a way that made it easier to raise money locally for new businesses. Moreover, the donations paled in comparison to the freeing up of long-time residents' savings when they realized that they could not retire to China after 1949. Gao, "A Social Survey," 37; Stevens, "Dinner at the Den," 29-30.

<sup>32</sup> Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1935); Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1937). On sentimental representations of Asia in midcentury American cultural productions, see Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Stevens, "Dinner at the Den," 30-32; *Chinatown*, Boston 200 Neighborhood Series (Boston: Boston 200 Corporation, 1976), 4.

12,000 to 15,000 Chinese Americans—nearly twenty percent of Chinese American men—served during the war.<sup>34</sup>

Changes to immigration law in this period also dramatically increased and transformed the population of Chinese people in the U.S. After the widely reported tour of Madame Chiang Kaishek and her speech to a joint session of Congress, Congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act in late 1943. The new law set a quota for Chinese immigration at 105 immigrants a year and made the approximately fifty percent of the Chinese American population that was foreign-born eligible for naturalization. The War Brides Act of 1945 would have an even greater impact on Chinese American population as it vastly expanded opportunities for Chinese women to enter the United States by allowing wives and children of citizens of Chinese ancestry to apply as non-quota immigrants. Lastly, the communist victory in China also led Congress to pass the Refugee Relief Acts, which brought 14,000 Chinese people to the United States in 1949-1950. Combined, these legal changes resulted in a one thousand percent increase in the number of Chinese women in Boston during the 1940s. Geographer Rhoads Murphey estimated that the Chinese population of Boston increased over sixty percent from 1940 to 1952.<sup>35</sup>

The Communists' victory over the Nationalists in 1949 profoundly affected overseas Chinese communities in the United States. While increasingly integrated into the social world of Boston's Chinatown, many Chinese men still dreamt of retiring to

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<sup>34</sup> K. Scott Wong, *Americans First: Chinese Americans and the Second World War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 58.

<sup>35</sup> Stevens, "Dinner at the Den," 31-32; *Chinatown*, 4-6; Murphey, "Boston's Chinatown," 248-255. See also Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*.

China after saving enough money.<sup>36</sup> With the new government in China, long-time Chinatown residents realized that moving back to South China to enjoy the profits of laboring in the U.S. was not only undesirable, it could be dangerous. In 1951, Communist government officials sent blackmail notes to a number of Chinatown residents demanding payments in order to spare their relatives from arrest, torture, and possible execution.<sup>37</sup>

The years from 1937 to 1949 marked a period of significant structural change in Boston's Chinatown as the interrelated national and international contexts of World War II and the early Cold War years gave rise to new avenues for immigration and naturalization, greater acceptance of Chinese Americans in mainstream American society, and a more unified Chinese American community. These changes also created an opening for Chinese merchants and business people to remake Chinatown. With the Tong wars over and the vice rackets now behind doors, Chinatown officially had the lowest crime rate of any community in Boston.<sup>38</sup> Invigorated by the infusion of women and children as a result of relaxed immigration restrictions, Chinatown now also had a more balanced male-to-female ratio. The war had united Chinatown's factions and generated a more positive image of Chinese people. Finally, the communist victory in China in 1949 marked the closing of the possibility of return for many of Chinatown's wealthiest men, who now had a new incentive to invest their savings in Boston. These wartime

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<sup>36</sup> Stevens, "Dinner at the Den," 32. See also Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*; Madeline Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>37</sup> This practice was widespread in Boston and nationally. Six out of ten Chinese Americans in Boston received such warnings as "to make payments of \$1000 to buy the lives — for a while — of relatives who are still living in Red China." Each message warned that a "mother, father, grandparents, wife or son in China will be arrested, tortured and then killed, if a payment of \$1000 is not made immediately to a specified Communist agent in Hong Kong." The U.S. Treasury asserted that up to \$5 million had been sent to Hong Kong, including approximately \$300,000 from the Boston area. *Boston Herald*, November 15, 25, 30, 1951; *Boston Herald*, December 10, 1951.

<sup>38</sup> Gao, "A Social Survey, 21-24; Murphey, "Boston's Chinatown," 249.

developments marked a dramatic shift from Chinatown's earlier image as a shadowy vice district to a respectable Chinese American home place and a safe and attractive tourist area within walking distance of Boston's major commercial and entertainment district.

By 1949, the Chinatown streetscape reflected these changes. The streets were filled with small merchants, restaurants and retail shops that bustled with activity. In the seven square city blocks of Chinatown, Chinese Bostonians owned and worked in twenty-six restaurants, forty-three trading companies, four Chinese laundries, one Chinese printing company, two photographers, one travel agency/money exchange service, and a collection of small grocery stores and curio shops selling imported art goods. Whereas in the past, most of Chinatown's businesses catered to the Chinese people of New England, now many customers were from outside of the Chinese community.<sup>39</sup>

### **Planning a New Chinatown**

While many individual property owners and entrepreneurs undertook building renovations on an individual basis, the Chinese Merchants Association of Massachusetts led a more organized effort to remake Chinatown on a larger scale in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Their effort took the form of a neighborhood renewal plan whose first project was to be the construction of a new building to serve as a community center and expanded organizational headquarters. Though the full extent of their plans was never realized, the Merchants Association's plan and the construction of its new headquarters in 1951 reveal much about how one segment of the Chinese American community understood and imagined Chinatown, how they envisioned and contributed to its

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<sup>39</sup> *Chinese Community Handbook* (Boston: Overseas Literary Association, 1949).

development, and the forces that both inspired and constrained their visions and their actions.

Founded in 1903, the Chinese Merchants Association of Massachusetts is one of the oldest Chinese social organizations in New England. According to its original charter on file with the Massachusetts Corporations Divisions, the Merchants Association was established “for the purpose of establishing and maintaining places for reading rooms, libraries and social meetings, for the prosecution of the study of music, for the promotion of morality, and for the encouragement of athletic exercises.”<sup>40</sup> On its face, the charter claims a relatively benign social and cultural purpose, but this stated mission belies the many critical services that the Merchants Association also provided to its members. In addition to organizing public celebrations of traditional Chinese holidays, the Association provided translation aid, business assistance, and housing for single, male Chinese workers. Together with Chinese district and clan associations, the Merchants Association was part of a national network that assisted Chinese newcomers and responded to institutionalized racism through mutual aid and self-governance.<sup>41</sup>

The Chinese Merchants Association was economically powerful and politically connected, and it played a leading role in community affairs together with the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. As an unofficial self-governing body for Chinatown, the Merchants Association arbitrated community disputes and represented the Chinese community in negotiations and interactions with American authorities.

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<sup>40</sup> Corporation No. 10200, Charter Book No. 153, Corporations Division of the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. To and CHSNE, among others, date the formation of the Chinese Merchants Association of Massachusetts to around 1914, but Corporations Division records indicate that the association was first incorporated nearly a decade earlier, on September 9, 1903. To and CHSNE, *Chinese in Boston*, 59.

<sup>41</sup> Huping Ling, “Governing 'Hop Alley': On Leong Chinese Merchants and Laborers Association, 1906-1966,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 23, no. 2 (2004), 50-84.



Comprised of the elite class of Chinese immigrants, the Merchants Association often leaned in favor of protecting the business interests of its members, and their affairs also encompassed illegal activities such as gambling.<sup>42</sup> In the face of pervasive structural racism, the Association also felt the need and obligation to assist newcomers from China and to maintain peace and social order within the community.<sup>43</sup> For instance, the Merchants Association established the Quong Kow Chinese School on Tyler Street in 1920 and for many years remained its sole funding source.<sup>44</sup> It also raised money to help transport the remains of early Chinese sojourners back to China, supported disaster relief in China and aided in the war effort against Japan.<sup>45</sup>

Though lacking the power and resources of official city planners, the Chinese Merchants Association of Massachusetts unveiled its own designs for the community, announcing in 1950 what spokesmen described as a long-term plan to “reconstruct all of Chinatown.”<sup>46</sup> Recognizing that residential density was rising and that the neighborhood’s deteriorating buildings were insufficient to meet the needs of a growing community, Chinatown’s merchant elites saw both a need to rehabilitate the built

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<sup>42</sup> On the Merchants Association, the CCBA, and the configuration of power in Chinatown, former resident Tunney Lee recalls:

You know there’s a position called English secretary for the Merchants Association, who was always said to be the spokesperson for Chinatown. And there’s always, if you look at the papers, the mayor of Chinatown was usually the head of On Leong, [ . . . ] CCBA was always around as kind of an arbiter, but On Leong was always the power. The English secretary was usually the person who spoke to the press when something was happening. And I remember Dr. Stanley Chin was the . . . when I was a kid, he was kind of a shady figure, [who] I’m absolutely sure was corrupt as hell. I mean they were corrupt, I mean c’mon it’s like . . . laughs . . . not nice ethnic people. I mean [Chinese are] just ordinary people, so some [are] corrupt, some [are] not. But he was like I would say one of the most powerful figures around because he sort of controlled the access, the press, and he knew everybody. He knew all the politicians.

Tunney Lee, interview with author, Cambridge, MA, June 8, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Ling, “Governing Hop Alley.”

<sup>44</sup> “Quong Kow” is also commonly romanized as “Kwong Kow.”

<sup>45</sup> Chu, *Chinese in Massachusetts*, 52-58.

<sup>46</sup> Frank G. Jason, “Chinese Merchants Plan Huge Building Program,” *Boston Herald*, February 26, 1950.

environment as well as an opportunity to refurbish the neighborhood's public image. Building on the positive attitudes towards China that developed out of World War II, the Merchants aimed to reconstruct Chinatown both as a means of attracting new customers to their businesses and as a way of supporting a fast-emerging Chinese American community.

The centerpiece of their plan was the construction of a new Merchants Association headquarters at 20 Hudson Street, in the heart of Chinatown. Journalists heralded the four-story building, built between 1949 and 1951, as a first of its kind, praising it as Chinatown's new "beauty spot" and "crown jewel." The Merchants Association explained that this development was only the beginning. As one spokesman put it, the building was just the "first step in a move to beautify and dignify the Chinese quarter, and to provide the section with an adequate community center."<sup>47</sup> The new building was a milestone. Although by this point building renovations were not uncommon in Chinatown, this was the first building to be fully designed, financed, and constructed from the ground up by and for the Chinese community.

The Merchants Association enlisted local Chinese American architect Edward "Eddie" Chin-Park and his associate Andrew S. Yuen to design the building. Having studied architecture and city planning at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University (where he was a student of leading modernist Walter Gropius), Eddie Chin-Park had already demonstrated both his technical skill and his patriotism during World War II as the chief architect of the Aeromedical Research Center at Wright Air Force Base and as a planner for the master plan of the United States Air Force. Eddie's

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., "East Meets West at New Hub Chinese Center," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 24, 1951, 6; "New Office Building Combines Chinese Art and Modern Lines," *Christian Science Monitor*, Sept. 25, 1951, 6; "Hub Chinatown Hails Opening of Community Bldg.," *Boston Herald*, October 2, 1951.

father, Chin Park, was also a prominent Chinatown civic leader who in 1952 would lead the New England Chinese Benevolent Association effort before the President's Commission on Immigration and Naturalization to secure fair treatment for Chinese American citizens' children to gain admission to the United States.<sup>48</sup>

Opening to much fanfare on October 1, 1951, the grand opening was marked by a full week of gala festivities, which attracted hundreds of Chinese Bostonians and curious spectators. Among the distinguished guests were On Leong association representatives from across the country, prominent local politicians and business leaders, and official representatives of the Republic of China.<sup>49</sup> The Merchants Association solicited the support of Boston's civic leadership, which, like elites in other American cities, was just then embarking on a campaign to use public power to harness private capital for economic and urban growth. Speakers at the opening events included several prominent figures in Boston's emerging growth regime—Mayor John Hynes, Secretary of Labor Maurice Tobin, president of Boston University Harold Case, and vice president of the Boston Chamber of Commerce Donald Hurley. Activities included a series of elaborate banquet dinners, screenings of Chinese films in the building's new auditorium, Chinese music and dance performances, dragon dances, and the like. As fireworks crackled, a raucous dragon dance and parade wound its way through the crowded, lit-up streets. A program of Chinese music and dance entertained spectators into the night, featuring performances by a Chinese opera company from Hong Kong, a lion dance troupe from

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<sup>48</sup> Dorothy G. Wayman, "Chinese Here to Dedicate Vermilion Pillars, Pagoda," *Boston Daily Globe*, September 29, 1951, 11; "Chin Park, 98; Leader in Chinese Community," *Boston Globe*, August 9, 1981, 1; "Iris Lane Warren Becomes a Bride," *New York Times*, January 28, 1957, 27.

<sup>49</sup> Guests included national On Leong president Shue-Some Mark and consul-general of the Republic of China, Ping C. Chang. "Chinese Merchants (and Dragons) Open New Building," *Daily Boston Globe*, October 3, 1951, 28.



Figure 1.3. The Chinese Merchants Building, 1951. Chu, *Chinese in Massachusetts*, 62.

Montreal, and the Kew Sing Music Club, an amateur music society devoted to promoting and preserving traditional Chinese music and Cantonese opera in New England.<sup>50</sup>

As proud as Chinatown's merchant elites may have felt about their new building, its grand opening was likely also a bittersweet occasion. With an estimated price tag of one million dollars, the building was privately funded by Chinatown's wealthier

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<sup>50</sup> Jason, "Chinese Merchants Plan Huge Building Program"; "New Office Building Combines Chinese Art and Modern Lines"; "Hub Chinatown Hails Opening of Community Bldg.," To and CHSNE, *Chinese in Boston*, 8, 67, 108-109; Chu, *Chinese in Massachusetts*, 14-15, 60-62; *A Chinatown Banquet*, produced by Mike Blockstein and Asian Community Development Corporation, (Boston: Asian Community Development Corporation, 2006), DVD; Reggie Wong, interview by author, Boston, September 27, 2010.

businessmen, many of whom had saved their earnings over years in the hopes of one day returning to China. With the defeat of the nationalist government in 1949, longstanding plans to return were now uncertain, and many of these community elites made the decision to invest their life savings into Chinatown.<sup>51</sup> These developments made the Chinese Merchants building possible, and they made the building into a monument both to dashed hopes of one day returning to China and to new dreams of making a home in the United States. The Merchants building thus embodied new visions of home, which reaffirmed Chinatown as a spatial anchor for this multiply displaced transnational community.

For the neighborhood's growing Chinese community, the building served important functions as a kind of Chinese American civic center. The top floor was reserved for association offices and meeting rooms, designed to be a "clearinghouse for Chinese business enterprises" while other floors would be available to residents for civic uses. The building included a five hundred-seat auditorium equipped for both film screenings and stage productions and a two hundred fifty seat banquet hall outfitted with modern amenities. Unlike most dining spaces in Chinatown, which by this point catered to a largely middle class white clientele, the building's banquet hall was intended for private functions and community gatherings. Reflecting the growing numbers of Chinese children in the neighborhood, the basement included recreation spaces for youth, including a "Ping Pong Room" and a "Youth Playroom" with a soft drinks bar. No other recreation or community gathering space in Chinatown compared in size or condition with the new building. And though some former residents recall viewing the building primarily as an Association headquarters ("their space") and only secondarily as a

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<sup>51</sup> "Hub Chinatown Hails Opening"; Stevens, "Dinner at the Den," 33.

community center, community members nonetheless availed themselves of the spacious rooms and meetings halls that were open for social events and recreational activities, including children's plays, youth dance parties, musical performances, film screenings, and community meetings.<sup>52</sup>

The building's strategic geographic location supported its status as a community landmark, and it also positioned the building as a central gateway for visiting shoppers and tourists. Stretching nearly a full city block on a busy intersection, the building was conspicuous to street traffic along a major thoroughfare (Kneeland St.), steps away from Chinatown's main strip of businesses and social organizations (Tyler St.), and within sight of the residents of Hudson and Albany Street to the south, where new Chinese families were establishing themselves amidst the area's longstanding Syrian community. Positioned at this urban crossroads, the building was at once a spatial assertion of Chinatown place identity and an invitation to the stream of commuters and tourists traveling downtown to patronize the Chinese restaurants and businesses just beyond.

While the Merchants building held one set of meanings for its builders and for the surrounding Chinese community, the building performed a related but different kind of cultural work as a public landmark. As civic center for the Chinese community, the building legitimized the Merchants Association as community leaders in the eyes of the civic elite. It also demonstrated that the group had the organizational and hierarchical character necessary to represent Chinatown to the growth regime. And at a time when

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<sup>52</sup> 20 Hudson Street Building Plans, Boston, 1949, Boston Building Department Collection (BBD), Boston Public Library (BPL), Bin-R-94; "Chinatown Merchants Plan Modern Headquarters, Center," *Boston Herald*, April 4, 1948; "Hub Chinatown Hails Opening"; Jason, "Chinese Merchants Plan Huge Building Program"; Arthur Krim, 20 Hudson Street Survey, June 1997, Boston Landmarks Commission Collection (BLC), City of Boston Archives (CBA), Assessor's Number 24N 12E, Form 1802; Reggie Wong, interview; To and CHSNE, *Chinese in Boston*, 8, 67, 108-109.

urban observers were preoccupied with eradicating slums and combating urban decline, the Merchants building served to assert Chinatown as a respectable urban neighborhood and to assure city dwellers that Chinatown was compatible with dominant visions of a reconstructed and revitalized urban center. Combining International Style modernism with what one journalist described as “a strong Oriental motif,” the building was essentially a massive stone block offset by an array of decorative Chinese features. As an expression of modernist architecture, the building’s clean lines and efficient form signified a progressive rationality rising up out of the nineteenth century streetscape that surrounded it. This modernist aesthetic was mediated, however, by signifiers of Chinese culture that celebrated the neighborhood’s ethnic identity. On one end of the roof facing Hudson Street was a dual-level pagoda standing thirty-three feet tall, and on the other end a lush Chinese tea garden. Chinese flags and lanterns were hung on the front of the building, and exterior bronze panels depicted scenes from Chinese history and folklore.<sup>53</sup> This architectural marriage of eastern tradition with western modernism articulated a progressive but moderate social vision, which emphasized cultural pluralism and social harmony while papering over persistent contradictions of race and class. Though by no means conspiratorial, the Chinese Merchants building expressed a carefully crafted public image designed to reassure viewers that Chinese Americans were safe and respectable urban inhabitants, capable of accommodating themselves to the demands of modernity.

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<sup>53</sup> “Chinatown Merchants Plan Modern Headquarters, Center”; Jason, “Chinese Merchants Plan Huge Building Program”; “New Office Building Combines Chinese Art and Modern Lines,” 6; 20 Hudson Street, Building Plans, Boston, 1949, BBD, BPL, Bin-R-94; Krim, 20 Hudson Street Survey, June 1997, BLC, CBA, Assessor’s Number 24N 12E, Form 1802.

Before designing the Chinese Merchants Building, Edward Chin-Park tested out some of these ideas in his design of Chinatown's Good Earth restaurant in 1944. The design for the Good Earth restaurant epitomized the reconstruction of Chinatown's restaurants through its conspicuous juxtaposition of western styles, modern comforts, and exotic Chinese elements, all of which would again find expression in the design of the Merchants Building. Chin-Park developed a comprehensive interior and exterior design for the Good Earth with a two story curved glass facade, reflecting the streamlined Moderne style popular at the time. The exterior projected upscale western styles while the dining room was suggestive of the interior of a Chinese pagoda. The walls were decorated with paintings of Chinese dragons, calligraphy and Chinese lanterns. The booths as well as the ceilings were carved in exaggerated Chinese patterns with exposed beams and tiled roof overhangings.<sup>54</sup> Playing on the popular Pearl Buck novel of the same name, the restaurant promised to transport white diners to a foreign world the moment they stepped inside, and it both benefitted from and contributed to liberal integrationist conceptions of China promoted by Buck and other producers of popular culture at the time.<sup>55</sup> As part the reconstruction of Chinatown commercial space, the Good Earth endorsed an ideology of cultural pluralism, which sanitized racial difference for white consumption while re-inscribing the neighborhood's ethnic place identity. Chin-Park would reapply this design strategy on a larger scale in the Merchants Building.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Stevens, "Dinner at the Den," 37-38; Krim, *Chinatown-South Cove Comprehensive Survey Project*, 18; Building Permit Doc. 03058, December 17, 1940, City of Boston Inspectional Services Department.

<sup>55</sup> Pearl Buck, *The Good Earth* (New York: John Day, 1931). See also Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*.

<sup>56</sup> There is broad agreement that Edward Chin Park did the drawing for the new Good Earth, but building records indicate that an Archie Ruskin was submitted as the initial architect in 1941 and 1944 as the building was prepared for construction. Ruskin was the same architect who performed all the renovations



Historian Eric Darton writes that a building or public space “embodies in its particular form the social imagination that gave it license.”<sup>57</sup> As both a community monument and a designed site of public encounter, the Chinese Merchants building at once issued a claim to Chinatown space and endorsed a complex set of ideas about race, identity, and progress as it reinforced Chinatown’s emergence as a dynamic commercial area, a transformation that was already well under way by the time the Merchants Association announced its neighborhood renewal plan. When the Merchants Association cited future plans for better housing, the construction of a park, and other physical improvements, they were interested in more than simply improving living conditions for Chinatown’s residents. By beautifying Chinatown and by making it an attractive commercial area, Chinatown’s business leaders were also staking a claim to Chinatown space as well as striving to align the neighborhood with broader efforts for city rebuilding that were beginning to gain momentum. In this way, the Merchants building represented a period of profound change for Chinese Americans and the culmination of decades of effort to transform Chinatown’s physical and cultural landscape as a hedge against potential accusations that Chinatown was a slum or blighted area, which could or should be cleared for “better and higher uses.”<sup>58</sup>

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on Ruby Foo’s Den in the 1930s. Building Permit Doc. 03058, December 17, 1940, City of Boston Inspectional Services Department.

<sup>57</sup> As cited in Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*, 374, n. 2, and in the original Eric Darton, *Divided We Stand: A Biography of New York’s World Trade Center* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 6. As critic Beatriz Colomina put it, “[Architecture] is a system of representation. . . . The building should be understood in the same terms as drawings, photographs, writing, films, and advertisements; not only because these are media in which more often we encounter it, but because the building is a mechanism of representation its own right. The building is, after all, a construction in all sense of the word.” Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 13-14.

<sup>58</sup> For overview of urban revitalization movements in the twentieth century, see John H. Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); Jon Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001). This subject is also addressed in chapters 2-4 of this dissertation.

## **“The Street Belonged to All of Us”: Everyday Geographies of Chinatown**

In contrast to the public strategies enacted in the built environment by Chinatown’s merchant elites, a growing residential community remade the midcentury urban neighborhood into an inclusive home place through more quotidian spatial practices of everyday life. Though records documenting the experiences and responses of Chinatown’s working class residents are scarce, it is possible to excavate some clues as to how they imagined and constructed Chinatown for themselves.

The differences between Chinatown’s elite class and its working class residents were reflected in their uses of and relationships to Chinatown space. Motivated both by economic self-interest and by a genuine if paternal concern for Boston’s Chinese community, Chinatown’s business leaders staged public claims to space in ways that sought to control Chinatown’s public image. These involved renovations of signage and decor in public establishments and highly visible modifications of the built landscape. In contrast, Chinatown’s working class residents produced Chinatown space and place through their everyday routines and recreation activities. In the residential areas south of Kneeland Street, there were few if any physical signs that visibly laid claim to Chinatown space in the way that conspicuous restaurant signage did on Tyler Street to the north. Though largely invisible to outsiders, residents engaged in spatial practices which made the generic built environment—largely unmodified from its original 1830s construction—into a place of multiethnic community and of freedom and play.<sup>59</sup>

Former residents recall a vibrant street life on Hudson Street, where a longstanding Syrian community lived alongside a growing Chinese community. Whereas

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<sup>59</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

Chinatown's merchant elites concerned themselves with preserving a monoethnic image of Chinatown, Chinatown's residents had other ideas. On Hudson Street, Chinese and Syrian neighbors shared public space, talked, smoked, and ate together, did business with one another, and formed relationships. One former resident recalled the smell of Syrian bread as "the smell of the community." Others remembered that it took "an hour to walk down one block" because there were so many people to greet, and that "doors were kept open, and neighbors, friends, and family visited frequently." Collectively, these Chinese and Syrian residents formed a kind of interethnic counter-public, which bore witness to the vibrant urban culture that developed in the borderlands of Chinatown and what once was known as Syriantown.<sup>60</sup> This hidden social world contradicts the Orientalism of both the Merchants Association, which promoted a monoethnic image of Chinatown, and the larger public of Boston, which construed Chinatown as exotic and opaque. Residents' everyday spatial practices thus constituted significant political expressions and acts of defiance to these official narratives of urban space, both of which flattened the complexity of Chinatown, albeit towards different ends.

As a consequence of changes to immigration law, the numbers of Chinese youth began to grow significantly after the end of World War II. Resident youth often invented games to play in the streets after school, such as stickball and kick the can, routinely

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<sup>60</sup> Neil Chin and Paul Lee, interview by Chien Chi Huang, Boston, August 28, 1995, Chinese Historical Society of New England (CHSNE); Cynthia Yee, "If Hudson Street Could Talk," *Asian Voices from Beantown: Short Stories & Poetry from the Asian American Resource Workshop Writers' Group*, ed. AARW Writers' Group (Boston: Asian American Resource Workshop, 2012), 95-101. May Lee Tom, "Remembering Hudson Street," *Chinese Historical Society of New England Newsletter* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1996); Chin and Lee, interview; "Hudson Street Stories" and "Syriantown," *Chinatown Banquet*; Evelyn Abdalah Menconi, *The Coffeehouse Wayn Ma Kan Collection: Memories of the Syrian-Lebanese Community of Boston* (West Roxbury, MA: William G. Abdalah Memorial Library, 1996); Reggie Wong, interview by May Lee Tom and Chien Chi Huang, Boston, September 18, 1995; Louis Hadaya, interview by Chien Chi Huang, Boston, September 18, 1995.

transgressing official urban boundaries and re-imagining the streets into spaces of freedom and play.<sup>61</sup> In the words of Albert Yee, who spent his youth in Chinatown:

I recall playing with baseball cards, sliding them on the sidewalk to see who would get one closest to the wall and win. We played with bottle caps, roller-skated and even hopscotch with the girls. In the winter, we built snow fortresses and had snowball fights. The street itself seemed to be an extension of the homes. I disobeyed my parents and played in the highway construction areas, climbing and running around heaps and mounds of dirt and other mammoth structures, investigating, discovering and just having a good time.’<sup>62</sup>

Street play was subversive in its repurposing of the urban landscape and in its creative refusal to conform to official geographies. Chinatown’s youth exposed the arbitrariness of dominant constructions of urban space—particularly spaces that were meant for automobiles—by imagining and living alternatives. Youth created a world of their own by taking over parking lots to play games of baseball, basketball, and volleyball. Former resident Cynthia Yee played “house” at an abandoned gas station on Hudson Street, using old gas pump foundations as stoves and wild dandelion and ailanthus leaves as vegetables.<sup>63</sup> Other youth clubs and spaces included the Knights athletic association, the Gung Ho club, the local YMCA, a Chinese Boy Scout troop, and the Maryknoll Sisters Catholic Mission, which organized a low cost roller-skate rental system for neighborhood youth. A proliferation of such civic groups signaled a growing community. These youth associations reflect the changing character of Chinatown and the multiplicity of spaces and activities that youth engaged in to play, exercise their imagination, demonstrate their

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<sup>61</sup> Cynthia Yee, interview with author, Boston, March 6, 2006; Albert Yee, interview with author, Newton, MA, December 16, 2009; Reggie Wong, interview; Tom, “Remembering Hudson Street”; Yee, “If Hudson Street Could Talk.”

<sup>62</sup> Tom, “Remembering Hudson Street,” 8.

<sup>63</sup> Yee, “If Hudson Street Could Talk,” 96-97.



Figure 1.4. Chinatown residents play a game of baseball on a parking lot at the corner of Beach and Kingston Streets, 1948, To and CHSNE, *Chinese in Boston*, 117.

physical skill, and form relationships with one another.<sup>64</sup>

The residents of Chinatown south of Kneeland Street were less concerned than community elites with policing borders or with crafting an image of monoethnic authenticity. Chinese businessmen in fact cultivated an exotic image of Chinatown to attract customers and encourage economic activity, a development which they hoped might serve to protect the community in the eyes of the state and the broader public. However, this image of a bounded ethnic community and of cultural authenticity was largely fabricated. Mel King recalls, for example, that where he grew up, on Seneca Street in the New York Streets area abutting Chinatown to the south, “there were . . . Irish, Portugese, Albanians, Greeks, Lituanians, Armenians, Jews, Filipinos, Chinese, and

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<sup>64</sup> Cynthia Yee, interview; Albert Yee, interview; Reggie Wong, interview; Tom, “Remembering Hudson Street”; To and CHSNE, *Chinese in Boston*, 80-83.

a few (very few) Yankees. Across the tracks were Syrians and Lebanese and a larger number of Chinese. Although our buildings were pretty well sorted out by color and ethnic background, the street belonged to all of us.”<sup>65</sup> Ironically, many Chinese elites, especially those fluent in English were in fact socially and geographically dispersed. The more successful businesspeople had resided outside of Chinatown since the early 1900s. Ruby Foo, for example, took up residence in Jamaica Plain and Gordon Chue of Cathay House made his home in the suburb of West Roxbury.<sup>66</sup> These business people were, sooner than others, able to find residence in predominantly white communities. Still, many made their living by running businesses in Chinatown, capitalizing on and cultivating an image of Chinatown as an exotic destination for curious tourists and moreover for white consumers. In contrast, the residents of Chinatown blurred and transgressed racial and spatial boundaries, spilling across and into areas such as Syriantown and the New York Streets area further south where they created new hybrid residential and cultural spaces.

## **Conclusion**

Beginning in the 1920s and culminating in the 1940s and 1950s, Chinatown underwent a multi-faceted transformation that shifted the neighborhood’s image from that of a vice district to that of a respectable residential area and tourist district. Chinese

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<sup>65</sup> King, *Chain of Change*, 21. Similarly, a 1929 study noted that the Quincy School in Chinatown was attended by 26 different ethnic groups, including: “Albanian, American, Armenian, Austrian, Brazilian, Cape Verdian, Chinese, English, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Mexican, Nova Scotian, Polish, Portugese, Romanian, Russian, Scotch, Sicilian, Syrian, Turkish, and West Indian.” It is apparent,” the report concluded, “that Boston’s Chinatown is not occupied solely by Orientals.” “Find 26 Peoples in Boston Chinatown: Represented in Schools of That Section,” *Boston Herald*, October 24, 1929.

<sup>66</sup> Stevens, preface to “Dinner at the Den”; The original charter of the Merchants Association places 3 of the 5 founders in West Roxbury and Dorchester addresses. Even if these addresses were falsified, they give some indication of Chinese elites’ geographic mobility across Boston. Corporation No. 10200, Charter Book No. 153, Corporations Division of the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Americans played an important role in this transformation. They reconstructed both the physical and cultural landscape of Chinatown through a set of distinctive social and spatial practices that both reflected and affirmed new ideas of what it meant to be Chinese in America. Chinese American lives and labor remade the Chinatown landscape within the context of massive national and international change, which opened up new possibilities for Chinatown's development. In addition to changes arising out of the Second World War, discourses of urban decline and renewal in the United States also played an important role in the changing conditions for Chinese American lives. These ideas about urban change disrupted and redirected the development of Boston's postwar Chinatown over against its midcentury emergence as family neighborhood and tourist district. The following chapter focuses on this broader urban context and its corresponding discourses of decline and renewal.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Desire Lines: Urban Highways and Visions of Decline and Renewal in Midcentury Boston**

#### **Introduction**

Boston's Chinese American community underwent significant social, cultural, and demographic change as it transformed Chinatown from the 1920s through the 1950s. But the dynamic Chinese American urbanism discussed in the previous chapter took shape against a backdrop of massive urban change and the emergence of a broader discourse of urban decline, which all but erased Chinatown from officials' visions of a revitalized city, whose implied ideal urban inhabitants were white middle class consumers.

With the exception of sensationalized news coverage about crime in the neighborhood, Boston's Chinatown was absent in most accounts of the city until after World War II, including those concerned with urban change. Chinatown, for example, is scarcely mentioned in any of Boston's guidebooks until 1947.<sup>1</sup> And as late as 1960, MIT

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin Bacon, *Boston: A Guidebook to the City and Vicinity* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1928); Prospect Union Association of Cambridge, *Boston Guide and Recreation Directory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930); *Rand McNally Boston Guide to the City and Its Environs*, (New York: Rand McNally, 1923); Walter L. Burrage, *Guide to Boston for Physicians, prepared for the 72nd meeting of the American Medical Association, June 6-10, 1921* (Cambridge, MA: The University Press, 1921); Eleanor Early, *And This Is Boston! And Seashore and Country Too* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930); Esther Forbes, *The Boston Book* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1947); Elizabeth May Herlihy, ed., *Tercentenary of the Founding of Boston, An Account of the Celebration Marking the Three-Hundredth Anniversary of the Settlement of the Site of the City of Boston, MA* (Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1930); Agnes Claire Lyons, *Invitation to Boston: a Merry Guide to Her Past, Present, and Future* (New York: M. Barrows, 1947); George Weston, *Boston Ways: High, By and Folk* (Boston: Beacon, 1947).



urban planner Kevin Lynch found that Chinatown was perceived in the popular imagination to occupy an indistinct region in the city of Boston. Chinatown receives just one mention in Lynch's landmark 1960 study, *The Image of the City*, which was based on fieldwork in Boston and explored the mental image that people have of their urban environment. Lynch cites Chinatown and the North End as examples of "introvert" regions "turned in upon themselves with little reference to the city outside them."<sup>2</sup> Lynch's research notes for the book reveal that Chinatown was often "floating" in the mental maps of Boston that his interview subjects produced. In their words, Chinatown was perceived to be "blank" and "felt to be somewhere 'in back.'"<sup>3</sup>

Whether Chinatown was imagined as a vice district or a family neighborhood, it was almost always construed as somehow separate and distinct from the surrounding city of Boston. In virtually all descriptions, Chinatown was constructed as a "colony," a "settlement," or an "enclave" that existed in excess of Boston proper, always an area that was in transition, either recently formed or soon to be dissolved but never belonging to the city. Despite its apparent transition from a negative to a positive public image, Boston's Chinatown continued to occupy a liminal position in the city's popular imagination, gaining or losing visibility and meaning in moments of crisis, either caught in the crossfire or lost beneath the radar of Boston's narrative of urban decline and its vision for urban renewal. In this way, Chinatown became all too often a space of invisibility or illegibility, and it was omitted in many representations of the city of Boston even as it became hypervisible in others moments and situations. This discursive erasure reveals how discourses of urban decline and renewal are always also discourses of race

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<sup>2</sup> Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), 71.

<sup>3</sup> The Public Image of Boston, between 1954 and 1959, Kevin Lynch papers (KL), Institute Archives and Special Collections, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), MC 208, Box 2.

and citizenship that produce complex and contested forms of power and meaning within specific material circumstances.

This chapter examines the discourse of urban decline that drove Boston towards large-scale urban renewal, focusing in particular on how urban highways were embraced as a means of economic survival for what many perceived to be a rapidly dying central city. In the 1940s, leading up to the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, which authorized funding for a national interstate highway system, public officials, transportation planners, real estate owners, and downtown businessmen seized on the idea that the survival of American cities depended on highways for the elimination of blighted areas and the revitalization of downtown commercial districts. These new highways built in the 1950s and 1960s permanently altered metropolitan landscapes throughout the country. They connected cities to suburban areas, reactivating urban centers as part of regional and national networks. However, they also tore through long-established residential neighborhoods in the central city, which were deemed obsolete and incompatible with modern cities. In their search for a solution to urban decline, highway builders sacrificed these urban communities, converting their gathering places into traffic jams and paving the way for a wide range of subsequent schemes for urban redevelopment.<sup>4</sup>

### **“A Town Without a Future”: Trajectories of Urban Decline in Midcentury Boston**

The United States was at a peak of economic and global strength in the 1940s and 1950s. However, the growth of the postwar economy was profoundly uneven. As some Americans enjoyed the “affluent society,” others—especially working class communities

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<sup>4</sup> Mark H. Rose and Raymond A. Mohl, *Interstate: Highway Politics and Policy since 1939*, 3rd ed. (Knoxville: University Press of Kansas, 2012).

in older industrial cities like Boston—suffered economic devastation as deindustrialization and suburbanization reconfigured the urban landscape.<sup>5</sup> In 1947, journalist Louis M. Lyons painted a distressing portrait of Boston as a city in decline in an essay titled, “Boston: A Study in Inertia.”<sup>6</sup> Chief among his concerns was a growing economic and spatial gulf between rich and poor, as evidenced by the physical deterioration of Boston’s housing stock and infrastructure, which stood in stark contrast to the superior conditions of Boston’s outlying suburbs. He wrote:

The cleavage between city and suburb that marks the tragedy of Boston is a key fact and index of the social condition of the community. Only a few short streets on Beacon Hill and the West Roxbury and Brighton districts compare as residence areas with the better suburbs. For the rest, Boston proper is the home of the poor. A large proportion exist at a low level. In 1940 the Housing Authority found that one-third occupied places renting at twenty-five dollars or less a month. A fifth of all dwelling units in the city were rated as substandard. Half these lacked running water, private baths, or toilets. A third of all dwellings had not heat but stoves. And this condition had changed only by further deterioration by 1946. These are the harsh conditions of the voting population, in contrast to the comfortable suburban dwellers who have no vote and pay no taxes in Boston.<sup>7</sup>

Recognizing suburban growth and urban decline as two sides of the same coin, Lyons was one of many who, in the wake of World War II, were grappling with the consequences of urban decentralization, not least of which was the economic and physical decline of the central city and the abandonment of its residents.<sup>8</sup>

Though Boston’s economic decline was sharply felt after World War II, its origins can be traced back at least to the 1920s, when Boston began to lose its industrial manufacturing base. Well known through the late nineteenth century for its garment

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<sup>5</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958).

<sup>6</sup> Louis M. Lyons, “Boston: Study in Inertia,” in *Our Fair City*, ed. Robert S. Allen (New York, Vanguard Press, 1947), 28-29.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

production, leather goods, and machinery industries, Boston was once one of the nation's largest industrial manufacturing centers.<sup>9</sup> But in the 1920s, many of Boston's garment factories started moving operations to suburban and rural areas, chasing inexpensive land, cheaper labor, lower taxes, and weaker unions. Meanwhile, textile mills in southern New England began moving to the American South, capitalizing on its low-wage labor markets and abundant raw materials.<sup>10</sup> As industrial production in the region diminished, so did the number of wage earners and the total wages paid by manufacturing activity. Meanwhile, the port of Boston saw its volume of cargo and the value of goods shipped through its port decline, which also meant the disappearance of jobs on the docks. As early as 1925, Mayor James Curley declared, "The port of Boston, which for more than a century occupied the first place commercially . . . and a harbor once alive with the shipping of the nations of the world is today merely a port of call."<sup>11</sup>

The Great Depression worsened Boston's economic decline as working class families were devastated by store and factory closures, bank failures, deflation, and widespread unemployment. Historian Thomas O'Connor describes Boston during the

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<sup>9</sup> O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 8-9; Bluestone and Stevenson, *Boston Renaissance*, 15; Peter Stott, *A Guide to Industrial Archeology in Boston Proper* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984).

<sup>10</sup> Edward A. Filene, "Unemployment in New England," in *New England's Prospect*, ed. John K. Wright (New York: American Geographical Society, 1933), 76; David Koistinen, "The Causes of Deindustrialization: The Migration of the Cotton Textile Industry from New England to the South," *Enterprise & Society* 3, no. 3 (2002), 482-520; Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South 1938-1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 6. On Southern 'plantation bloc' capitalists who sought to attract northern manufacturing to the South as a way of suppressing black development, see Woods, *Development Arrested*.

<sup>11</sup> Elihu Rubin, *Insuring the City: The Prudential Center and the Postwar Urban Landscape* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 79; O'Connor, *Building A New Boston*, 9; Jim Vrabel, *When in Boston: A Time Line and Almanac* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 278. As John Mollenkopf reminds us, "The postindustrial transformation did not 'just happen,' but grew out of the nearly universal rejection of the kind of city which the rapid, haphazard, and rapacious growth of industrial capitalism produced between 1850 and 1930. . . . [Though industrial capitalism] produced tremendous wealth, it also created new miseries and intense new forms of political and social conflict." Mollenkopf, *Contested City*, 14.

Depression as a scene where “panhandlers roamed the streets looking for handouts, idle workers waited for boats to come into the Fish Pier with unsalable scraps of codfish, and the jobless curled up on park benches or huddled in the doorways of public buildings.”<sup>12</sup> By the mid-1930s, many downtown property owners found their tall buildings no longer profitable, with rents falling and high vacancy rates in office buildings. To lower their property taxes, property owners demolished their buildings and replaced them with “taxpayers,” which was the nickname given to parking lots and one- and two-story garages.<sup>13</sup>

To make matters worse, Boston’s “rascal king” mayor James Curley involved himself in political feuds with other Democrats at the local, state, and federal levels including President Franklin Roosevelt, which prevented Boston from receiving its share of New Deal public spending and delayed the city’s recovery from the Depression. Historian Charles Trout estimates that Curley’s antics cost Boston “as many as 10,000 [Community Works Administration] jobs, the benefit of any [Public Works Administration] money until 1935, a serious delay in the start-up of local projects of the [Works Progress Administration] and a year-long delay in the payment of unemployment compensation provided by the Social Security Act of 1935.”<sup>14</sup>

World War II temporarily revived Boston’s economy as working class families benefited from jobs that became available in shipyards, army bases, garment factories, and industrial plants.<sup>15</sup> Some anticipated that the city’s decades-long downward trend

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<sup>12</sup> O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 8-9.

<sup>13</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown*, 218.

<sup>14</sup> Jack Beatty, *The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley, 1874-1958* (Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 2000); Charles Trout, *Boston: The Great Depression and the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 186.

<sup>15</sup> O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 17.

would finally reverse itself after the war.<sup>16</sup> However, as other cities were becoming “arsenals of democracy,” Boston and New England as a whole did not gain from the wartime economic boom as much as some other areas, like California.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Boston’s economic decline persisted through the 1950s as the city continued to lose businesses and much of its tax-paying population to the suburbs and beyond. Meanwhile, as Lyons observed, Boston’s residential properties languished, and many single-family townhouses were converted to tenements and boardinghouses.<sup>18</sup>

Like most American cities, Boston lost substantial population to the suburbs after World War II, but this trend began much earlier. Unlike most central cities in the United States, which grew faster than their surrounding suburbs until around 1920, residential decentralization was actually already underway in Boston by 1890. The annexation process in Boston, which was substantially over by 1873, created a metropolitan area in which the central city comprised an unusually small proportion of the population and land area, compared with other metropolitan areas throughout the nation.<sup>19</sup> Boston’s share of the metropolitan population fell continuously, from nearly half in 1880 to little more than a third in 1940. After reaching its peak population of 801,444 in 1950, Boston’s residential population dropped precipitously, losing over 100,000 people by 1960, and nearly a quarter million by 1980.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, the middle-class suburb of Canton to the south of Boston saw its population nearly quadruple, to 17,100, in just twenty years, from 1950 to 1970. During the same period, the suburb of Randolph nearly

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<sup>16</sup> Bluestone and Stevenson, *Boston Renaissance*, 81.

<sup>17</sup> Sugrue, *Origins of Urban Crisis*; Charles K. Hyde, *Arsenal of Democracy: The American Automobile Industry in World War II* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 79; Lyons, “Boston: A Study in Inertia.”

<sup>19</sup> Bluestone and Stevenson, *Boston Renaissance*, 77. Hyde Park was the last area to be annexed to Boston in 1912.

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 138-139; Bluestone and Stevenson, *Boston Renaissance*, 16.

tripled in population to 27,000, and Framingham's population doubled to 64,000.<sup>21</sup> Between 1950 and 1960, Boston's surrounding suburbs rose in population by 17.6% while its central city population dropped by 13%, the largest percentage decline of all large northeastern cities.<sup>22</sup>

Boston's loss of population was of course uneven across race and class lines. The growth of Boston's "streetcar suburbs" in the late nineteenth century along the street railway lines was led by Boston's middle and upper classes, which sought retreat from the oppressiveness of urban life by building outlying rural estates in areas like Jamaica Plain and West Roxbury. Some of these families would soon leave for the even more suburban locales of Newton to the west and Medford to the North, which evolved in the 1920s from independent towns into residential communities.<sup>23</sup> After the Second World War, widespread preference for low-density neighborhoods of single-family homes combined with a rise in real incomes to propel white middle class families toward the "crabgrass frontier."<sup>24</sup> Many of these families wished to leave behind the high crime rates, heavy congestion, and growing numbers of black people that they associated with the city. Their migration was subsidized by the federal government, which ratified incentives that fueled the growth of suburbs at the expense of central cities. The Federal Housing Administration, together with the Veterans Administration, guaranteed long-term, low-interest mortgages that allowed a large group of moderate-income households to find residence in the suburbs. A mortgage interest-deduction in the federal personal

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<sup>21</sup> Bluestone and Stevenson, *Boston Renaissance*, 16.

<sup>22</sup> Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*, 124.

<sup>23</sup> Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 71; see also Sam Bass Warner, Jr. *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

<sup>24</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*; Peter G. Rowe, *Making a Middle Landscape* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

income tax code further induced these households to leave the central city for suburban single-family homes. The government also enacted federal policies that reinforced local factors working to make Boston's suburbs economically and racially homogenous. The Federal Housing Administration explicitly encouraged the use of racially restrictive covenants in sales contracts and deeds involving mortgage insurance, asserting, "if a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes. A change in social or racial occupancy generally contributes to instability or a decline in values." Though the Supreme Court ruled this practice unenforceable in 1948, the FHA continued to refuse mortgage insurance to minority-dominated inner-city areas until 1965. As a result of these policies and practices, the white population of Boston dropped from 758,700 to 622,746 between 1950 and 1960. By 1970, it fell to only 524,000—a startling loss of nearly a quarter million in just two decades.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile the urban core remained home to an increasingly segregated and now growing population of racial and ethnic minorities, the majority of whom were relegated to bottom-rung service sector employment and also prevented by racially restrictive covenants from finding residence in integrated communities. Between 1940 and 1950, Boston's nonwhite population more than doubled from 25,350 to 54,996. Though mostly comprised of black migrants displaced from the American south, these midcentury newcomers also included hundreds of Chinese immigrants, who took advantage of relaxed immigration restrictions as well as the 1945 War Brides Act and the Chinese

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<sup>25</sup> Bluestone and Stevenson, *Boston Renaissance*, 51, 78-80; See also Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*; Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*; Hillel Levine and Lawrence Harmon, *The Death of an American Jewish Community: A Tragedy of Good Intentions* (New York: Free Press, 1992); Gregory D. Squires and Charis E. Kubrin, *Privileged Places: Race, Residence, and the Structure of Opportunity* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006).



Refugee Acts. Though the Chinese in Boston numbered only 1,383 in 1940 and roughly 2,900 in 1950, this represented a doubling in size of the second largest nonwhite racial group in the city.<sup>26</sup> Boston's nonwhite population was proportionally small compared to other large Northeastern cities, but when compared to the 154 cities and towns in the Greater Boston metropolitan region, only Boston had more than a 5 percent nonwhite population as late as 1950. And this population was becoming more concentrated. By 1960, Boston's percentage of nonwhite residents nearly doubled from 5.3% to 9.8%. By 1970, it doubled again to 18.1%.<sup>27</sup>

By the 1950s, suburbanization and deindustrialization together with an aging municipal infrastructure and a growing nonwhite population led many observers to view Boston as a "hopeless backwater" and as "a town without a future" that had "become ill, decaying at the core."<sup>28</sup> In a 1959 article for Harper's Magazine, journalist Elizabeth Hardwick portrayed downtown Boston as "a dreary jungle of honky-tonks for sailors, dreary department-store windows, Loew's movie houses, hillbilly bands, strippers, parking lots, [and] undistinguished new buildings."<sup>29</sup> By this point, Boston's tax base had shrunk to seventy-five percent of its tax base in 1929, and years of economic disinvestment resulted in Moody's Investor Service demoting Boston to the lowest bond

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<sup>26</sup> Yin, "The Population Pattern," 59-69; Robert C. Hayden, "A Historical Overview of Poverty among Blacks in Boston, 1950-1990," *Trotter Review* 17, no. 1 (2007), 131-43; Bluestone and Stevenson, *Boston Renaissance*, 25-27; Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*. The 1950 Census grouped "Chinese" under the racial category of "Other." It is possible that Japanese American and Native American populations accounted for a small fraction of this number.

<sup>27</sup> Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*, 126; Bluestone and Stevenson, *Boston Renaissance*, 8-9, 78-80. Of the twelve largest cities that Teaford studies, only Minneapolis had a smaller percentage of nonwhite residents than Boston at 1.6%. See also Fogelson, *Downtown*; Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs*; Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*; George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, revised and expanded edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); Lipsitz *How Racism Takes Place*.

<sup>28</sup> Alex Krieger, David A. Cobb, Amy Turner, eds. *Mapping Boston* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 162; *Boston Contest of 1944: Prize Winning Programs* (Boston: Boston University, 1945).

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Hardwick, "Boston: The Lost Ideal," *Harper's Magazine* (December 1959), 64.

rating of all U.S. cities with a population of over 500,000.<sup>30</sup> In contrast to the situation of Boston's "comfortable suburban dwellers," many feared that urban decline in the central city was fast approaching crisis.<sup>31</sup>

### **Saving Downtown from Decentralization**

Many Bostonians shared this sense of the city's economic and physical decline. And as their counterparts did in other cities, urban observers in postwar Boston diagnosed decentralization as the principal "cancer" draining the city of its vitality as an urban center.<sup>32</sup> Residential dispersal of Boston's wealthier residents were leaving behind so-called "slums" and "blighted neighborhoods" in its wake, and many viewed these older central city neighborhoods as a threat to the social order and as a dangerous burden on the public treasury, one that might eventually bankrupt the city. Meanwhile, downtown business leaders were deeply concerned about the depressing effect that these neighborhoods might have on adjacent commercial property values.<sup>33</sup> For others, commercial decentralization posed an even greater threat to the city than residential dispersal. While business leaders bemoaned the loss of commercial activity downtown, many recognized that commercial decentralization threatened to severely cripple the city's budget. In the 1940s and 1950s, Boston still depended on property taxes for most its municipal revenue. In fact, two thirds of its funding came from property taxes—more

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<sup>30</sup> Bluestone and Stevenson, *Boston Renaissance*, 101; O'Connor, *Building A New Boston*, 147.

<sup>31</sup> Lyons, "Boston: Study in Inertia," 28-29.

<sup>32</sup> Many urban observers framed their discussions of the city in terms of human life. Other bodily metaphors positioned the city as having veins, arteries, heads, heart, and feet. For many, the city was capable of "dying," being "on life support," and later on being "reborn."

<sup>33</sup> Harland Bartholomew, "The American City: Disintegration Is Taking Place," *Vital Speeches of the Day* 7, no. 1 (November 1940), 64. Some in fact blamed the Federal Housing Administration for abandoning the older central city neighborhoods. Planner Harland Bartholomew, for example, argued that FHA policies had "the effect of accelerating decentralization and of undermining the values of property in three-fourths of the main body of the city."

than any large city in the Northeast—and Boston derived more than half of its total tax revenue from business property.<sup>34</sup>

Despite having the nation's highest property tax, Boston's tax base was also one of the most depressed.<sup>35</sup> This was partly because the practice of assessing property in Mayor Curley's era was among the most corrupt in the city.<sup>36</sup> Curley earned the ire of Boston's business leaders and financial community through his manipulations of real estate tax assessments, whereby residential sections (where voters were plentiful) were given lower valuations while downtown properties, especially hotels and department stores, were assessed at exorbitant rates. In 1946, for example, the assessed value of the Statler Hotel was raised \$1 million while the valuation of Filene's department store was increased by \$950,000 and Jordan Marsh's by \$615,000.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, Curley redirected tax revenue from downtown real estate into public projects in Boston's poor neighborhoods. Styling himself as a latter day Robin Hood and a mayor of the poor, Curley openly bragged about his strategy for redistributing income from the wealthy to the poor and needy.<sup>38</sup> In 1916, during Curley's first term as mayor, George F. Washburn, president of the Massachusetts Real Estate Exchange complained that Boston's tax structure resembled "an inverted pyramid with the small end of it resting for its support on [a] very small congested area," the downtown retail district.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*, 18, 76-77; Boston City Planning Board, *General Plan for Boston*, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*, 74-75.

<sup>36</sup> Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 74; O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 9-20; Kennedy, *Planning the City upon a Hill*, 132-155.

<sup>37</sup> Kennedy, *Planning the City upon a Hill*, 142-145.

<sup>38</sup> Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 74; O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 9-12.

<sup>39</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown*, 193

As a result of Curley's style of politics, Boston's business and financial elite came to view the city as hostile to their interests and withdrew from making investments.<sup>40</sup> In 1955 the chairman of the board of Sears, Roebuck told a Boston department store executive that Sears would not consider any additional branches in the New England metropolis because of the exorbitant property tax, and many other business chiefs claimed to cross Boston off their list of possible sites for the same reason.<sup>41</sup> Business disinvestment posed a serious threat to the city's economic base as over half of the city's municipal revenue derived from taxes on business property, and especially retail businesses, which were concentrated downtown.<sup>42</sup>

Though diminished from its former glory, downtown Boston continued to function after World War II as the center of the metropolitan area's commercial activity, and people were still coming there to work, shop, and to amuse themselves. And despite the city's imposition of a heavy property tax on downtown businesses, not all of them fled. The central city was still attractive enough that Jordan Marsh invested \$11 million into its downtown store in the early 1950s.<sup>43</sup> However, there were also signs of economic stagnation. Beginning in the 1930s, Boston's share of metropolitan retail trade declined as outlying business districts and shopping malls expanded on the suburban fringe.<sup>44</sup> Many now did their shopping in new suburban business centers. Some stopped going downtown or went much less often.<sup>45</sup> Even as automobile use by downtown visitors and workers increased by 47 percent between 1927 and 1938, seven percent fewer persons

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<sup>40</sup> Kennedy, *Planning the City upon a Hill*, 142-145.

<sup>41</sup> Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*, 75.

<sup>42</sup> Boston City Planning Board, *General Plan for Boston*, 13.

<sup>43</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown*, 382.

<sup>44</sup> Boston City Planning Board, *General Plan for Boston*, 18.

<sup>45</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown*, 222.

converged on Boston's downtown shopping district, and this trend only intensified in the postwar years.<sup>46</sup>

Another indication of downtown decline was the increased usage of the expression "central business district" in planning literature and popular discourse. Historian Robert Fogelson has pointed out that increased use of this terminology reflected an emerging popular recognition that downtown centers were no longer the *only* business district in the metropolitan area, but rather one of many and now in competition with business centers in outlying districts. Moreover, downtown business and property owners were beginning to realize that downtown's dominance could no longer be assumed. In other words, its status as the "central" business district was no longer a given. In fact, downtown's dominance now needed to be actively secured and safeguarded. Still, downtown remained vital to the imagined urban landscape. As one Boston planner declared in 1955, "No vision of the 'city of tomorrow,' no matter how decentralized or how dispersed, can conceive of no downtown."<sup>47</sup>

For downtown businessmen and property owners as well as for Boston's municipal leaders and urban planners, commercial revival of the downtown area was essential to the future of the central city.<sup>48</sup> Though Boston's downtown commercial area accounted for only one quarter of one percent of the city's total land area, it accounted for nearly ten percent of the city's tax revenue.<sup>49</sup> Attracting and keeping business downtown would be key to preserving the dominance and vitality of the central city in the face of suburban outmigration.

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<sup>46</sup> William H. Ballard, *A Survey in Respect to the Decentralization of the Boston Central Business District* (Boston: Urban Land Institute, 1940), 27.

<sup>47</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown*, 183-186, 388.

<sup>48</sup> Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*, 25.

<sup>49</sup> Boston City Planning Board, *General Plan for Boston*, 18-21.

According to downtown businessmen, property owners, and some urban planners, the main causes of decline in the central business district were the linked problems of residential dispersal and traffic congestion. In their minds, residential dispersal removed the middle and upper classes, leaving behind the poor, many of whom were racial and ethnic minorities. From the perspective of business owners, they were losing their best customers, keeping their worst, and ending up surrounded by a ring of blight.<sup>50</sup> This interpretation was embraced and vigorously promoted by the Urban Land Institute (ULI), a non-profit research corporation sponsored by the National Association of Real Estate Boards, who began in 1940 to research urban problems. The trustees of the ULI were prominent merchants, bankers, insurance executives, and property owners, all of whom had a financial stake in the well-being of the central business district, and their research reflected these interests.<sup>51</sup> In April 1940, the ULI published one of their first reports, titled *Decentralization: What Is It Doing to Our Cities?* In it, they portray decentralization as a threat to “much of what we now prize as civilization” and argue that the blighted areas that decentralization leaves in its wake threatens the economic well-being not only of the central business district but of the entire central city. They sponsored dozens of studies in cities highlighting the seriousness of decentralization as a national problem, and they advocated for local, state, and even federal action to slow residential dispersal, rehabilitate blighted areas in the central city, and rebuild America’s cities. The ULI was the national mouthpiece for a downtown development agenda that would shape the politics of urban development in Boston and other cities for decades to

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<sup>50</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown*, 230-232.

<sup>51</sup> Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*, 26; Fogelson, *Downtown* 238.

come. A key component of this program for city rebuilding in the 1950s would be the radical reconstruction of downtown traffic patterns.<sup>52</sup>

### **Boston’s “Crooked and Narrow Streets”**

Since the early twentieth century, Boston’s “crooked and narrow streets” presented a problem that preoccupied Boston’s urban planners, politicians, businessmen, and journalists. On a typical weekday in 1927, about 825,000 people entered downtown Boston, which was more than the entire population of the city and more than one-third of the population of the metropolitan district. Increased automobile traffic caused terrible traffic congestion downtown, earning it the nickname “the congested district.” One city planner complained in 1930, “There is probably no city in the United States where traffic conditions on the streets of the downtown business section [is] so near the saturation point as [it is] here in Boston.”<sup>53</sup>

In the opinion of the ULI, urban revitalization demanded adaptation to the automobile age, through measures such as improved traffic circulation and more parking facilities. Downtown businessmen and property owners concluded that reducing traffic congestion was the key to their well-being. In their view, making downtown more accessible would increase business, raise property values, bring in capital, and slow or perhaps even halt decentralization. By mimicking the suburban logic of accessibility—that is by making it easier for people, goods, and capital to circulate through downtown

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<sup>52</sup> *Decentralization: What Is It Doing to Our Cities? A Preliminary Survey of 512 Reports by Expert Appraisers and Brokers from 221 Cities on What This New Force is Doing to Urban Life* (Chicago: Urban Land Institute, 1940).

<sup>53</sup> Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 96; Fogelson, *Downtown*, 188, 192; Kennedy, *Planning the City upon a Hill*, 136.

as quickly and efficiently as possible—they argued that the central city could better compete with the suburbs.<sup>54</sup>

To address the traffic problem, engineers conducted hundreds of studies of traffic congestion in Boston and other cities in the early twentieth century.<sup>55</sup> Over several decades, many different solutions were invented and proposed, but most studies arrived at the same conclusion: the way to solve the traffic problem was to build a new type of highway known as a freeway or expressway. Being much wider than surface streets and being free of grade crossings, these limited-access roads could, according to one estimate, handle three and a half times the traffic of an ordinary street of the same width, and they would allow traffic to flow continuously, as fast as the law permitted. Like most urban planners and traffic experts, engineer Miller McClintock argued that freeways should be built from outlying residential sections “directly to the heart of the community” or “as near the [central business] district as may be possible.” By accelerating traffic and increasing accessibility, urban planners, municipal leaders, and engineers believed that expressways would slow or halt downtown commercial decline, encourage the recentralization of business and thus revive the city more generally.<sup>56</sup> In 1947, the federal commissioner of public roads expressed a prevailing attitude of postwar urban planning when he wrote that new highways, “developed with vision, will do much to stop the decay of our cities and prevent the attendant decrease in property values.”<sup>57</sup> Most downtown businessmen and property owners agreed as did most motorists, who were

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<sup>54</sup> Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*, 27, 42; Fogelson, *Downtown*, 111, 249.

<sup>55</sup> On the relation between the automobile and urbanization in the early twentieth century, see Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>56</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown*, 255-256, 260-263, 273, 275

<sup>57</sup> Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*, 95.



enthralled by the vision of sleek, modern high-speed highways free of congestion. Indeed, highways were as much as a cultural expression of midcentury modernity as they were a strictly technological innovation.

In the 1930s and 1940s, planners began to make proposals for expressway systems in Greater Boston. Envisioned as economic lifelines for the central business district, most of them converged on the central business district, designed to move traffic to and through downtown as quickly and efficiently as possible.<sup>58</sup> For example, in 1930, the Boston Planning Board enlisted Robert Whitten, the president of the American City Planning Institute, to author the city's first comprehensive citywide highway study, the *Report on a Thoroughfare Plan for Boston*. "The Plan," Whitten stated, "is based primarily on a recognition of the need for a modernization of the present highway system by the development of a limited mileage of express roads and parkways of generous width and permitting a continuous flow of traffic." Based on extensive traffic count statistics, the *Report* made a series of recommendations calling for a total of ten major and fifty-six lesser transportation projects. Key proposals included a tunnel connecting the central city to East Boston and two highways from the west and southwest that also led downtown: the Blue Hills Radial and the Boston & Albany Highway. However, the centerpiece of Whitten's proposal was an elevated "Central Artery" highway in the central business district that linked to arterial roads and distributed traffic downtown.<sup>59</sup>

The Central Artery, it was believed, would attract forty percent of the vehicles that were clogging city streets at the time. According to Whitten, "The Central Artery,

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<sup>58</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown*, 275; Sam Speroni, "Before the Big Dig: Boston's 1948 Master Highway Plan and Its Fortunate Failure," (B.A. thesis, Brown University, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> Boston City Planning Board, *Report on a Thoroughfare Plan for Boston* (Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1930), 6.

with its upper-level roadway is a practical way to provide for this through traffic, while at the same time affording enormous relief to the traffic going to and from the Central District itself.” Inspired by New York’s West Side Elevated Highway, Whitten and the Boston Planning Board argued that it was economically imperative for the Central Artery to be built. The report contended that the people of metropolitan Boston were spending \$180 million a year for motor vehicle transportation. Delays reduced efficiency by ten to twenty percent, so even a ten percent increase in the efficiency of the traffic flow, Whitten argued, would be worth \$18 million annually. “The proposed express roads and other projects are costly,” concluded Whitten, “but they are not nearly as costly as the present condition and delay.”<sup>60</sup>

The Great Depression delayed government action on Whitten’s recommendations, but traffic congestion and decentralization persisted. In June 1940, Mayor Maurice Tobin convened a “Conference on Traffic,” including representatives of twenty-four leading civic organizations, in an effort to move forward on some of Whitten’s recommendations. Based on Whitten’s *Report*, Tobin’s traffic conference presented a six-year, \$20 million program for the construction of expressways in Boston. Basic to the plan was the conference’s belief that “relief of downtown traffic congestion” was of “primary importance to the taxpayers of the city.” In conformity with this view the plan outlined a network of highways that, according to a Boston newspaper, would “take long-distance traffic off the Hub’s narrow streets and . . . make the downtown section quickly accessible to the suburbs.” This would be “a major step toward halting the decline in activity and the shrinkage of property values in the downtown area.” The Off Street Parking and Terminals Committee of Mayor Tobin’s Conference on Traffic also

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<sup>60</sup> Boston City Planning Board, *Report on a Thoroughfare*, 12.

recommended construction of municipal parking garages costing \$8 million and accommodating three thousand cars.<sup>61</sup> World War II massively curtailed highway construction, further delaying action on Whitten's recommendations, but planning and discussion continued through the war.<sup>62</sup>

In 1944, a "Boston Contest" was staged to solicit broad-reaching proposals for all kinds of urban matters, including traffic problems. The Contest was initiated by the Boston Society of Architects, administered by Boston University, sponsored by Governor Leverett Saltonstall and Mayor Tobin, and supported by MIT, Harvard University, and the Chamber of Commerce. It drew numerous proposals and boasted a panel of distinguished judges, including famed urbanist Lewis Mumford. Receiving significant support from downtown department stores and insurance companies, the Boston Contest indicates the extent to which by the mid 1940s, a broad range of academics, planners, architects, and government officials had come to share a common vision for downtown development, which tethered the city's future to the accessibility and well-being of its central business district.<sup>63</sup> The winning team, headed by Harvard political scientist Carl Friedrich, argued that the metropolitan area had "become ill, decaying at the core, because its vitality has not been a common concern of all those having a stake in it."

Among the Harvard team's proposals to solve the problem of a decentralized metropolis

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<sup>61</sup> "Traffic Artery Across City Recommended, *Boston Globe*, June 12, 1940, 9; "Skyway Highway," *Boston Globe*, June 12, 1940, 14; *Christian Science Monitor*, June 11, 1940, 1, 12, as cited in Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*, 30.

<sup>62</sup> Melvin R. Levin, *The Boston Regional Survey* (Boston: Mass Transportation Commission, 1963), 90.

<sup>63</sup> *Boston Contest of 1944*. The first prize of \$5000 was won by a Harvard team chaired by Carl J. Friedrich, professor of government, and that also included Seymour Harris, associate professor of economics, Talcott Parsons, professor of sociology, Charles Chrington, instructor in government, George R. Walker, Harvard trustee, and Walter Francis Bogner, professor of architecture and dean of the Graduate School of Design. The second prize of \$3000 went to a team chaired by Henry I. Harriman, vice-chairman, New England Power Association, Louis M. Lyons, writer, *Boston Globe*; Edward Dana, president, Boston Elevated Company; John C. Kiley, Boston real estate man, Joseph D. Leland, president, Boston Society of Architects, Philip Nichols, a Boston lawyer, and Robert Bottomly, a Boston lawyer.

was for all communities within a twenty-five mile radius of the city to be politically reorganized into a metropolitan governing body under the name, “The Boston Metropolitan Authority.” Friedrich and his team denounced the business exodus from Boston’s downtown, and they blamed the city’s confusing street patterns and lack of highways: “Downtown Boston is badly affected by the deterioration of the central core of the metropolitan region. This business section occupying only about 2% of the total area is no longer able to carry 72% of the city’s expense. The properties which have shouldered this burden are unable to carry their load because downtown congestion and obsolescence have destroyed their earning power. . . . In order to halt the flight of business from the center, we must plan with vision, boldness, and skill.” The winning team called for “a network of streets that will bring a population flow to feed the downtown area with new business” in a way that would “facilitate concentration without congestion,” and they concluded that “the most pressing problem of the next decade is that of rebuilding and expanding existing highway and street facilities to a level which will permit transportation by private motor car and by public highway conveyance throughout the metropolitan area with speed, safety, and economy.”<sup>64</sup> In fact, all of the top prize winners of the *Boston Contest* proposed variants of a hub and spoke road network, some form of north-south elevated expressway leading to the central business district, and additional roads reaching into the center from the west. Though the traffic proposals submitted to the Boston Contest were not directly realized, they echoed Whitten’s earlier recommendations, and they closely resembled transportation proposals that would be made again after World War II.

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<sup>64</sup> *Boston Contest of 1944*, 14-16.

By the end of the war, the state's highways had fallen into neglect. One third of the state's main roads were more than twenty years old, and fewer than five percent of the roads had been constructed within the previous ten years.<sup>65</sup> Within a month after the war's end, the Massachusetts Department of Public Works (DPW), the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC), and the State Planning Board jointly initiated the most extensive highway needs study up to that point for the Greater Boston area.<sup>66</sup> This study was published in the 1948 *Master Highway Plan for the Boston Metropolitan Area*, which was commissioned by Governor Robert F. Bradford and authored by the private consulting firm of Charles A. Maguire and Associates with the aid of DeLeuw, Cather and Company, a Chicago-based planning firm. Based on a total of 22,500 home interviews and 111,000 cordon line roadside interviews, the 1948 plan calculated so-called traffic demand statistics, which were projected upon a map of the Boston region and labeled "desire lines." The *Master Highway Plan* defined a desire line as "a straight line between the point of origin and the point of destination of a trip or group of similar trips, without regard to routes traveled, in other words the line of travel if a direct highway existed." According to the plan, these desire lines represented the path that eighty-five percent of motorists wanted to enter the downtown area, and they dramatized the demand for modern, express highways from the suburbs to the central city. The 1948 plan proposed to satisfy these desire lines by translating them into a set of seven radiating freeways leading into the central city, each terminating at an inner belt highway which encircled downtown and included the Central Artery first proposed in 1930. In addition, the 1948 plan recommended the construction of an outer belt connecting each of the

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<sup>65</sup> O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 80.

<sup>66</sup> Levin, *Boston Regional Survey*, 90.

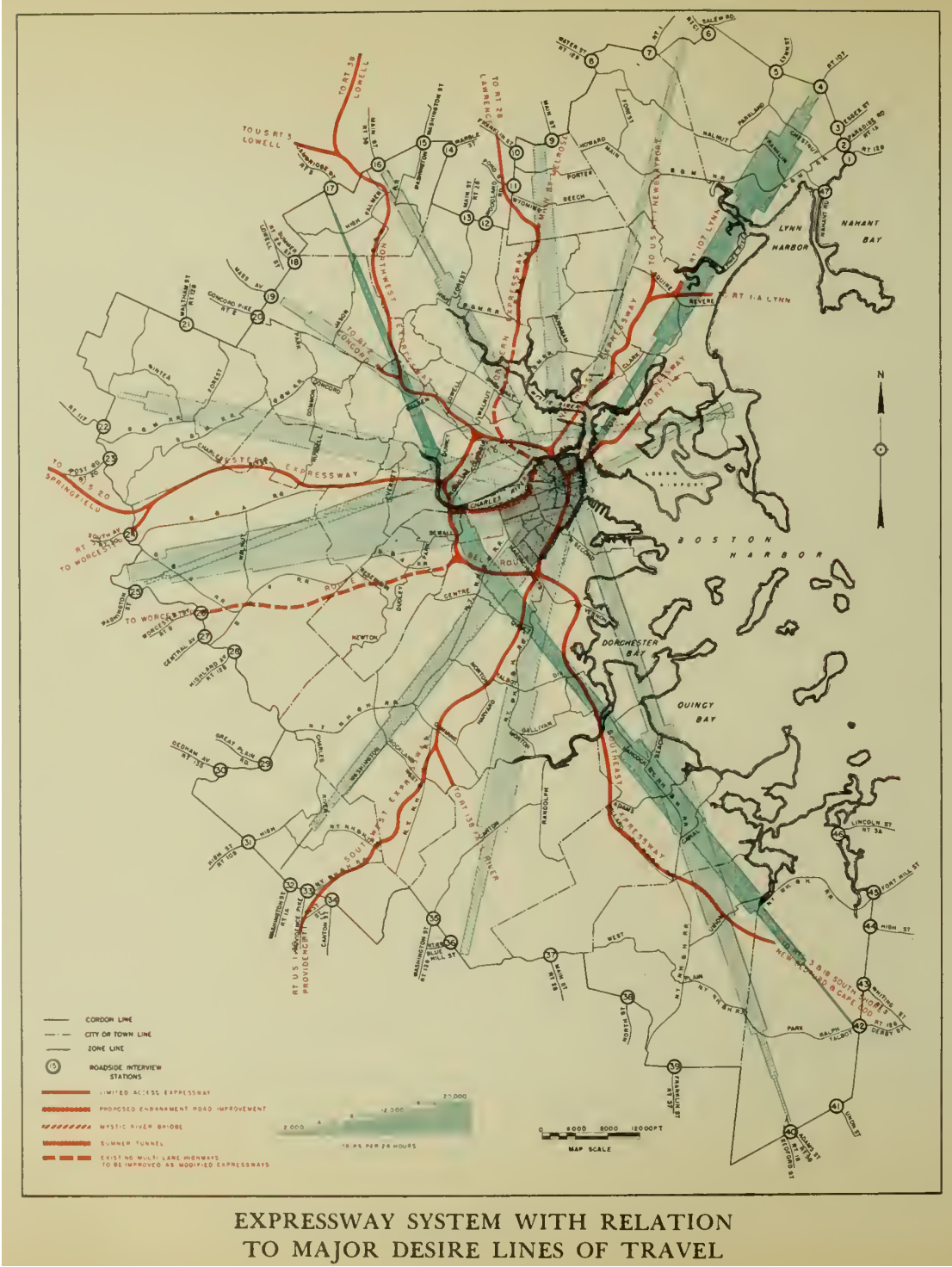


Figure 1.1. *The 1948 Master Highway Plan* dramatized Boston’s desire for rapid movement. On this map, red lines represented planned urban expressways, including the Central Artery. Green “desire lines” were based on a measure of “trips per hour,” which were indicated by thickness. Expressways were meant to relieve traffic by matching these “desire lines” as closely as possible. Maguire and Associates, *1948 Master Highway Plan*, 50.

arterial roads at about a ten mile radius from downtown Boston. This outer belt would facilitate transportation between suburbs and also allow cars and trucks to bypass Boston if necessary.<sup>67</sup> By the late 1940s, under pressure from the highway lobby, city officials, and downtown business interests, both state and federal government abandoned their long-held position that urban highways were a local responsibility. Massachusetts was one of many states that began to designate urban freeways as state highways and to earmark funds to build them. The federal government, which had long provided funds for rural roads, also began to subsidize urban highways, first as part of the New Deal programs and later as part of the national defense efforts.<sup>68</sup> In 1944, Congress enacted legislation that earmarked twenty five percent of all federal highway funds for road construction in urban areas with populations of five thousand or more, and Washington agreed to pay up to half the cost of all the new urban thoroughfares. From 1946 through 1955 this urban share of federal highway funds totaled \$1.09 billion.<sup>69</sup> These new sources of funding made possible the 1948 *Master Highway Plan*. At this point, Congress was also holding hearings on legislation that would lead in 1956 to the creation of the National Interstate and Defense Highways System, which would include most of the

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<sup>67</sup> Charles A. Maguire and Associates, *Master Highway Plan for Boston Metropolitan Area* (Boston: Joint Board for the Metropolitan Master Highway Plan, 1948), 12.

<sup>68</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown*, 276; Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*, 93-95. Federal subsidies of roads in urban areas was a long and painful process. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1928 set the first limited progress making federal funds available within municipalities of 2500 or more, along those sections of highway on which the houses (were) ...more than 200 feet apart on the average. As part of the New Deal, Emergency Relief and Construction Act of 1932, the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 and the Hayden-Cartwright Act of 1934 were emergency acts offered to states to provide highway construction in cities where unemployment was most severe. In this way, it was geared less towards urban planning than towards addressing unemployment.

<sup>69</sup> Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*, 93-95; Kenneth Geiser, Jr. *Urban Transportation Decision Making* (Cambridge, MA: Urban Systems Laboratory, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1970), 14-15.

nation's as yet unbuilt urban freeways and add further fuel to Boston's transportation projects.<sup>70</sup>

Although Robert Bradford was unable to secure funding for the 1948 *Master Highway Plan* before being defeated by Democrat Paul Dever in 1949, Dever, working with state legislators and, benefitting from a Democratic majority, passed in his first term in office a \$100 million bond for state highways, financed by an increase in the state gas tax.<sup>71</sup> With funding secured to build new highways, Governor Dever reappointed William F. Callahan in 1949 as the commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Works (DPW) after a ten-year hiatus.<sup>72</sup> In this role, Callahan gave his highest priority to two sections of the Master Highway Plan of 1948. One was the State Route 128, the circumferential highway that Callahan himself had initiated in his first term as DPW commissioner, between 1934-1939. The other was the Central Artery, the central thoroughfare designed to alleviate the longstanding problem of congestion in downtown Boston.<sup>73</sup>

These transportation plans were codified again in the 1950 *General Plan for Boston*. At the request of reformist mayor John Hynes, who won his 1949 campaign on the theme of a reformed and reconstructed "New Boston," Boston's City Planning Board issued a *General Plan for Boston* in 1950. All cities wishing to take advantage of the federal subsidies made available under Title I of the 1949 Housing Act required the development of a general or master plan. Boston's *General Plan* satisfied this

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<sup>70</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown*, 276. Rose and Mohl, *Interstate*, 85-112.

<sup>71</sup> O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 80.

<sup>72</sup> Kennedy, *Planning the City upon a Hill*, 171. Dates of Callahan's second tenure varies. Some erroneously cite 1946 as the beginning of his tenure at the Department of Public Works and attribute the 1948 Master Highway Plan to Callahan, but he did not return to office until 1949.

<sup>73</sup> Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 100-101.



requirement and proposed expansive redevelopment of twenty percent of the city's land area over a period of twenty-five years. Decades of transportation planning were incorporated into the General Plan as part of a grand urban vision that included plans not only for transportation but also for housing reform, education, and economic development.<sup>74</sup>

The election of John Hynes as Boston's Mayor in 1950 cemented the foundations of Boston's pro-growth coalition. In stark contrast to Curley, John Hynes worked to foster trust and partnership between business and government. Striving to create a friendly "business climate" in Boston, Hynes invited local business leaders to participate in government affairs, soliciting their input and seeking their involvement on special committees. The Citizen Seminars at Boston College contributed to the formation of an urban growth coalition under John Hynes. In 1954, Reverend W. Seavey Joyce, the dean of Boston College's School of Management, established the Citizen Seminars to bring business and political elites together to discuss and develop solutions to the city's problems. Inspired by the Allegheny Conference in Pittsburgh, Boston's business and political elites developed a shared vision for a 'New Boston,' which called for political reform, renovation of the built environment, and economic growth. Their hope was that public and private leadership, working together, could revitalize the city's slums, rebuild downtown commercial spaces, and refurbish the city's image in ways that would attract new investment and commercial activity.<sup>75</sup>

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>74</sup> Boston City Planning Board, *General Plan for Boston*.

<sup>75</sup> Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 80-81. For a discussion of urban growth coalitions, see Mollenkopf, *Contested City*.

Highways embodied this vision of a ‘New Boston,’ and official discourse celebrated these roads as symbols of progress and modernity as much as solutions to Boston’s economic woes. Frequently promoted as “economic lifelines,” highways promised to transform Boston’s aging roads and confusing traffic patterns into efficient transportation routes for customers, businessmen, materials, and goods. Historian Robert Fogelson argues that popular support for the development of an urban highway system reflected both optimism and desperation in regards to the city’s future. Optimism was reflected in the images of sleek “skyways” “soaring above city streets” rendered in planners’ drawings and in journalistic coverage at the time. In the vision of one engineer, elevated highways, standing on “well-shaped columns” surrounded by “playgrounds, parks and wooded areas” would be beautiful, streamlined, and noiseless.<sup>76</sup> Underpinning this hopeful vision of highway planning was a modernist faith in scientific rationalism, efficiency, and progress. At the same time, business and political elites were desperate for a solution to urban decline and saw highways as an urgent and necessary measure by which to make the central business district more accessible, to curb decentralization, and to right the economic fortunes of the city. To this end, planners, engineers, and public officials at the municipal, state, and federal level set in motion an ambitious plan to construct a network of urban expressways that would dramatically alter the physical and social landscape of the entire metropolitan area.

Chinatown, which had developed in the shadow of Boston’s central business district, would find itself at the epicenter of these changes. In 1951, the long-desired Central Artery would begin to wind its way downtown, disrupting the communities who lived there and displacing hundreds of households and businesses in the process. In all of

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<sup>76</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown*, 282.

the planning for new highways, these communities near the urban core received little consideration beyond their deleterious effect on downtown property values. The highway builders were so focused on reversing the loss of population, capital, and commerce downtown, on drawing white middle class shoppers and commuters back into the city, that they overlooked the people who were already there. In fact, they diagnosed central city neighborhoods as part of the problem, as “blighted” areas that were dragging the city down. The following chapter examines how this vision of urban highways as economic lifelines conflicted with those of the people in Chinatown who stood in their path.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Contesting Race and Space: Confronting the Central Artery and the Massachusetts Turnpike in Chinatown**

In built-up areas, where the urban highways are being constructed . . . the highway serves as a kind of explosive that changes the pattern of land use. . . . The highway literally acts as a blockbuster, smashing the neighborhood and scattering its inhabitants. Those who pick up the pieces can put them to profitable use.

– David Hapgood, “The Highwaymen,” 1969<sup>1</sup>

They took the neighborhood life away from us, which I think I resent even till now.

– Displaced Hudson Street resident, 2006<sup>2</sup>

#### **Introduction**

City planners fixated on urban expressways as a way to revive their central business districts with an eye towards more comprehensive schemes for urban revitalization. However, the direction of highway routings and their construction were in the hands of state road engineers, who often sought the paths that maximized traffic and cost efficiency, heedless of particular local concerns. Thus formed the basis for political battles over the particular route of urban highways that were often fought between local stakeholders in the city and highway enthusiasts operating at the state and regional level. Central to this conflict in Boston, from the perspective of the urban growth regime, was the effect that the urban highway would have on the city’s tax base. Boston relied on

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<sup>1</sup> David Hapgood, “The Highwaymen,” *The Washington Monthly* 1, no 2 (March 1969), 6.

<sup>2</sup> “Hudson Street Stories,” *Chinatown Banquet*.

property taxes for two thirds of its municipal revenue, and the mayor's resistance to routes proposed by the Massachusetts Department of Public Works rested to a great extent on minimizing the loss of taxable property, particularly businesses, which were taxed at a much higher rate than homes. For people whose neighborhoods stood in the way of highway routes proposed by state transportation planners, their desire to save their homes and businesses often converged with the interests of the mayor, the city council, local business owners, and urban industrial leaders. Such was the case in Chinatown, whose ethnic leaders benefitted from the support of these groups in their battle to save their neighborhood from destruction.

This chapter explores how Chinese Bostonians confronted the construction of urban expressways in Chinatown. It examines how these roads, the vision of economic growth they presented, and the conflicts they provoked reconfigured the space and place of Chinatown. It focuses first on the efforts of Chinatown's ethnic elites to contest the routing of the Central Artery expressway through Chinatown in the 1950s. It then considers how the construction of the Massachusetts Turnpike extension in 1962 destroyed a part of Chinatown, which was home to a multiethnic, working class, residential community.

### **Challenging the Central Artery**

Whatever plans the Chinese Merchants Association had for Chinatown in 1951, when it opened its new building, those plans would be disrupted by a different vision for urban redevelopment that was gaining momentum, the first piece of which was the Central Artery expressway. Despite the Merchants Building's prominence as a new local

landmark and its promise to give rise to a new Chinatown, the Massachusetts Department of Public Works would demolish nearly half of the building's eastern section less than four years after the building was constructed to clear the way for Boston's Central Artery. In spite of extensive efforts by Chinatown's merchant elites to align the neighborhood with dominant visions for a modern, revitalized urban core, this development trajectory was overwritten by another vision, one that gave primacy to enhanced regional mobility over the preservation and rehabilitation of existing neighborhoods at the urban core. Freeways promised to reactivate cities by connecting them to larger regional and national economies through a faster, more efficient movement of people, goods, and capital across space. This vision of economic growth by way of increased regional mobility prevailed over the one promised by a revitalized Chinatown tourist economy, and it had dire consequences for Chinatown's relatively immobile ethnic community, tied as it was to its particular urban setting.

The Central Artery was the lynchpin of the Master Highway Plan of 1948, which crystallized decades of transportation studies and planning. It was to act as a crucial link in the plan's proposed "Inner Belt," which provided access to the downtown business district. Unlike Route 128, which involved cheap land acquisitions and minimal destruction of existing buildings, the urban highway was a major physical intervention. In his vision for the Central Artery in 1930, Robert Whitten produced a rendering of a delicate, steel-framed, elevated road neatly inserted amid the broad commercial structures of the business district. Yet the Central Artery, launched in 1951 and completed in 1959, was designed at a much broader scale and required the procurement of relatively costly urban land parcels. From the perspective of state highway planners, the Central Artery

marked the culmination of decades of considering solutions to the congestion problem in downtown Boston. But from the perspective of the people whose homes and businesses stood in the way, the Central Artery was a disaster.<sup>3</sup>

In 1948, the state legislature authorized \$100 million for highway projects and over the next few years, subsequent authorizations added another \$350 million to the state's highway budget. Work on the artery began with the crash of a wrecking ball in the North End in the fall of 1951. Property takings and evictions had begun in 1950, and a cloud of impending disaster spread across the city's oldest and most cohesive residential neighborhoods. In the North End, the new expressway was scheduled to destroy more than one hundred dwellings and uproot some nine hundred businesses, and its projected route would slice the neighborhood off from the main part of the downtown area, thus isolating the North End from the rest of the city. Meat wholesalers near North Station demanded that demolition halt until they could locate new quarters. In the spring of 1950, store owners, restaurateurs, and food wholesalers organized a "Save Boston Business" committee to protest the coming disaster, while longtime residents formed a Committee to Save the North End of Boston to head off what they felt would be the obliteration of their Italian neighborhood. Despite their efforts, they failed to halt the Artery construction, and a path of destruction worked its way south through the heart of the North End and then into the downtown core. By the fall of 1953, the demolition had progressed down to Fort Hill Square, just north of Chinatown.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Maguire and Associates, *Master Highway Plan*; Boston City Planning Board, *Report on a Thoroughfare*; Anthony David Green, "Planning the Central Artery: Constraints on Planners and the Limits of Planning, 1909-1979" (B.A thesis, Harvard University, 1979); Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 102.

<sup>4</sup> O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 83-84; "State Refuses to Halt Work on Hub Artery," *Christian Science Monitor* (February 6, 1953); Everett M. Smith, "Leather District Fights Artery," *Christian Science Monitor* (November 6, 1953); Joseph A. Koblinsky, "Artery Threatens Leather District and Chinatown," *Boston Globe* (March 25, 1953); "Hynes Opposes State Route for Artery," *Christian Science Monitor*

The initial proposal for this section of the Central Artery route called for the demolition of large parts of both Chinatown and the nearby leather and garment district, including the new Chinese Merchants Building. When residents of Chinatown and businesses in the nearby garment industry learned of the potential impact of the artery on their neighborhoods (and having seen the impact of the artery on the North End), they quickly made public their opposition. On the evening of the Department of Public Works announcement, the Chinese Merchants Association, whose recently completed office building lay in the proposed right-of-way, met and established a special committee to confer with both the Mayor and the Governor. On that same evening, Mayor Hynes, acting upon a deluge of complaints from the garment industrialists, condemned the route for its impact on the leather industry, which they claimed would deprive the city of over \$9 million in lost tax base. Mayor Hynes appealed to the Governor to force the Department of Public Works to reconsider their route and even offered an alternative route which would have laid further east along Dorchester Avenue. The newspapers gave the protests full coverage, which was generally sympathetic to the opposition. On the following day, the recently appointed Department of Public Works commissioner John Volpe attempted to calm the opposition by explaining that the proposed route was actually only one of four alternatives under consideration. He further suggested a top level meeting on the whole matter. This meeting took place on April 10, 1953 and included Governor Christian Herter as well as Volpe and Hynes. This resulted in an agreement from Volpe not to proceed for thirty days while the city developed an

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(March 25, 1953); "City and Chinatown Oppose Artery Route," *Boston Globe* (October 20, 1953); "No. Enders Protest Hanover St. Ramps for Central Artery," *Boston Globe* (January 27, 1953).



alternative “which will have the functional advantages of the inner route through the leather district and still not require the demolition of so much highly valued property.”<sup>5</sup>

In the fall of 1953, John Volpe and his team of engineers issued a revised plan that spared the Merchants building but instead slated for demolition practically all of Chinatown’s residential neighborhood and three-quarters of Chinatown’s major restaurants as well as a fourteen story garment factory employing over five thousand people, three churches, a branch of the public library, a playground, and two public schools. Everything between Tyler and Hudson Streets from Essex to Broadway was scheduled for demolition. Viewing the alternative route as no better than the first, representatives of the garment, shoe and leather trades joined community leaders in Chinatown to push for a route that would save their businesses and homes. The Chinese Merchants Association together with the New England Shoe and Leather Association, the New England Apparel Industries, and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union formed the Committee to Preserve Downtown, and an intense drama played out in the news over the course of more than a year.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Stanley L. F. Chin chaired this Committee. One of the first Chinese physicians in Boston trained in Western medicine, Chin was a visible Chinatown civic leader active in both the Merchants Association and the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, and he claimed in one statement to Commissioner Volpe that he spoke on behalf of ten thousand New England Chinese who were outraged by the state

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<sup>5</sup> Geiser, *Urban Transportation*, 261-262; *Boston Herald* (April 10, 1953); “State Refuses to Halt Work on Hub Artery”; Smith, “Leather District Fights Artery”; Keblinsky, “Artery Threatens Leather District and Chinatown”; “Hynes Opposes State Route for Artery”; “City and Chinatown Oppose Artery Route”; “No. Enders Protest Hanover St. Ramps for Central Artery.”

<sup>6</sup> “State Refuses to Halt Work on Hub Artery”; “Leather District Fights Artery”; Keblinsky, “Artery Threatens Leather District and Chinatown”; “Hynes Opposes State Route for Artery”; “City and Chinatown Oppose Artery Route”; “No. Enders Protest Hanover St. Ramps for Central Artery.”

plans.<sup>7</sup> Meetings were held at various sites in the neighborhood, including the new Chinese Merchants building, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association headquarters on Hudson Street, and the Gamsun Restaurant at 21 Hudson Street. The coalition engaged in threats of mass demonstration at the State House and began gathering signatures for a petition to oppose the Artery route.<sup>8</sup>

Other public officials joined in the protest including the Boston City Council, who voted unanimously to seek an injunction restraining the state from razing buildings in Chinatown to make way for the expressway. The order was sponsored by Councillor Gabriel F. Piemonte. The son of Sicilian immigrants, Piemonte may have been inspired by the devastation he had just witnessed in his own home neighborhood of the North End. He vigorously opposed the “grave and irreparable damage to the city” that the proposed roadway would cause both from the standpoint of destroying industry and in disrupting the “provincial life of Boston’s Chinese colony.”<sup>9</sup>

Mayor Hynes joined the chorus against Governor Herter and State Commissioner Volpe’s plans. While he vocalized his support of the Chinese community, he framed his concern primarily in terms of the taxable property the city stood to lose as a result of such an enormous land taking. In a televised panel discussion of the issue, Harvard economics professor Seymour Harris, who would later go on to be chief economic advisor to President Kennedy, estimated that the loss to the city might reach \$400,000,000 and one-

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<sup>7</sup> Chu, *Chinese in Massachusetts*, 98; “Garment Strike Threatens Highway Plan,” *Boston Herald*, October 22, 1953; Former resident Tunney Lee recalls that Chin was “corrupt as hell” and “one of the most powerful figures around because he sort of controlled the access, the press, and he knew everybody. He knew all the politicians.” Tunney Lee, interview (see chap. 1, n. 44).

<sup>8</sup> “Artery Threatens Leather District and Chinatown”; “Hynes Opposes State Route for Artery”; “Central Artery 3-Level Route,” *Boston Herald* (September 22, 1953); “City and Chinatown Oppose Artery Route”; “Chinatown Razing May Be Vetoed,” *Boston Herald*, October 20, 1953; Geiser, *Urban Transportation*; 261-262; Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 102.

<sup>9</sup> “City and Chinatown Oppose Artery Route”; “Garment Strike Threatens Highway Plan”; Edgar J. Driscoll, Jr., “Gabriel Piemonte, 82; served in State House, on City Council,” *Boston Globe*, July 2, 1991.



Figure 2.1. Protesting the Central Artery Route, 1954. Chinese Bostonians line up at the Chinese Merchants Association building to sign a petition asking Governor Christian Herter to change the Central Artery route. Wong Jayne, a Chinese Merchants Association leader, is seated. To and CHSNE, *Chinese in Boston*, 109.

fifth of all manufacturing jobs in the city. This was beyond what Hynes was willing to sacrifice for the artery.<sup>10</sup>

Chinatown's community leaders tried to play on public sympathies towards Chinese people, which had developed during the war. The Refugee Relief Act of 1953, which allowed limited entry for Chinese people displaced by the war, had also just been signed into law in August of that year and would have been fresh on the minds of many. At a public meeting held in October of 1953, Dr. Stanley Chin pleaded with John Volpe to use a bit of "Christian sympathy and understanding" for the people of Chinatown, who were in Chin's words a "meager family," yet "self-sustaining in the 26 restaurants involved here." Chin tied the fate of Chinatown to fears of urban decline, warning the

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<sup>10</sup> John Harris, "\$400 Million Loss Under Artery Plan," *Boston Herald*, October 31, 1953; "New Haven to Offer Plan for Less Costly Artery," *Boston Herald*, November 16, 1953, 1, 4.

Department of Public Works that the artery route would rapidly turn the model neighborhood into a slum. Chin declared that the artery “would almost certainly result in adding additional families to city relief roles and intensify sociological problems” and that “the percentage of illiteracy will run high in the race because the Chinese families and children will not be too readily accepted in the society of a new neighborhood.” He continued, “Their children, scattered into different schools in different communities, will be targets of persecution, and it may come to a point where the Chinese child would abandon his schooling rather than put up with this condition.”<sup>11</sup> The artery dispute also reached the ears of Wellington Koo, the Chinese ambassador to the U.S., who dispatched Koon Lee Yuen, Chinese consul to New York, to a public meeting in October of 1953 to address the matter of the Central Artery. At the meeting, Yuen told Commissioner Volpe: “If anything is going to happen, it should not happen to Chinatown. If anything happens to my country people here, it would prove disastrous in sending thousands of peace-loving Chinese to a state of life beyond expectation.”<sup>12</sup>

These tactics had some success in generating public sympathy, particularly among religious leaders. Following similar statements of several Chinatown leaders, Boston’s Catholic newspaper, *The Pilot*, issued an editorial praising Chinatown’s “stable” and “responsible” citizenry, citing the lack of juvenile delinquency and vandalism in the “Chinese settlement.”<sup>13</sup> While on one level this rhetoric lent a moral weight to the Chinese community’s effort to protect their homes and businesses from devastation, it did so by constructing Chinese Americans as well-behaved, undemanding and therefore

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<sup>11</sup> “Artery Plan Would Kill 200 Million Businesses,” *Boston Herald*, October 22, 1953; “Garment Strike Threatens Highway Plan.”

<sup>12</sup> “Garment Strike Threatens Highway Plan.”

<sup>13</sup> “Pilot Opposes Chinatown Artery Plan,” *Boston Herald*, December 4, 1953, 33.

deserving citizens. On another level then, this defense preserved and reproduced a distinction between so-called deserving citizens and undeserving citizens, whose political demands ostensibly made them unworthy of state protection. In the local context, this discourse had the effect of distancing Chinese Americans from Boston's black communities. While they may not have realized it, Chinatown's business leaders and their supporters played a role in facilitating this disastrous comparison with black Americans through their defense of Chinatown space. Moreover, these kinds of sentimental appeals—which may have had more purchase during World War II when Americans were transfixed by stories of Japanese aggression in China—lost much their power after the war, and ultimately, they did little to sway the highway builders' determination.

In pre-election November, Governor Christian Herter dismissed social arguments about the highway's path, declaring that the artery alignment was a technical decision and that he would defer to the Department of Public Works. With that, Commissioner Volpe announced an official, non-negotiable alignment on which the DPW would begin condemnation by early March. This alignment lay about a block east of the earlier proposal and included half a mile of tunnel near South Station. Volpe noted that if the city remained in opposition to this new route, he would be willing to consider any reasonable alternative until February, but that during the winter the DPW would continue to work out the details of this new route. Mayor Hynes remained dissatisfied with the route and hired his own consultant, John Clarkeson, to consider an alternative city

proposal. Over the winter, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association developed its own alternative proposal, which they submitted to John Clarkeson for consideration.<sup>14</sup>

On Nov 30, 1953, Shek Taat Chen, Chairman of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of New England published a public letter to Boston Commissioner of Public Works George G. Hyland in the *Christian Science Monitor* that tallied the physical, financial, and human costs that Chinatown would sustain if the proposed artery route were to go through:

Restaurants, four, \$80,000 monthly; Chinese grocery stores, five, \$100,000 monthly; beansprout wholesalers, two, \$10,000 monthly; residences, 50, 300 families affected; real estate, \$200,000 valuation; Chinese Merchants Association building, newly erected, \$1,000,000 valuation; Wongs' Family Association, two buildings, \$30,000 valuation; and unemployment potential, 200 persons or more.

Citing these businesses and properties as “tangible evidence of 20 to 30 years of toil and hardship on the part of the Chinese residents,” Chen explained, “Boston’s Chinese community was established piece by piece, unit by unit, in the understanding that only an organized, established Chinatown would prove sufficiently attractive to the tourist trade to provide a means of income to the residents there.”<sup>15</sup> By 1954, over fifty-eight proposals had been considered for the Central Artery route, and thirteen of them focused specifically on the portion running through Chinatown. After numerous studies, the state decided finally on a plan that would save the Merchants Building by tunneling underneath it but that would still displace 58 out of a stated 290 families in Chinatown and 11.2% of the square footage of Chinese businesses including two of Chinatown’s largest and most popular restaurants, Cathay House and Ruby Foo’s Den. Members of the Chinese American community grieved the impending loss: Wong Jayne, a Merchants

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<sup>14</sup> Geiser, *Urban Transportation*, 261-262.

<sup>15</sup> “Boston Chinatown Seeks Revision of Artery Route,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 30, 1953.

leader lamented, “We are weak and unrepresented. Chinatown is the line of least resistance. No wonder they pick on us.” Another Merchants Association representative asked, “Where are [the Chinese] going to live? . . . They must stay together. Many of them can’t speak your language and they need one another. . . .” Lee Foo, a local travel agent declared, “There is no place for us to go, no place at all.”<sup>16</sup> Despite their efforts to portray themselves as self-sufficient and racially equal, the planned destruction of Chinatown brought into clear view the ways in which Chinese Americans were still a subordinated racial minority, yet to achieve the promise of full and robust citizenship, and in many ways trapped in space.

In May of 1954, days before the state’s decision would become final, representatives of the Merchants Association, looking at the numbers of families and businesses to be displaced, contacted officials to voluntarily sacrifice half of its building to the Central Artery route in order to save more Chinese homes and businesses. That the Merchants Association was able to successfully negotiate an alternate route with state officials in this way illuminates the complicated position occupied by Chinatown’s ethnic elites. On the one hand, the Merchants had established themselves as legitimate representatives of the Chinese community in the eyes of the state, and they had the necessary organization and political skill to broker an arrangement that saved much of Chinatown from destruction. On the other hand, their sacrifice was a painful reminder of their powerlessness as members of a racial and ethnic minority, whose livelihoods and social structure were fixed in place. Despite extensive commercial investments that ethnic elites had made to raise Chinatown’s stature as part of a revitalized urban core, the state

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<sup>16</sup> George Lodge, “‘No Place to Go,’ Say Chinese Facing Eviction for New Road,” *Boston Herald*, October 19, 1953; “Garment Strike Threatens Highway Plan.”

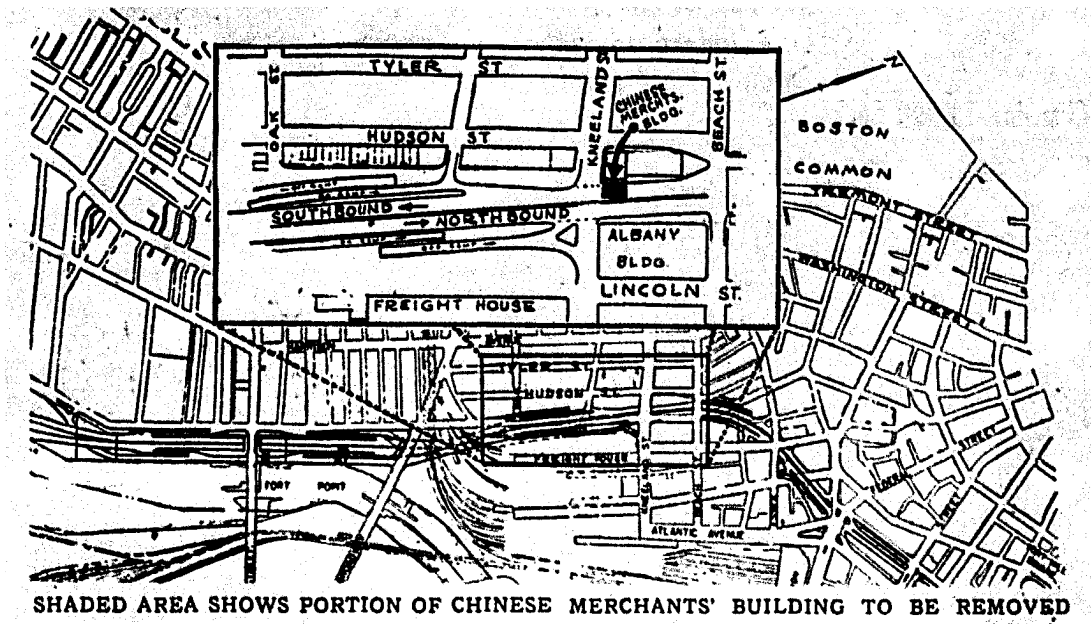


Figure 3.2. The final Central Artery route spared Chinatown from destruction but took half the Chinese Merchants Association's new building. "Artery Shift Spares Chinatown Area," *Daily Boston Globe*, May 28, 1954, 5.

found Chinatown's particular tourist economy to be of lesser value to urban regeneration than the vision for economic growth promised by new highways.

In the end, the Central Artery displaced only 14 families residing in Chinatown instead of the original 170 families that the state's earliest plans designated for displacement.<sup>17</sup> Still, less than four years after the Merchants building was erected, the Massachusetts Department of Public Works ordered the demolition of half of the building's eastern section to make space for the expressway. In the process, the building's footprint was reduced by almost forty percent (from 7,940 to 4,919 in square footage). The auditorium that once stretched half a city block was rotated forty

<sup>17</sup> "Herter, Volpe Tell Artery Link Today," *Boston Herald*, November 3 1953, 1, 10; "Big Chinese Merchants Building to Be Moved," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 3, 1953; "Buildings to Go for New Artery; Cuts Damage in Chinatown, Garment Area," *Boston Herald*, November 3, 1953; Edgar Mills, "Boston's Central Artery Expected to Cost \$135 Million: Construction to Take 3 to 4 Years," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 3, 1953; "Gov. Herter Today Announced Final Plans for the Route of Boston's Central Artery," *Boston Herald*, November 3, 1953; Alice Burke, "Artery Grab-bag: 58 Routes, All Within 650 Yds," *The Boston Evening Traveler*, November 20, 1953; "Artery Shift Spares Chinatown Area," *Boston Globe*, May 28, 1954; "Hynes Lauds Artery Route," *Boston Herald*, May 28, 1954.



five degrees and a stage about one quarter its original size was installed in the corner of the building. Of the original 506 seats, 194 remained. The dining room was halved, the pork oven removed. Windows and doors that Edward Chin-Park and Andrew Yuen had designed with such care were salvaged from one part of the building and reused in other parts to minimize expenses. What had been open balconies were enclosed in glass in an effort to reclaim lost space. While the pagoda was saved, the rooftop garden and covered walk were destroyed, and the roof would no longer be fit for human occupancy.<sup>18</sup>

The rise and fall of the Merchants building leaves a complicated legacy that brings into focus the ways in which the history of Chinese Americans in Boston intertwine with the city's history of urban redevelopment. In vocalizing his opposition to the Central Artery's proposed pathway through Chinatown, Stanley Chin declared, "We are the only section of Boston, which has been modernized by private capital. Our own money has been put into every building in Chinatown to renovate it, give it modern fixtures and conveniences. . . . We did it all for ourselves."<sup>19</sup> On one level, the efforts of Chinese American elites to modernize and upgrade Chinatown's commercial and residential spaces represented a claiming of space for a racially subordinated population. However, in claiming this space, Chinese Americans and their supporters also asserted a flat vision of social harmony, political quietude, and responsible citizenship, which constructed Chinese Americans as a "model minority." And though the Merchants' particular development vision conflicted with that of the state, both visions for urban renewal emerged out of the same discourse of urban decline, and both shared an emphasis on physical reconstruction of the built environment as well as a liberal faith in

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<sup>18</sup> 20 Hudson Street Building Plans, Boston, 1949, BBD, BPL, Bin-R-94; 20 Hudson Street Building Plans, Boston, 1956, BBD, BPL, Bin R-187.

<sup>19</sup> Lodge, "'No Place to Go,' Say Chinese Facing Eviction for New Road."

social progress. Still, the efforts of Chinese Americans were vital to the development of Boston's postwar Chinatown in ways that departed from the dominant redevelopment vision. When many had abandoned a city in decline—and before official urban renewal had gained momentum—Chinese Americans saw in the city signs of opportunity and hope. Though their efforts were not entirely successful, their investing in, restoring, and beautifying Chinatown's built environment nevertheless constituted a significant planning practice “from below,” which publicly asserted a vision of the city in which Chinese Americans belonged.

### **Massachusetts Turnpike**

In 1962, just four years after the Central Artery was completed, the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority would extend its toll road from Boston's western suburbs into downtown Boston, where it would connect with the Central Artery. The urban extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike would involve the demolition of sixty housing structures in Chinatown, displacing hundreds of residents, shuttering dozens of small businesses and exacerbating the effects caused by the Central Artery just a few years earlier.

In 1952, the state legislature chartered the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority to construct a 123-mile limited access highway running from the New York border to Route 128 in Weston, MA. The Massachusetts Turnpike Authority began constructing the main portion of the turnpike in 1954, and the turnpike opened in the spring of 1957.<sup>20</sup> The state legislature approved a \$239 million dollar bond for a 123-mile limited access superhighway from the New York border to Route 128 in 1954, and this road was completed by 1957. At the dedication ceremonies, Turnpike Authority chief William F.

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<sup>20</sup> Geiser, *Urban Transportation*, 255-257; Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 141.

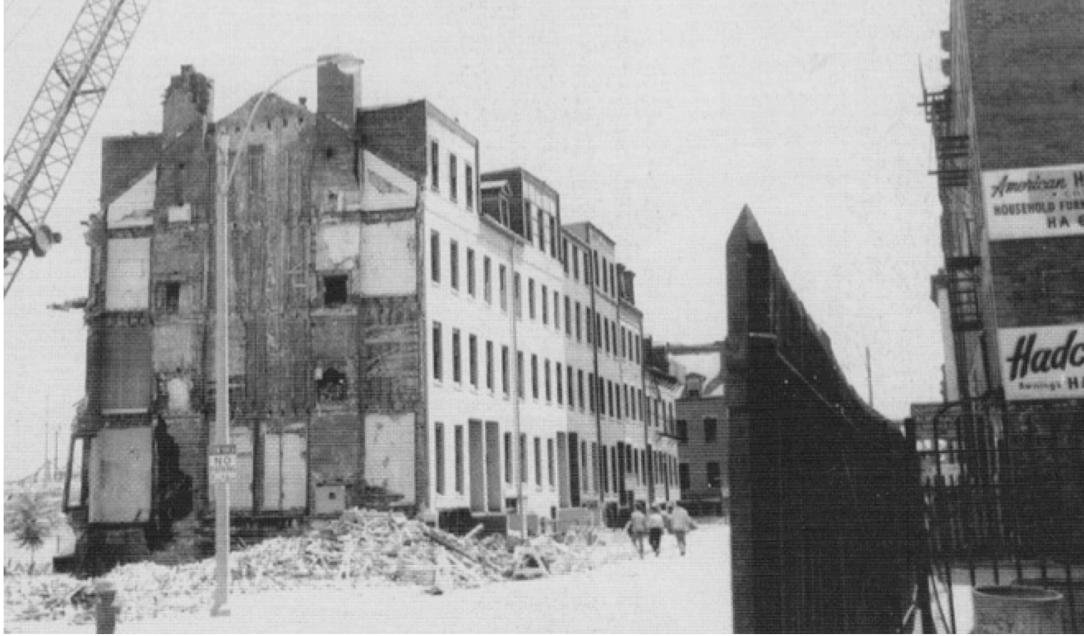


Figure 3.3. A view of the demolition on Hudson Street for the Massachusetts Turnpike Extension, 1963. To and CHSNE, *Chinese in Boston*, 111.

Callahan declared that the turnpike “will not be completed until we take it into downtown Boston. It will be the salvation of Boston. My intention is to do everything within my power to bring this road into downtown Boston.”<sup>21</sup> In Callahan’s vision, the Massachusetts Turnpike (inclusive of its downtown extension) would cohere a set of existing and proposed transportation facilities in the region, strengthening the entire system. These roads included the Central Artery, which had already made its way through downtown Boston; the Sumner Tunnel, which would connect the Central Artery to East Boston and Logan Airport; and Route 128 with its emerging technology industries. At its western terminus, the turnpike provided a high-speed connection to the

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<sup>21</sup> Albert D. Hughes, “Autos Stream Over New Pike; Extension in Boston Pushed,” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 16, 1957.

New York State Thruway, linking Massachusetts by express highway all the way to Chicago and beyond.<sup>22</sup>

Often compared to Robert Moses, William F. Callahan was the Commonwealth's master road builder, as controversial and powerful a figure in Massachusetts transportation history as Moses was in New York. Callahan had served first as Commissioner of the Department of Public Works from 1934 to 1939. During this time, he began building sections of Route 128, a proposed "Circumferential Highway" that would connect radial routes and serve as a beltway around Boston. To expedite the completion of the highway, Callahan avoided town centers, a decision that drew criticism from business leaders, realtors, and the New England chapter of the American Automobile Association, which labeled the road a "highway to nowhere." In 1939, Callahan's work was disrupted when newly elected Republican Governor Leverett Saltonstall discharged Callahan under accusations of "squandering public funds." Upon taking office in 1949, Democratic Governor Paul Dever reappointed Callahan as Commissioner of the Department of Public Works. In his second term as Commissioner, Callahan drove what in his view was a complacent and ineffective public works agency into rapidly proceeding with the continued construction of Route 128. He was aided by the 1948 *Master Highway Plan for the Boston Metropolitan Area*, which had just been released and which reaffirmed his vision for an expanded and modernized regional transportation infrastructure. In 1950, Callahan also initiated construction of the Central Artery, which was the first piece to be constructed on the proposed Inner Belt recommended in the 1948 plan.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 142-3.

<sup>23</sup> Geiser, *Urban Transportation*, 255-257.

It was William Callahan who first proposed the establishment of an independent Turnpike Authority as a more efficient way of building roads, and in 1952 Governor Paul Dever made him the independent authority's first chairman, bestowing Callahan with new powers and freedom to get roads built.<sup>24</sup> Callahan devoted his life to realizing his vision of a comprehensive, modernized transportation infrastructure for the Bay State. In doing so, he faced significant political opposition and resistance from local communities.<sup>25</sup> Like Robert Moses, Callahan viewed himself as someone who “gets things done,” and he often ridiculed and dismissed his critics as ineffectual “grocery store philosophers” and “pen pushers.”<sup>26</sup> One local journalist wrote that Callahan was “alternately considered an asphalt-crazed autocrat and a visionary architect of progress.”<sup>27</sup>

The structure of public authorities like the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority bore similarities to the business-led coalition that characterized politics in the New Boston. The Massachusetts legislature established the Turnpike Authority as a “quasi-public” corporation, modeled on “public benefit corporations” like the Mystic River Bridge Authority, the Port Authority of New York, and the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority. These kinds of public authorities were chartered by the state and given broad legal powers, but they were also market-driven entities tied to private financing. To finance large-scale public projects intended to support economic growth in the city and metropolitan region, the Turnpike Authority marketed bonds to private and institutional

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<sup>24</sup> When Callahan left the Department of Public Works in 1952 to serve as chairman of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, he was succeeded by John Volpe, who continued work on Route 128 and oversaw the completion of the Central Artery.

<sup>25</sup> Geiser, *Urban Transportation*, 255-257.

<sup>26</sup> Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 144-147.

<sup>27</sup> O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 81-82.

investors, promising a return based on future toll revenue. Bypassing the conventional process of highway funding allowed the Turnpike Authority to avoid political delays and to finance and execute large projects swiftly.<sup>28</sup>

Though the main section of the turnpike was completed in 1957, an urban extension in downtown Boston was part of Callahan's vision since planning for the project began. As early as 1953, Callahan and his team of engineers had identified the Boston and Albany right-of-way as the most efficient and least troublesome route for an extension of the turnpike into downtown Boston. Though the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority was originally chartered as a temporary authority, set to dissolve once the turnpike was completed and its debts paid, Callahan consistently sought to increase the Authority's assets, issue new bonds, and extend its indebtedness. These measures incrementally expanded the Authority's horizon so that it became semi-permanent.<sup>29</sup> A key element of this strategy was Callahan's effort to construct an extension from Route 128 to the heart of Boston. In 1955, at Callahan's urging, the state legislature enacted a statute, which expanded the scope of the Authority and authorized a Boston extension of the turnpike.<sup>30</sup> Callahan quickly moved to annex the Boston and Albany railroad property. Still the sale of the necessary \$180 million bonds was delayed until 1962, first by the argument that the 90% federal funding on the Interstate system would make toll roads obsolete; second, by strong resistance from the residents and the mayor of Newton, an exclusive suburb through which the Turnpike extension would have to pass; and third

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<sup>28</sup> Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 141-142.

<sup>29</sup> Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 144.

<sup>30</sup> Chapter 47, Acts and Resolves of Massachusetts, 1955.

by the Prudential Insurance Company, which wanted the Boston and Albany right-of-way for its own project.<sup>31</sup>

Callahan strongly believed that the city's economic future absolutely depended on the turnpike to move people and goods in and out of the city. Affirming the logic of the Urban Land Institute, Callahan stood firm by his conviction that the city's very survival depended on highway access. In one particularly dramatic Turnpike press release, Callahan declared that "if a road wasn't built into Downtown Boston . . . They better look up Chief Chickatawbut's descendents [the Indian chief from whom Governor John Winthrop purchased the land the city was built on] and arrange to give downtown Boston back to the Indians."<sup>32</sup> For Callahan, as for the ULI, downtown decline was a threat to Western civilization.

There was significant opposition to the Turnpike extension, which was part of what would later become known as the anti-highway movement, or the "freeway revolts." In Newton, the Newton Board of Aldermen established a Citizens' Toll Road Committee in 1956 to consider the city's interests with respect to the Turnpike extension. They were motivated by two concerns: the taking of land and homes by eminent domain from residents of four of Newton's "villages" that were along the path of the Boston & Albany (Auburndale, West Newton, Newtonville, and Newton Corner); and the fear that the road would displace the Boston & Albany's commuter rail service between Newton and Boston.<sup>33</sup> There was also significant push for a freeway versus a toll road, which was most visibly supported by John Volpe—Callahan's successor at the DPW and Governor

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<sup>31</sup> Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 116, 140-141; Geiser, *Urban Transportation*, 255-257.

<sup>32</sup> William F. Callahan, "For Future Press Release," undated, Massachusetts Turnpike Authority Archives, Box 01321, quoted in Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 149.

<sup>33</sup> Robert C. Bergenheim, "Toll Road Via B&A and Building Too?," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 17, 1956.

of Massachusetts from 1961-1963. However, the turnpike extension, and any efforts to oppose it, was more complicated than the Central Artery, because it became tied to the development of the Prudential Center, which was widely viewed as a beneficial development to the city of Boston. Many expressed their regret that the two were tied, since there was support for the Prudential but widespread concern by this point that a Pike extension to the heart of the city would exacerbate downtown congestion rather than resolve it.<sup>34</sup> At a public hearing on the turnpike extension in 1961, Daniel Rudsten, a former state senator from Boston and general chairman of the Massachusetts Citizens Committee, a group organized to resist the turnpike extension, spoke out against the turnpike extension as a matter of urbanism. While Rudsten articulated his support the Prudential Center project, he feared that highways were turning the city into a bland suburb:

The thing we must ask ourselves—and you, yourselves—is, what kind of a City are we building for Boston’s future? Are we building a suburban shopping center with a lot of automobiles, or building a city of people who are working and playing together, of the homes and shops and business firms of industry, of theater and restaurants and playgrounds and esplanade concerts. Is not this the kind of city we want, or are we just going to build a monstrous or monolith of buildings and surrounded with an 8-lane toll road that will be like a moat with the rest of Boston becoming a village, deteriorating around the back of it.<sup>35</sup>

On March 5, 1962, Callahan pressed a plunger to ignite the construction of the Boston Extension, as he triumphantly declared: “I only wish some of my critics and

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<sup>34</sup> Massachusetts Citizens Committee, “A Critical Review of the Boston Extension Project of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority,” BRA 3658; “Professors Explain Warning to Bankers on Pike Bonds,” *Boston Herald*, April 12, 1961; John H. Fenton, “Highway Delayed in Massachusetts,” *New York Times*, May 20 1961, “Turnpike bond Plan Fails in Bay State,” *New York Times*, June 21, 1961; Michael Liuzzi, “Massachusetts: Toll Bonds Fail,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 30, 1961; A.S. Plotkin, “Hub Toll Road Assured; Work to Begin at Once,” *Boston Globe*, January 23, 1962; Peter B. Greenough, “New Deal and Faces Assure ‘Pike Bond Underwriting,’” *Boston Globe*, January 23, 1962; *Insuring the City*, 124-26, 138-165.

<sup>35</sup> Boston Redevelopment Authority, *Public Hearing, Gardner Auditorium, State House, Boston, March 22, 1961*, (Boston: Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1961), 151.



enemies were sitting on that ledge.”<sup>36</sup> The extension would transform traffic patterns in the western suburbs and Boston. Though it followed the path of the Boston & Albany roadbed through Newton, the Turnpike extension entailed the destruction of numerous neighborhoods. In West Newton, for example, a long-standing African American community was razed for the construction of a turnpike ramp. And Chinatown, with the Central Artery fresh in its memory, found itself on the chopping block again. In a press release, Callahan justified the trade-off: “We are fully aware of the hardships they will have to endure, no matter what the price may be; however, the public is paying an even greater price in death, injuries, inconveniences and inefficiencies because of sub-standard and dangerously overcrowded roads and streets that fail to properly serve the biggest segment of our metropolitan population.” Callahan’s comments echoed Robert Moses’ famous quip: “You can’t make an omelet without breaking eggs.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Hudson Street: A Precarious Community**

Between 1962 and 1965, the Boston Extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike demolished scores of homes and displaced hundreds on a densely populated residential block south of Chinatown’s commercial core. Although several citizens groups formed to oppose the turnpike extension, such as the Massachusetts Citizens Committee and the Ward Five Democratic Committee, the people of Chinatown did not join these groups nor did they organize a separate challenge to the extension into downtown Boston. Curiously silent in the historical record are the community elites who had so publicly joined forces

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<sup>36</sup> “Callahan’s Blast opens Toll Road: A Wry Wish and a Whoosh!” *Boston Herald*, March 6, 1962.

<sup>37</sup> Press Release, January 22, 1962, Massachusetts Turnpike Authority Archives, Box 01321, quoted in Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 165; Robert Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Knopf, 1974), 218.



Figure 3.4. Reggie Wong and his sister Caroline Wong (later Chang) on Hudson Street, late 1940s. Their home was among those taken for the Massachusetts Turnpike extension. To and CHSNE, *Chinese in Boston*, 111.

with the garment and leather industries to campaign against the Central Artery only a few years earlier. One possible explanation is that because the demolition area was a primarily residential area, the Merchants Association and the CCBA, whose offices and restaurants were located just north of this area, did not perceive the land takings to the south as a major threat to their interests. The area south of Kneeland was not part of Chinatown's historic core, and only recently had Chinese families begun to occupy the buildings on Hudson and Albany Streets in significant numbers. It may even be that these

community elites calculated that the highway extension would bring additional business to their establishments.

A more likely explanation, however, is that Chinatown's ethnic elites as well as its working class residents felt powerless against the forces of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, which routinely ignored local opposition to its goals. According to several former residents whose homes were taken by eminent domain, many building owners were intimidated by the legal system were unprepared to contest the seizure of their homes and the low assessed values given to their properties within the limited timeframe given to them.<sup>38</sup> Those with uncertain citizenship status would have been even less likely to pursue a legal or public challenge that would draw attention to them.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Chinatown's ethnic elites had begun to shift their attention at this time to yet another massive project, the Boston Redevelopment Authority's South Cove Urban Renewal Plan, which threatened to reconfigure Chinatown on an even larger scale.<sup>40</sup> Multiple factors thus combined to make it difficult for the people of Chinatown to organize a challenge to the Turnpike route.

Hudson Street, which lost some sixty structures to the Turnpike demolition, had emerged by the 1950s as an important site of Chinatown life. A number of Chinese businesses and community institutions had already established themselves on Hudson Street prior to World War I. The northern end of the street was home to the popular Ruby Foo's Den restaurant at 6 Hudson Street, near the Nationalist Guomindang Party (#17)

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<sup>38</sup> Rubin, *Insuring the City*, 140-147; Zenobia Lai, Andrew Leong, and Chi Chi Wu, "The Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle: Reflections on Community Lawyering." *UCLA Asian Pacific American Law Journal* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 4; Tom, "Remembering Hudson Street."

<sup>39</sup> I thank Stephanie Fan for reminding me of this point.

<sup>40</sup> BRA, *Urban Renewal Plan: South Cove Urban Renewal Area, Project No. Mass. R-92* (Boston: BRA, 1965); See chapter 4 of this dissertation.

and the San Yuen Company (#23), which supplied noodles to all of Chinatown's restaurants. At 7 Hudson Street were several garment factories, which employed increasing numbers of Chinese women in the community. These included Louis Jacobs & Sons on the fourth floor, Federal Garment Company on the fifth floor, and Boston Co-op Cap Works Company on the sixth floor. Other significant Chinese restaurants include the Red Rooster at 11 Hudson Street and the Gamsun at 21 Hudson Street, which sat adjacent to the new Chinese Merchants Building. Hudson Street also boasted no fewer than six grocers at 3, 4, 4a, 9, 12, and 18, and an importers office at 10 Hudson St.<sup>41</sup> Towards the southern section of the street lay the homes of many of the new Chinese families, which established themselves during the 1940s and 1950s. Many of the buildings on Hudson Street where these families lived were old brick row houses dating back to the early development of the South Cove in the 1830s-40s. Boston Building Department records indicate numerous complaints to home owners here in the 1950s, based on matters of code enforcement by inspectional services, most of which indicate structural integrity problems, problems of egress, missing fire escapes, and rotting wood piles.<sup>42</sup> Based on their age and condition, these properties were among the oldest and the lowest valued in the city, making them especially attractive to the Turnpike Authority in its financial calculations for the Turnpike right-of-way.<sup>43</sup>

As part of Chinatown's residential area south of Kneeland Street, Hudson Street was also home to a racially mixed community that was rendered invisible by both

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<sup>41</sup> *Metropolitan Boston Address Record* (Boston: New England Telephone and Telegraph Company, 1930); Stevens, "Dinner at the Den," 25.

<sup>42</sup> Krim, *Chinatown-South Cove Comprehensive Survey Project*. On code enforcement, see Boston Building Department records for 2, 5, 9, 10, 20 Tyler Street and 6, 20, 51, 71, 79, 89, 91, and 103 Hudson Street, and 36 Harrison Street, Inspectional Services Department Collection, City of Boston Archives.

<sup>43</sup> According to journalist Joseph A. Keblinsky, urban renewal experts had labeled these areas as "more or less in the decadent stage" and predicted that "their loss will not be too hard to take." Keblinsky, "The Political Circuit: Pike Kills Pay Hikes?"



Figure 3.5. A multiethnic group of spectators watch a game of baseball on a parking lot in Chinatown, 1948. To and CHSNE, *Chinese in Boston*, 117.

Chinatown's ethnic elites, who tended to cast Chinatown as a unified, monoethnic space, and by the city's official urban planners, for whom the area was "introvert," illegible, and unstable.<sup>44</sup> The working class community here had a different relationship to the neighborhood, one rooted in alternative assumptions about space. Rather than modeling a straightforward form of abstract civic space to the growth regime, this community created a specific, functional social world in the lived spaces of the home and the street, which, for many residents, were inseparable from one another. "Shared streets . . . were our life,"

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<sup>44</sup> Lynch, *Image of the City*, 71; The Public Image of Boston, between 1954 and 1959, KL, MIT, MC 208, Box 2; Kevin Lynch, *Medical Center in the South Cove: A Study for the Development of the New England Medical Center and Its Neighborhood* (Boston: New England Medical Center, 1955); Boston Housing Authority, *Redevelopment of the South Cove: A Preliminary Study* (Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1956). See chapters 1, 2, and 4 of this dissertation.

recalls former resident Cynthia Yee.<sup>45</sup> This complex social world was one that crossed social, cultural, and spatial boundaries rather than policed them. It was resolutely mixed and did not easily fit into the established rubrics that Bostonians used to describe their city's social fabric. In fact, this heterogeneous residential and cultural space had all the ingredients for what the growth machine wanted to get rid of. This put the small residential community of Hudson Street, with its blurred boundaries and its emergent multiethnic and multiracial community in a particularly precarious position vis-à-vis the urban growth regime's drive to radically reshape the city, making it even more vulnerable to disruption and displacement.

As their homes were demolished, some families relocated to other parts of Chinatown and many eventually relocated to new homes in and around Boston, Allston, Brighton, the Back Bay, West Roxbury, and Newton. The grief of a disrupted community life was felt by many. Olivia Waishek, a Syrian American woman who had lived at 90 Hudson Street, recalls:

I came home from school one day, and there's a sign on the wall, which I ripped off. And we had been evicted. We had to leave. . . . They sent us a letter and they came, and they posted the signs. We had to be out by a certain date, [but] my father refused to move. By that time, he was up there. All his memories—seventy-two, seventy-three years of his whole life were right there. We started to look for a house here and there, and my mother's family all lived in west Roxbury, so we moved to west Roxbury—we had to. They knocked the houses across the street. They were starting on our side. We had no choice, we had to move, and we had to rent an apartment because we were building a house at the time. We rented an apartment and we stayed in there about eleven months until our house was finished. Very disruptive living. We finally moved, and we were not in our house two weeks, and my mother was killed crossing the

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<sup>45</sup> Yee, "If Hudson Street Could Talk," 97.

street. If you were to speak to somebody in their 70s, they would say the same thing I'm saying: their heart belongs here.<sup>46</sup>

Many continued to maintain ties to Chinatown, returning to the neighborhood to shop and to socialize. Young people who had been displaced came to Chinatown at the end of the school day to play with one another and later to work in the neighborhood. Others continued to maintain ties over the course of their lives, returning regularly even as they left Chinatown for college, military service, or employment elsewhere. Chinatown remained a home place despite and perhaps because of the experience of displacement.

From 1956 to 1960 the federal aid authorizations for interstate highways in urban areas soared from \$79 million to \$1,125 million. By the early 1960s, hundreds of miles of additional limited-access highways had opened to traffic in the older central cities, realizing the dreams of earlier transportation planners, who had sought to rescue aging cities like Boston by way of modernization.<sup>47</sup> By this time, it was also becoming apparent that much of this planning had trampled over the plans and visions of local governments and communities, and President Kennedy pointed this out in his Transportation Message to the 87th Congress. This concern resulted in the inclusion in the then pending Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962 a requirement that after 1965 all state highway departments would be required to demonstrate that their planning participated in a “cooperative, comprehensive and continuing planning process.”<sup>48</sup> By that point, however, Boston’s downtown turnpike extension would be complete.

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<sup>46</sup> “Syriantown,” *Chinatown Banquet*. See also Helen Woo and Paul Lee, interview by Chien Chi Huang, Boston, August 28, 1995.

<sup>47</sup> Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*, 162-164.

<sup>48</sup> Federal Aid Highway Act of 1962, 76 Stat. 866; Public Law 87-866; Geiser, *Urban Transportation*, 19-20; Raymond A. Mohl, “Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities,” *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 5 (July 2004), 680.

Though Boston's new highways may have facilitated the flow of growing numbers of motor vehicles in and out of the city, they did so at the expense of cutting sections of the city off from one another, and they involved significant land takings, displacing some three hundred residents and destroying over seventy structures in Chinatown by the mid-1960s. The experiences of the displaced would haunt highway building and urban renewal in Boston and other cities for years to come. San Francisco was the site of America's first freeway revolt in the late 1950s. In the 1960s, a national movement against freeways would emerge as communities across the country organized coalitions that delayed or defeated the construction of highways through their neighborhoods. In Boston, plans for an Inner Belt as proposed in the 1948 Highway Plan were thwarted in the mid-1960s by a diverse cross-class coalition that led Governor Francis Sargent to declare a "moratorium" on highway construction in 1970. Additional pieces of the 1948 Master Highway Plan, such as the Southwest Expressway, were also scrapped.<sup>49</sup>

## **Conclusion**

From the 1920s to the 1950s, Chinatown's ethnic elites renovated and reconstructed the neighborhood's built environment, and these efforts provided a basis for some of their objections to the Central Artery's path through the neighborhood. By making these investments and physical improvements, they argued, they helped transform the neighborhood from a vice district into a safe and respectable neighborhood, and the battle over Chinatown's future would to be fought on these terms. That is to say,

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<sup>49</sup> Mohl, "Stop the Road," 674-706; Alan Lupo, Frank Colcord, and Edmund P. Folwer, *Rites of Way: the Politics of Transportation in Boston and the U.S.* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); Speroni, "Before the Big Dig."



Chinatown's postwar reputation as the site of a responsible and deserving ethnic community would play a part in later struggles over the neighborhood's development.

Although they were unable to force the Central Artery route out of Chinatown entirely, their lengthy political campaign succeeded in preventing the highway from destroying the neighborhood altogether. Still, their efforts to show that Chinatown could accommodate itself to and even contribute to the larger project of urban revitalization—most powerfully expressed in the Chinese Merchants building—were trampled by the asphalt path of the urban expressways. The outcome of this struggle was a painful indication of Chinatown's racial and spatial marginalization vis-à-vis the larger urban growth regime. By the time the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority demolished Hudson Street, it was clear to these neighborhood leaders that they would have to develop a new strategy to safeguard Chinatown from further devastation as the city's redevelopment agency set its urban renewal program into motion. Residents' experiences of disruption and displacement would also provide fuel for new forms of community action that would erupt in Chinatown in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

## CHAPTER 4

### **“Planning With People”: Tufts-New England Medical Center and Urban Renewal in Chinatown, 1955-1971**

[We, the people of Boston, must] destroy our own diseased tissue and by heroic willpower rebuild our community as a worthy competitor of the newer type of city.

– William Roger Greeley, Chairman of the Boston Contest, 1944<sup>1</sup>

Can it be that as a cure to the disease, Tufts plans to kill the patient?

– Richard Gong, Free Chinatown Committee, 1971<sup>2</sup>

#### **Introduction**

In the 1950s and 1960s, the burgeoning movement to revitalize the city made Boston's Chinatown a site of intense contestation among several public and private institutions. Among the public agencies undertaking the task of implementing urban revitalization were the Massachusetts Department of Public Works and the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, each of which defeated tremendous local opposition to construct highways through Chinatown and downtown Boston that displaced hundreds of residents and businesses and left noise, pollution, and concrete eyesores in their place. They did so with federal funding and through the combined administrative, legal, and financial maneuvering of a powerful political coalition that included elected and appointed state

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<sup>1</sup> Russell B. Adams, Jr., *The Boston Money Tree: How the Proper Men of Boston Made, Invested, and Preserved Their Wealth from Colonial Days to the Space Age* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1977), 305-306.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Gong, “Chinatown Group Protests Neglect, Tufts Expansion,” *Boston Globe*, July 20, 1971, 15.

officials, urban planners, transportation engineers, downtown business leaders, and real estate interests. Not only did these highways entail enormous human costs in their construction, they actually exacerbated many of the problems they were meant to alleviate. Downtown traffic only grew more congested in the years after the highways were built. Though engineers envisioned automobiles zipping along high-speed roads free of traffic, the Central Artery quickly became famous for its colossal traffic jams. Within a year of its completion, average daily usage of the Central Artery had already exceeded its design capacity of ninety thousand vehicles per day.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, rather than ameliorate the pattern of suburban migration that the highway builders had hoped to combat, highways accelerated it, as Boston watched its suburbs continue to grow in the 1960s and 1970s while its central city population continued to fall, never again reaching its 1950 peak.

In the same period, as highways reconfigured the city and its surrounding region, from downtown Boston to its suburban hinterlands, a movement to remake the city in other ways was also underway. This movement fixated on the clearance of “slums” and “blighted areas” and their replacement by a new landscape that would restore the city to a position of economic prosperity and prestige. Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 referred to this process as “urban redevelopment,” but it would become better known as “urban renewal” under Title I of the Housing Act of 1954.<sup>4</sup> Steering these efforts in Chinatown

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<sup>3</sup> A. S. Plotkin, “New Throughways Used to Capacity: 95,000 Cars Every 24 Hours,” *Boston Globe*, July 26, 1959, 1.

<sup>4</sup> The literature on urban renewal policy is vast. See Peter Marris, “A Report on Urban Renewal in the United States,” in Leonard J. Duhl, ed., *The Urban Condition: People and Policy in the Metropolis* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 113-134; Martin Anderson, *The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal, 1949-1962* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1964); Scott Greer, *Urban Renewal and American Cities: The Dilemma of Democratic Intervention* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966); Charles Abrams, *The City Is the Frontier* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); James Q. Wilson, ed., *Urban Renewal: the Record and the Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966); Jeanne R. Lowe,

were Tufts University and the New England Medical Center (T-NEMC), private nonprofit institutions that would ally with one another and with the city's redevelopment agency to pursue their particular vision of a better urban future.

This chapter examines the development and implementation of Boston's urban renewal program in Chinatown, from its beginnings in the mid-1950s to its end in the 1970s. It explores how a non-profit medical center drove the renewal process in Chinatown, and it considers the significance and impact of urban renewal on this neighborhood. The history of urban renewal in Boston's Chinatown is deeply intertwined with that of the development and expansion of Tufts University and New England Medical Center in Boston's South Cove. This institutional partnership provided the initial impetus for urban renewal in Chinatown, the consequences of which have continued to reverberate in the decades since. The institutional expansion of T-NEMC and its relationship to Boston's renewal program can be understood within the context of the sharp increase in federal spending on science and medical research during the Cold War. The joining of these federal spending patterns with the urban renewal project in the 1960s had an effect of empowering universities and hospitals in urban politics. With one of the highest concentrations of colleges, universities, and hospitals in the United States, Boston

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*Cities in a Race with Time: Progress and Poverty in America's Renewing Cities* (New York: Random House, 1967); Lawrence Friedman, *Government and Slum Housing: A Century of Frustration* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968), 147-172; Mark I. Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933-1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 105-156; Mollenkopf, *Contested City*; Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance*; Robert Halpern, *Rebuilding the Inner City: A History of Neighborhood Initiatives to Address Poverty in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 57-82; Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America and What We Can Do about It* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004); Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*; Herbert J. Gans, *The Urban Villagers* (New York: Free Press, 1962); Marc Weiss, "The Origins and Legacy of Urban Renewal," in J. Paul Mitchell, ed., *Federal Housing Policy and Programs, Past and Present* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985) 253-276; Robert E. Lang and Rebecca R. Sohmer, eds., "Legacy of the Housing Act of 1949," special issue, *Housing Policy Debate* 11, no. 2 (2000); Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

was especially affected by this combination of federal priorities. Research and medical institutions played a decisive role in bringing the long-desired “New Boston” into being and setting in motion Boston’s resurgence as a “City of Ideas,” a development which reached full bloom in the “Massachusetts Miracle” of the 1980s.<sup>5</sup> While the roots of this economic resurgence were federally supported and steered by local politicians and institutional actors, it must be remembered that it was also subsidized by the people of neighborhoods like Chinatown, whose participation—willing and unwilling—was necessary for this urban transformation to occur.

Additionally, this chapter examines the advancement of the “planning with people” approach adopted by Boston Redevelopment Authority director Ed Logue and urban planners in other cities in the 1960s, after the conspicuous failures of large-scale clearance projects such as the West End.<sup>6</sup> This approach sought to give local neighborhoods a greater voice in the planning process, and it tends to be viewed as an improvement over the top-down clearance programs pursued in earlier years. This approach did incorporate new voices into the planning process, and it generated important benefits such as the construction of new low-income housing. However, this chapter shows that “planning with people” fell short of its promise by selectively recruiting only the most powerful of local institutions and neighborhood organizations

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<sup>5</sup> Margaret Pugh O’Mara, *Cities of Knowledge: Cold War Science and the Search for the Next Silicon Valley* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); BRA, *1965/1975 General Plan for the City of Boston and the Regional Core* (Boston: BRA, 1965).

<sup>6</sup> Edward Logue, *Seven Years of Progress* (Boston: BRA, 1967), 1; Walter McQuade, “Urban Renewal in Boston,” in *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy*, ed. James Q. Wilson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966), 270-271; James Q. Wilson, “Planning and Politics: Citizen Participation in Urban Renewal,” in *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy*, ed. Wilson, 407-421. On Logue see Lizabeth Cohen, “Buying into Downtown Revival: The Centrality of Retail to Postwar Urban Renewal in American Cities,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611, no. 1 (2007); Lizabeth Cohen, “Ed Logue and the Struggle to Save America’s Cities,” Research Brief (Real Estate Academic Initiative at Harvard University, March 2010); Lizabeth Cohen, *Saving America’s Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in the Suburban Age* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, forthcoming).

into its process. In this way, “planning with people” actually generated new configurations of exclusion that allowed the BRA to move forward with its renewal program despite sometimes strong local opposition, all while claiming neighborhood approval. Rather than ameliorating the kind of state violence typified by large-scale clearance then, “planning with people” engendered new forms and sites of violence by exploiting existing community divisions in ways that intensified rather than resolved conflicts over space. Moreover, rather than empowering ordinary people to define their own visions for the future of their neighborhood and city, it actually enhanced the power of the state to pursue its narrow vision of renewal, which continued apace in the 1960s in ever more expanded ways.

The redevelopment of Chinatown was the fulcrum of the city’s renewal project in the South Cove, and it set the trajectory for later struggles over downtown development and gentrification. While the significance of T-NEMC’s role in Chinatown’s transformation is undeniable, its meaning remains controversial. Many longtime neighborhood residents and activists have portrayed T-NEMC as a nefarious institution, which neglected the people of Chinatown while expropriating their land. Others have defended the institution as “a good friend to the community.”<sup>7</sup> As this chapter argues, T-NEMC’s involvement in urban renewal in Chinatown is more complicated and in some ways more troubling than either of these interpretations allow. In fact, both of these interpretations grasp two sides of the same story. T-NEMC and the BRA promoted the idea that urban renewal in Chinatown was mutually beneficial for the neighborhood, for the institution, and for the city as a whole. And they were able to enlist Chinatown’s

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Liu, “Chinatown’s Neighborhood Mobilization and Urban Development in Boston” (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, Boston, 1999), 117. Liu attributes this quotation to Bill Moy, speaking at a Chinatown community forum on July 24, 1997.

traditional leadership, who were initially divided over the issue, into this project and to persuade them of its virtue by promising limited community benefits in the form of new low-cost housing. Although urban renewal generated some 400 units of much-desired affordable housing for the Chinese community, it destroyed more units of housing than it replaced, and it facilitated the expansion of T-NEMC's land holdings in a residential neighborhood by more than 400% in one decade. In this way, T-NEMC was able to claim the mantle of "good friend to the community" while at the same time utilizing public mandates and monies for urban renewal in order to consolidate its own institutional expansion in and around Chinatown. In the decade after 1965, T-NEMC expansion led to the rapid erosion of Chinatown's residential and commercial areas, almost half of which were seized for institutional development.

### **Beating the Suburbs at Their Own Game**

As the Commonwealth's highway builders were finally seeing their long desired roadways cut new and often brutal paths through and around Boston, urban planners, downtown businessmen, and real estate owners continued to promulgate the idea that urban decline could only be reversed by making the central city not only more accessible but also "cleaner, brighter, quieter, and more attractive."<sup>8</sup> Urban highways were aimed principally at attacking the problem of decentralization by alleviating downtown traffic congestion, increasing accessibility to the central city, and thereby stimulating economic activity in the central business district. The matter of making Boston "cleaner, brighter, quieter, and more attractive," however, required different but no less extreme measures. Urban redevelopment, they believed, would solve the problem of "blight" by demolishing

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<sup>8</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown*, 233.

aging and unproductive urban spaces and thereafter reconstructing the physical landscape along more rational lines. Thus, as state agencies implemented highway construction under the banner of urban revitalization, downtown retailers and property owners together with urban planners, elected officials, and other interested parties began pursuing the other key half of their urban solution—the physical reconstruction of the central city itself.

Boston’s municipal leaders took their first steps toward developing an urban redevelopment program in 1940, when—at the request of the Boston City Planning Board—Mayor Maurice Tobin appointed a seventeen-member Advisory Committee on Community Rehabilitation. The advisory committee included planners and architects from Harvard and MIT as well as delegates from the Boston Society of Architects, the Chamber of Commerce, the New England Mutual and John Hancock Life Insurance Companies, the Boston and Massachusetts Real Estate Exchanges, the local housing associations, organized labor, and social welfare agencies. Together with the City Planning Board, this committee embarked on a “study of depreciated areas” “for the purpose of finding methods by which tremendous losses in real estate values may be recaptured, especially in areas close to the downtown district.”<sup>9</sup>

By the start of 1941, this group had decided to pursue detailed investigations of South Boston, the South End, and the West End for possible “rehabilitation.” Their “working definition of rehabilitation” included “the demolition of buildings, street replanning and the construction of new buildings, as well as repairs and remodeling.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Boston City Planning Board, “Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the City Planning Board for the Year Ending December 31, 1940” (Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1941), 4, 32.

<sup>10</sup> Boston City Planning Board, *Building a Better Boston: A General Statement on Rehabilitation and an Analysis of Existing Conditions in the South End* (Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1941);



Boston's planners, like their counterparts in other cities, believed that decentralization could be defeated if Boston offered "within the center neighborhood environments which attempt to captures some of the attractions which pull people to the suburbs." This would be achieved "by providing adequate open space for recreation, rehabilitation of buildings, and replanning of street patterns to obtain freedom from heavy traffic dangers and lessening the nuisance of smoke, dirt and noise."<sup>11</sup> A revitalized city meant more open space, better roads, and a safer life. This was what suburbia offered, and now Boston and other central cities had to compete with suburbia by beating it at its own game.<sup>12</sup>

### **In Pursuit of a New Boston**

Boston's urban redevelopment program began in earnest in June 1943, when William Stanley Parker, Chairman of the Office of the City Planning Board, sent Mayor Maurice Tobin the study entitled "Rehabilitation in Boston," which included the Advisory Committee on Community Rehabilitation's results and recommendations. Identifying limited areas to study, the first being the "New York Streets" area in the ethnically mixed South End, the study sought to demonstrate that areas such as these had deteriorated to such a degree that reconstruction and rehabilitation could only follow extensive demolition along with reconditioning a few salvageable structures. It also pointed out that it was not just that dilapidated buildings needed to be replaced but that new construction and new uses for underutilized land should be shaped by a

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Boston Housing Authority, *The New York Streets Project Report (Preliminary)* (Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1952); Boston City Planning Board, "Twenty-Seventh Annual Report." In the early 1940s, Boston's city planners used "rehabilitation" as a comprehensive term in its studies to refer to both clearance as well as preservation. In practice, however, these reports found relatively few sound structures worth preserving and generally emphasized clearance of large areas followed by new construction.

<sup>11</sup> Boston City Planning Board, *Rehabilitation in Boston, Volume II: A Report on Reconstruction* (Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1943), 7-8.

<sup>12</sup> Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*, 33-34.

comprehensive vision for the city's future. The dilapidated structures and chaotic growth of the nineteenth century industrial city—where housing, commerce, and industry mingled dangerously—had to be cleared and rebuilt according to a more ordered, rational, and functional division of urban space. Even the limited project of the New York Streets ought to be carried out within a comprehensive master plan for the city.<sup>13</sup> The Boston City Planning Board continued to investigate and make recommendations for redevelopment in the New York Streets area, the South End more generally, the West End, and Mattapan through the end of the 1940s.<sup>14</sup>

After John Hynes was elected mayor in 1949, he moved forward energetically with his plans for a “New Boston,” cultivating an alliance among Boston's business leaders, downtown real estate owners, the City Planning Board, and the Boston Housing Authority. This alliance would base its actions on a 1950 General Plan for Boston, which endorsed wartime ideas for urban revitalization, incorporating earlier transportation studies such as the Central Artery and new plans for redevelopment such as the New York Streets and West End projects. Hynes' growth coalition refined and developed a shared vision for Boston's future in the Boston College Citizens Seminar. Over a series of meetings beginning in 1954, businessmen, politicians, and planners came together on the campus of Boston College to discuss their shared goals for the revitalization of Boston's slums, the eradication of blight, the rebuilding of downtown office and

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<sup>13</sup> Boston City Planning Board, *Rehabilitation in Boston, Vol. II*.

<sup>14</sup> Boston City Planning Board, *Building a Better Boston*, Boston City Planning Board, *Rehabilitation in Boston, Vol. II*; Boston City Planning Board, *Rehabilitation in Boston, Volume III: A Progress Report on Reconditioning, Project Costs and Benefits to Developer, City and Tenants* (Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1946); Boston Housing Authority, *Mattapan Project Report* (Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1952); BHA, *The New York Streets Project Report*; Boston Housing Authority, *The West End Project Report: A Redevelopment Study* (Boston: Boston City Printing Department, 1953); Boston Housing Authority, *Expressways to Everywhere* (Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1955).

commercial districts, the creation of attractive housing for the middle class, renewed transportation in the region, and new spaces for tourism. If all this could be achieved, they believed that Boston would be able to end the flight from the central city, attract homeowners and customers back from the suburbs, promote vigorous commercial activity, and attract corporate investments that would restore confidence in the city's future.<sup>15</sup>

In response to the growing movement in Boston and other cities to combat urban decline by constructing new housing and eradicating blight, Congress passed the Housing Act of 1949, which provided federal funding for "urban redevelopment." Title I of the Housing Act authorized \$1 billion in funds to help cities acquire slums and blighted land for public and private redevelopment with the federal government paying two-thirds of the cost. The city would clear the land and then sell it to a private developer below market price in hopes that blighted areas could be regenerated and the real estate property tax base increased through large-scale construction projects. The Housing Act of 1954 amended the 1949 Act to provide funding, not only for new construction and demolition, but for the rehabilitation and conservation for deteriorating areas as part of a "Workable Program" with a land-use plan, zoning, relocation of displaced persons, building codes, and citizen participation. It also replaced "urban redevelopment" with the term "urban renewal." This amendment signaled the beginnings of a shift from new construction to conservation, although most major renewal projects continued to focus on clearance and new construction until the mid-1960s. Two years later the Housing Act of 1956 amended

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<sup>15</sup> O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 122; Mollenkopf, *Contested City*, 155-159.

the 1949 Act to authorize relocation payments to persons displaced by urban renewal.<sup>16</sup>

Taking advantage of these federal funds, the Boston Housing Authority proceeded to clear first the New York Streets neighborhood and then the West End neighborhood as the city's first renewal projects. Between 1955 and 1957, the New York Streets area of the South End was transformed from a multi-ethnic residential neighborhood into an industrial area that would become home to the *Boston Herald* newspaper. Perhaps the most notorious project, however, was that in West End, which entailed massive displacement of some 2,700 households from another of Boston's vibrant, multi-ethnic neighborhoods between 1958 and 1962 in order to make way for the construction of Charles River Park, a complex of luxury high rise apartments. Together, these two renewal projects displaced over 3,000 families from their homes, and both would in time become icons of urban renewal's failures both locally and nationally.<sup>17</sup> As these renewal projects were underway, the Boston Housing Authority, at the urging of the New England Medical Center, began to eye the Chinatown neighborhood for its next renewal project.

### **New England Medical Center in the South Cove**

In 1955, the Central Artery was making its way through Chinatown, and clearance for Boston's first experiment with urban renewal was just beginning in the adjoining New York Streets neighborhood of the South End. Mayor Hynes had officially announced the

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<sup>16</sup> See Lang and Sohmer, "Legacy of the Housing Act of 1949;" Anderson, *Federal Bulldozer*; Wilson, ed., *Urban Renewal*; Gelfand, *Nation of Cities*; 105-156; Mollenkopf, *Contested City*; Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*; Halpern, *Rebuilding the Inner City*, 57-82; Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*; Gans, *Urban Villagers*;

<sup>17</sup> Sean M. Fisher, Carolyn Hughes, eds. *The Last Tenement: Confronting Community and Urban Renewal in Boston's West End* (Boston: The Bostonian Society, 1992), 62; O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 106, 124-127; Kennedy, *Planning the City upon a Hill*, 162-166. On growing resistance to urban renewal more generally, see also Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961); Mandi Isaacs Jackson, *Model City Blues: Urban Space and Organized Resistance in New Haven*; Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*; Klemek, *Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal*.

West End redevelopment project two years earlier in 1953, but the full scale of its devastation would not be seen there for another three years.<sup>18</sup> At this point, advocates of urban renewal were still confident in their strategy for urban revitalization, which involved large-scale clearance of so-called slums and blighted areas in place of which a new landscape of modernity, efficiency, and order would be constructed. Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 and its amendments empowered cities to realize this vision with federal funds paying two thirds of the cost.

By the mid-1950s, NEMC had developed into a loose consortium of hospitals working in affiliation with the Medical and Dental Schools of Tufts University, and it occupied the better part of three square blocks in the South Cove. New England Medical Center (NEMC) was first formed in 1930 as an unincorporated alliance of the Boston Dispensary, the Boston Floating Hospital for Infants and Children, and the Trustees of Tufts College. Established in 1796 by a group of prominent Bostonians including Samuel Adams, the Boston Dispensary opened its first clinic in a house at Ash and Bennet Streets in 1856. In 1931, after a fire destroyed its ship, the Boston Floating Hospital constructed a new building for its medical services at the corner of Ash and Nassau Streets. In 1938, the Pratt Diagnostic Hospital erected a building along Bennet Street. The Pratt Diagnostic Hospital had evolved out of the Boston Dispensary's inpatient services and officially joined NEMC in 1948. In the same year, the NEMC constructed the Farnsworth Surgical Building on Harrison Avenue between Bennet and Harvard Streets. The Medical Center expanded its name to New England Medical Center Hospital in 1950 when Tufts College Medical School and Tufts College Dental School sold their previous building at 416

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<sup>18</sup> O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 106, 124-127; Kennedy, *Planning the City upon a Hill*, 162-166; Fisher and Hughes, eds. *Last Tenement*; Gans, *Urban Villagers*.

Huntington Avenue to Northeastern University and relocated to a rehabilitated commercial building at 136 Harrison Avenue, at the corner of Harvard Street and Harrison Avenue. In 1952, NEMC purchased the Ziskind Building, next to the Farnsworth Building on Bennet Street, for additional research space.<sup>19</sup>

Loosely clustered in the South Cove, NEMC facilities were surrounded by the city's commercial and theater districts to the north and west and Chinatown's residential section to the east. Signs of what was commonly understood as urban blight—aging structures, building vacancies, declining land values, and mixed land uses—were typical of the South Cove area, and according to the leaders and staff of the NEMC, these conditions were beginning to impede the institution's ability to carry out its work.<sup>20</sup>

Seeking to expand and better coordinate its facilities and to improve its surroundings, NEMC leadership launched an institutional planning effort in 1955 when it hired Kevin Lynch, an urban planner at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, to produce a report titled, "Medical Center in the South Cove: A Study for the Development of the New England Medical Center and its Neighborhood." This report described the blighted conditions of the South Cove, the impact of blight on both the NEMC and the South Cove's residential communities, and it outlined a proposal that linked the expansion of the NEMC to the regeneration of the South Cove's urban environment. This report would serve as a blueprint for what would evolve over the next decade into the Boston

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<sup>19</sup> Florence Trefethen, *Boston and Beyond: The Economic Impact of the Tufts-New England Medical Center on the City of Boston and the Surrounding Metropolitan Area* (Boston: Tufts-New England Medical Center, 1974), 77-78, 90. The Boston Dispensary was the first organized medical care service in New England and the third in the United States. Paul Revere was among its benefactors. Before opening its clinic on Bennet and Ash Street, the Dispensary was originally located on Corn Hill Street. While Tufts University affiliated with NEMC in 1950, the institution's name was not changed to Tufts-New England Medical Center until 1962. Tufts College officially became Tufts University in 1955.

<sup>20</sup> Lynch, *Medical Center in the South Cove*, 1.

Redevelopment Authority's South Cove Urban Renewal Plan of 1965.<sup>21</sup>

The report begins: “The New England Medical Center is faced with a problem of growth, and its neighborhood, the South Cove, a problem of decay. Both problems are connected. Not only must the Medical Center understand its neighborhood so that it may find the space it needs for expansion, not only must it help reconstruct it so that its own environment be improved, but indeed as the strongest force in the area, it bears a responsibility for rebuilding that goes across its own property lines. Unhappily or otherwise, it must look beyond its internal preoccupation to other issues that surround it.”<sup>22</sup> In Lynch’s estimation, the South Cove was “clearly decadent and substandard; an area of physical dilapidation and progressive abandonment, of mixed shifting use, of declining values, declining population, low incomes, low rents, and poor health.”<sup>23</sup> Staff of the NEMC reported that the “dingy environment” of the area “repels both patients and staff.”<sup>24</sup> For Lynch, all of these conditions provided a “ready index of improper development and of a ripeness for change.”<sup>25</sup> Based on these findings, Lynch concluded that there was a “need for a strong initiative in the South Cove—that it will not renew itself automatically,” and that as the “strongest force” in the area, the NEMC had to accept the responsibility to lead this effort.<sup>26</sup>

Explaining the ambitions of the NEMC, Lynch wrote of a “widespread conviction” among NEMC staff that the institution had a “need to grow” beyond its

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<sup>21</sup> Lynch, *Medical Center in the South Cove*, 6; BRA, *Urban Renewal Plan: South Cove Urban Renewal Area*.

<sup>22</sup> Lynch, *Medical Center in the South Cove*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

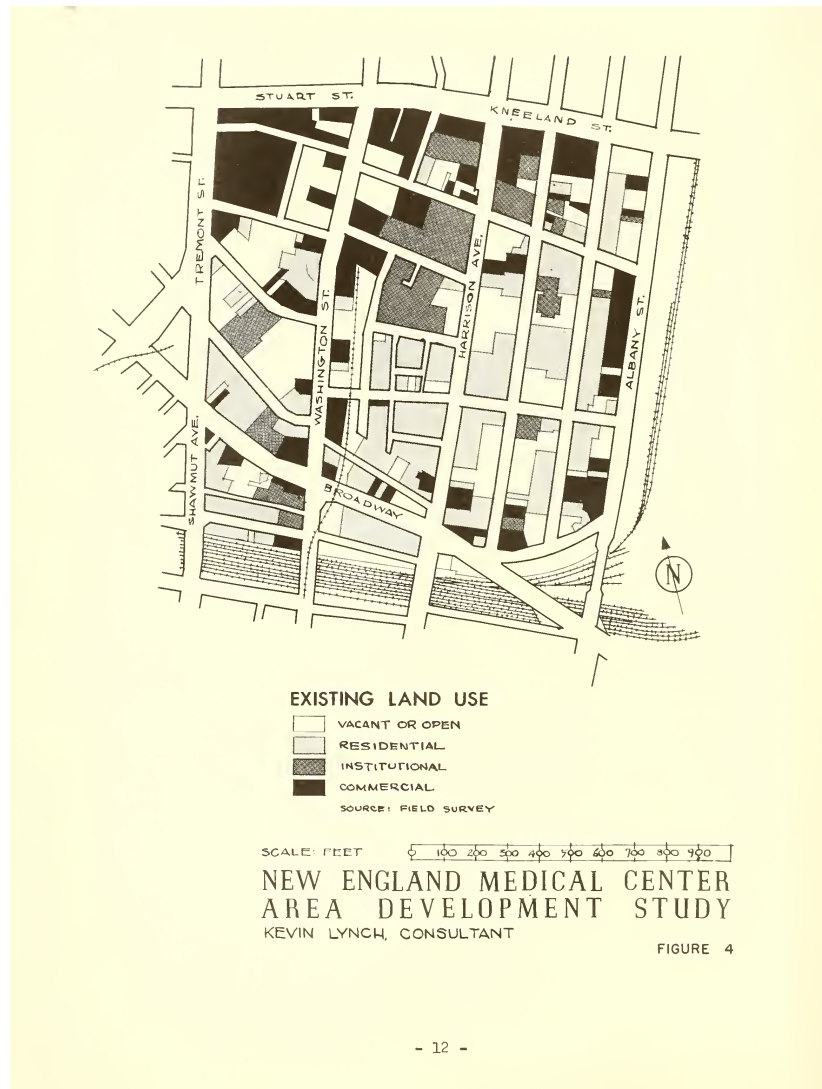


Figure 4.1. Land Use in Chinatown, 1955. Lynch, *Medical Center in the South Cove*, 12.

“cramped and awkward” facilities in order to develop into a “full-scale medical center.”<sup>27</sup>

By Lynch’s calculation, the future total requirement of floor space in 1980 would be 1,358,000 square feet, representing an increase in size of 2 ½ times beyond its existing 552,000 square feet of floor space. The projected ground space requirement of 636,000 square feet would require almost 4 times the 143,000 square feet of ground area on which

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 3, 33-34.



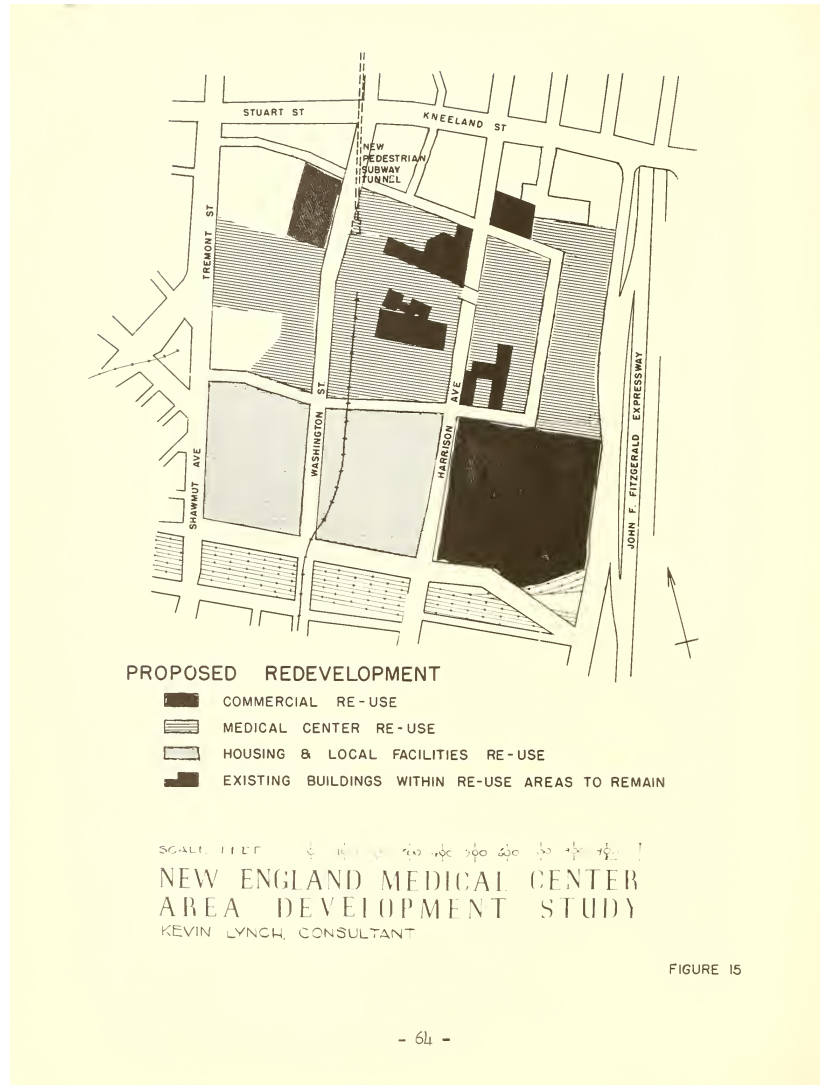


Figure 3.2. Kevin Lynch's Proposed Redevelopment for Chinatown, 1955. Lynch, *Medical Center in the South Cove*, 64.

its existing facilities were sited.<sup>28</sup> Staff also believed that growth should be planned such that the NEMC's disparate services and functions would be further integrated into a single coordinated unit.<sup>29</sup> For the NEMC then, "redevelopment [of the South Cove] would mean a new environment and the chance to grow in an orderly manner."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 34

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 63.

Out of the three possible scenarios for expanding NEMC in the South Cove outlined in the report, Lynch pinned his recommendation to “Scheme C,” which entailed a reconfigured street pattern, the construction of three parking garages for a total of 1500 parking spaces, a pedestrian greenway, and the acquisition of some 400,000 square feet of land in addition to its existing holdings. Included in this acquisition was the total residential area of Chinatown along Tyler and Hudson Streets below Kneeland Street. Under Scheme C, the entirety of Chinatown’s residential neighborhood would be cleared and reestablished in a new mixed-income residential community, which would be constructed a few blocks away to the south of Oak Street and west of Harrison Street. This “Foreign Village” would include dormitories and apartments for medical center staff and students as well as space for community facilities such as churches and playgrounds and ethnic businesses attached to the Chinese community, or in Lynch’s words, “[a] peppering of restaurants or stores of special flavor.”<sup>31</sup> Lynch facetiously assumed that Chinatown could be simply lifted and reestablished whole in a different location. This vision for recreating Chinatown in a new location is revealing of a spatial logic that underlay much of modernist planning, one that Henri Lefebvre called “abstract space.” This refers to a way of imagining space as passive containers with no particularity, or as Michel Foucault put it, “a void, inside of which we could place individuals and things.”<sup>32</sup> This conception of space helps to explain Lynch’s failure to comprehend the full value and complexity of Chinatown.

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas V. Atwater, Jr., *Optimal Land Re-Use Analysis: New England Medical Center Redevelopment Study* (Boston: New England Medical Center, 1955), 21; Lynch, *Medical Center in the South Cove*, 63-77. Atwater’s study of existing and potential land values in the South Cove was conducted for Kevin Lynch, who submitted it to NEMC together with his report. The term “Foreign Village” is Atwater’s.

<sup>32</sup> For useful discussion of “abstract space,” see Grace Kyongwon Hong, *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 70; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*; Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986), 23.

While it may be tempting to interpret Lynch's proposal as a simple land grab in a vulnerable neighborhood, Lynch actually saw redevelopment as both a necessary and mutually beneficial arrangement that would be good not only for NEMC but also for Chinatown and for the city at large. For NEMC, redevelopment offered "a new environment and the chance to grow in an orderly manner." For the city, it promised to raise land values and stimulate commercial activity downtown. By facilitating NEMC's transformation into a first-rate medical center, redevelopment would protect the city's health, create jobs, and elevate the city's prestige. For Chinatown residents, redevelopment offered the promise of decent housing and adequate community facilities. Therefore, for Lynch, redevelopment in the South Cove promised to strengthen a basic public service, contribute to downtown revitalization, and give "new life [to] the residents of a decadent area."<sup>33</sup>

Lynch also took pains throughout the report to recognize "the strength of the Chinese and Syrian family and community," and he suggested, "perhaps, because of the two community-oriented nationality groups, Syrian and Chinese, the area is more stable, more self-regulating, and socially healthier than might be expected from the physical and economic indices."<sup>34</sup> He further acknowledged, ". . . the group with the strongest stake in the district, along with the Medical Center, is the Chinese community; and . . . the most important institutions in the South Cove are those that serve them, including the Quincy School."<sup>35</sup> Lynch portrayed the Chinese community as respectable citizens who, like NEMC, suffered from "a very poor surrounding environment" that left them "isolated, lacking in social or economic opportunity, and housed in an adequate supply of very bad

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<sup>33</sup> Lynch, *Medical Center in the South Cove*, 63.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 21.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

dwellings.”<sup>36</sup> Of course, from his vantage point in history, Lynch would not have been able to fully recognize the violent histories of war, exclusion, disenfranchisement, and uneven geographic development that produced the urban environment that Chinese Americans came to inhabit together with Syrians and others. Likewise, he did yet fully appreciate the rich and dynamic lives that they made for themselves in and through Chinatown despite massive structural constraints. Though his work a few years later began to undo this conventional wisdom, Lynch was convinced at the time that a process of clearance, construction, and relocation, while temporarily disruptive, would ultimately benefit the Chinese community by virtue of supplying it with “decent housing and adequate recreation.”<sup>37</sup>

In considering how the NEMC might realize this plan, Lynch concluded with the recommendation that NEMC approach the City of Boston to encourage it to declare a South Cove renewal project under the provisions of Title I of the Housing Act of 1954 and Chapter 121A of the Massachusetts General Laws, the latter providing tax concessions to private and non-profit developers building housing in blighted areas. An urban redevelopment corporation formed under Chapter 121A was obligated to engage primarily in the construction of housing. Therefore, NEMC’s focus on institutional expansion precluded it from pursuing this strategy. However, Lynch reasoned, if NEMC’s leadership was able to convince the city to declare a South Cove renewal project, the Boston Housing Authority could oversee the acquisition and clearance of land as a public agency and then sell it below market rate to NEMC for institutional

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

expansion as well as to non-profit or private developers interested in building housing.<sup>38</sup> This technique whereby the city would administer NEMC expansion as part of a broader renewal plan, which included housing construction, would prove effective. And though the exact pattern of NEMC expansion in later years would change from what Lynch outlined in 1955, the general plan for institutional growth remained remarkably faithful to Lynch's initial recommendations. It was thus that Kevin Lynch, on behalf of NEMC, provided the initial designs for what would eventually become the South Cove urban renewal program. Later in 1964, Hermann F. Field, who directed T-NEMC's planning office from 1961 to 1972, affirmed the institution's pivotal role in declaring the South Cove an urban renewal area: ". . . Through its own interest in an urban renewal project for the area, the Medical Center has been the prime mover in early urban renewal action in the area without which it is doubtful whether a project could have been initiated in the near future, if at all."<sup>39</sup>

### **Planning South Cove Renewal: A False Start**

By September 1956, less than one year after Lynch's report, the Boston Housing Authority had carried out a preliminary investigation into redevelopment of the South Cove, the city's fourth such contemplated project.<sup>40</sup> Describing "death, disease, poverty, and loneliness," the report observed a "definite need for renewal." The South Cove boundaries in the BHA report encompassed the area that Lynch had identified plus an

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>39</sup> Tufts-New England Medical Center Planning Office, *Development of Tufts-New England Medical Center, 1965-1985: A Preliminary Study* (Boston: Tufts-New England Medical Center, 1964), 5.

<sup>40</sup> BHA, *Redevelopment of the South Cove*, 1. By this point, a Mattapan renewal project was under consideration, along with the West End and New York Streets projects. See BHA, *Mattapan Project Report*; BHA, *The New York Streets Project Report*; BHA, *The West End Project Report*. The Boston Housing Authority was the city agency in charge of urban redevelopment until the Boston Redevelopment Authority was established in 1957.

additional fifteen acres to the west. The report's findings and recommendations hewed closely to Lynch's, so closely in fact that it lifted at least one passage verbatim.<sup>41</sup> As Lynch had done, the BHA recommended the demolition of ninety percent of the existing buildings in the area, including nearly all of the neighborhood's residential buildings, which numbered over one hundred and included the entire residential section of Chinatown south of Kneeland Street. And as Lynch had proposed, a new residential development would house those displaced from Chinatown who wished to remain in the area.<sup>42</sup> Mayor Hynes swiftly requested that City Council approve the motion to declare a South Cove renewal project, so that the city could apply for funds from the Housing and Home Finance Agency in order to carry out more advanced survey and planning.

The City Council held a series of public hearings on the proposal between November 21, 1956 and March 15, 1957, during which nascent citywide resistance to urban renewal left the Council hesitant to endorse the plan. Stanley Chin, of the Chinese Merchants Association, led the charge at these hearings against the destruction of Chinatown's residential neighborhood. Upon learning of the plan, he reported that the Chinese community—who had just relinquished buildings and land for the construction of the Central Artery highway—was once again in “despair and confusion.” Chin challenged the BHA's damning assessments of poor health and deteriorating buildings as “erroneous and misleading,” pointing out that a number of Chinese residents had rehabilitated their homes. Pleading with the Council “not to scatter our people to the four

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<sup>41</sup> BHA, *Redevelopment of the South Cove*, 5; Lynch, *Medical Center in the South Cove*, 18.

<sup>42</sup> BHA, *Redevelopment of the South Cove*; 1; “Chinatown,” Meeting Notes, 1976, BRA 4563; Joseph Keblinsky, “Backers Urge Survey Cash for South Cove Urban Plan,” *Daily Boston Globe*, February 9, 1957, 1. Kane Simonian, the director of the Urban Renewal Division of the Boston Housing Authority, estimated the total cost of acquisition and clearance in the South Cove at 18 million dollars and the cost of new construction between 40 million and 50 million. Joseph Keblinsky, “\$18,000,000 Plan to Redevelop South Cove Asked,” *Daily Boston Globe*, September 26, 1956, 1.

winds,” Chin asked that Tyler, Harrison, and Hudson Streets, which encompassed Chinatown’s residential neighborhood, be excluded from the project. Kane Simonian, director of the BHA’s urban renewal division, countered that removing Chinatown from the project would nullify its feasibility as federal funding depended on the redevelopment of housing in blighted areas. Chin was joined in his opposition to the proposal by residents from nearby neighborhoods as well as representatives of property owners in the area. Attorney Joseph B. Abrams, representing several property owners and 75 residents in the area, denounced the project as a thinly veiled attempt by the NEMC to expand its facilities from 3 ½ acres to 13 ½ acres. Representatives of the South Cove Taxpayers Association argued that the project would mostly benefit NEMC, and while the organization did not oppose rehabilitation on principle, it was “against the taking of our valuable properties by subterfuge.” With the City Council unable to reach a decision, City Councilor Edward J. McCormack Jr., chairman of the Council’s urban renewal committee, announced that no action would be taken until after an inspection of the project area by the councilors scheduled for March 27, 1957.<sup>43</sup>

In early March, however, planning in the South Cove was interrupted when the Housing and Home Finance Agency ordered cutbacks to federal subsidies as a measure to reduce inflation. The HHFA put a stop order on funds to cities planning slum clearance and deferred approval for all federal grants to cities for slum clearance, except for those in disaster areas or where major obstacles would impede completion of projects. At this point, the New York Streets had already been razed, and Mayor Hynes, who at the time

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<sup>43</sup> “Chinese Fear Project May Doom Homes,” *Daily Boston Globe*, November 21, 1956, 26; “Backers Urge Survey Cash for South Cove Urban Plan”; “So. Cove Taxpayers Back Redevelopment Probe Bill,” February 24, 1957; Joseph Keblinksy, “Housing Board Challenged to Show District Decadent,” March 16, 1957, 1.

was president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, successfully lobbied President Eisenhower for continued funding of the West End project, citing that residents had already begun moving away in anticipation of the project. While federal funding continued for those two projects, the HHFA directive halted planning for the South Cove renewal project, which would not resume until the 1960s.<sup>44</sup>

### **John Collins and Ed Logue Enter the Scene**

By the end of the 1950s, urban renewal came to be distrusted and resented by the urban poor and by urban intellectuals alike. In a 1958 letter, Lewis Mumford expressed disgust at what he saw as the perversion of the urban renewal program: “It has simply become a policy of lending government aid to assemble land for the private investor, who gets a further government subsidy in acquiring the land at a lower price than the market would demand. The whole business is scandalous: socialization for the sake of the rich accompanied by the expropriation and the expulsion of the poor! This use of the term has made renewal a filthy word—like ‘love’ or ‘creativity’ in the mouth of an advertising copy writer.”<sup>45</sup> By 1960, clearance in the New York Streets and West End neighborhoods had dislocated over 3,000 families from their homes.<sup>46</sup> The 5,120 residents of the South Cove neighborhood narrowly avoided joining this fate. However, having witnessed the brutal clearance of both the New York Streets and the West End neighborhoods and

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<sup>44</sup> Koblinsky, “Housing Board Challenged”; Thomas Winship, “New U.S. Ruling Perils Boston’s Redevelopment,” *Daily Boston Globe*, March 17, 1957, B1; Joseph Koblinsky, “West End Plan Unaffected by Any U.S. Subsidies Cut,” *Daily Boston Globe*, March 22, 1957, 5; Syd Hoffberg, “Slum Clearance for Europe First, Then U.S.?: Two Hub Renewal Plans Seen Doomed,” *Daily Boston Globe*, March 24, 1957, A31.

<sup>45</sup> Lewis Mumford, letter to F. J. Osborn, 10 August 1958, in *The Letters of Lewis Mumford and Frederic J. Osborn: A Transatlantic Dialogue 1938-1970*, ed. Michael R. Hughes (New York: Praeger, 1972), 283. On the development of resistance to urban renewal in the 1950s, see Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*, 200-249; Klemek, *Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal*.

<sup>46</sup> Fisher and Hughes, eds. *Last Tenement*, 62; O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 124.



having experienced the destruction wrought by the Central Artery, their mistrust of renewal was stronger than ever.<sup>47</sup>

When John Collins was elected mayor in 1960, he recruited a young, energetic city planner named Ed Logue to head urban renewal in the city, and the two of them would oversee a substantial rebuilding of Boston over the next eight years. Logue had been in charge of urban renewal in New Haven, which many considered a success, and he agreed to accept the job in Boston under the condition that Boston's City Planning Board be folded into the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), a move that would grant him broad, centralized powers. When it was created in 1957, the BRA had assumed the development powers previously held by the Boston Housing Authority. In 1960, as Logue desired, the Massachusetts General Court consolidated both planning and development functions into a single authority. Under these arrangements, the BRA would not only have the authority to plan urban renewal, it would also have the power to carry out these plans by buying and selling property, acquiring property through eminent domain, and granting tax concessions in order to encourage commercial and residential development. Combining the functions of planning and development into a single authority had no precedent, and the arrangement was, as historian Lawrence Kennedy writes, "the most remarkable aspect of the entire era and one with incalculable ramifications for Boston in the decades since."<sup>48</sup>

With Logue at the helm of a new, more powerful BRA, Collins was able to move several unfinished projects to completion, including the Prudential Center and Government Center. With these projects under way, Collins and Logue moved forward

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<sup>47</sup> BHA, *Redevelopment of the South Cove*, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Kennedy, *Planning the City upon a Hill*, 173.

with their vision for a new era in Boston's revitalization, announcing on September 22, 1960 a massive "Ninety Million Dollar Development Program for Boston," which proposed renewal programs in ten separate areas: seven residential neighborhoods and three downtown districts, of which the South Cove was one. Altogether, the program proposed to rehabilitate a quarter of the entire acreage of Boston, an area housing half of the city's population. After the disasters of planning in the 1950s in places like the West End, and the growing resistance and anger directed at autocratic planners like William Callahan in Massachusetts and Robert Moses in New York, Collins and Logue went out of their way to emphasize that their program for renewal would emphasize rehabilitation rather than clearance, and that it would be planned in consultation "with the people who live in those communities."<sup>49</sup> Logue called this approach "planning with people."<sup>50</sup>

### **New England Medical Center Begins South Cove Renewal Planning Anew**

As Collins and Logue moved energetically forward with what one observer called "the most ambitious redevelopment program in the world," NEMC leadership took advantage of the political moment to rekindle its plans for expansion and renewal in the South Cove. It began in June of 1961 by establishing an internal planning office for would now be called Tufts-New England Medical Center (T-NEMC) and by appointing architect-planner Hermann H. Field its inaugural director.<sup>51</sup> Expanding upon the blueprint that Kevin Lynch set in the 1950s, Field announced the Medical Center's plans for an

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<sup>49</sup> O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 190-191.

<sup>50</sup> Logue, *Seven Years of Progress*, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Hermann H. Field, *Evaluation of Hospital Design: A Holistic Approach* (Boston: Tufts-New England Medical Center, 1971), 4-5; "Vermont Dean to Head Tufts Medical Center," *Boston Globe*, March 5, 1961, 11; "Young Realtor Predict Billion Dollar Hub Changes," *Boston Globe*, October 10, 1961, 42; Anthony Yudis, "New Life for Old South Cove," *Boston Globe*, January 11, 1962, 38.

initial “three-year revitalization program for the South Cove area,” aimed at expanding hospital facilities, providing open space and recreational facilities, and building new housing. As Field explained, this was but the first phase of a long-range redevelopment program, which T-NEMC hoped to unfold in cooperation with the BRA over the next three decades or more. Following the general shift among planners away from the technique of large-scale clearance, Field stressed that this renewal program, unlike the one pursued in 1956, would emphasize the “rehabilitation and preservation of Chinatown” in order to increase the area’s “stability as a permanent Chinese center.”<sup>52</sup>

In addition to the energy that Collins and Logue had injected into rebuilding Boston, T-NEMC was also spurred to revive its ambitions by an amendment to Section 112 of the Housing Act of 1961. First established in the Housing Act of 1959, Section 112 provided a 2-to-1 federal matching grant to cities where universities had made real estate acquisition investments or improvements in an area near to and consistent with an approved urban renewal plan. The Housing Act of 1961 expanded this to include hospitals as well, and the federal grant took the form of a transferable credit that could be applied to another renewal project within the city limits. In other words, the federal matching grant did not have to be spent on the original project in which the university or hospital was a participant.<sup>53</sup>

Many higher education institutions used this program to expand their campuses in

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<sup>52</sup> “Young Realtor Predict Billion Dollar Hub Changes”; William Lewis, “Hospital Bids for 2 Hub Theaters,” *Boston Globe*, January 9, 1962, 1; Anthony Yudis, “New Life for Old South Cove—II,” *Boston Globe*, January 12, 1962; Anthony Yudis, “Many Firms Shifted From Scollay Area,” *Boston Globe*, July 19, 1962.

<sup>53</sup> McQuade, “Urban Renewal in Boston,” 267-268; Julian Levi, *Municipal and Institutional Relations within Boston: The Benefits of Section 112 in the Housing Act of 1961* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); Margaret O’Mara shows that Cold War politics were central to the sharp increase in federal spending on scientific research and development in this period, and that this federal spending made academic research universities into powerful economic and political institutions in postwar urban politics. O’Mara, *Cities of Knowledge*.

the 1960s, including MIT, Yale University, Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania, and perhaps most notably University of Chicago. University of Chicago's leaders in fact were the driving force behind the creation of this program, having led the lobbying effort for its inclusion in the Housing Act of 1959. As director of the NEMC Planning Office, Hermann Field was well aware of their efforts and in fact cited their program of renewal in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago as a model for T-NEMC to follow in the South Cove. Under a South Cove renewal plan, the BRA could acquire land in and around Chinatown, sell it to T-NEMC, and then receive double the amount of money in the form of Section 112 credits that it could spend towards any renewal project in the city. Section 112 empowered universities and hospitals in urban politics, and when schools and medical institutions proposed expansions, city administrations found them hard to resist. Section 112 had an especially large impact on urban development in Boston, which had one of the largest concentrations of eligible Section 112 institutions in the United States, with thirty-one colleges and universities and twenty-five hospitals and medical centers eligible for the program. In 1962, University of Chicago researcher Julian Levi found that institutional expansion in Boston's urban renewal areas stood to generate over \$31 million in potential Section 112 credits to the city.<sup>54</sup> T-NEMC was the first institution in the Boston area whose 112 credits were applied to the city's renewal, and by 1967, T-NEMC expansion alone would generate more than \$5 million in Section 112 credits that the BRA was able to apply towards Boston's citywide renewal program.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> O'Mara, *Cities of Knowledge*, 78-79; Levi, *Municipal and Institutional Relations within Boston*; Hermann H. Field, "Application of Comprehensive Planning to the Urban Teaching Medical Center," *Hospitals: Journal of the American Hospital Association* (November 1965); Guian A. McKee, "Health-Care Policy as Urban Policy: Hospitals and Community Development in the Postindustrial City," (San Francisco: Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, December 2010), 8.

<sup>55</sup> T-NEMC Planning Office, *Development of Tufts-New England Medical Center, 1965-1985*, 6; McKee, "Health-Care Policy as Urban Policy," 8.

From this moment on, the availability of Section 112 credits allowed T-NEMC and other medical and research institutions in Boston to forge a powerful link between their own urban planning process and the citywide urban renewal process being pushed forward by Collins and Logue. Under these favorable conditions, T-NEMC once again submitted a South Cove renewal proposal to the City of Boston. In late 1962, the BRA approved the development plan for T-NEMC expansion and filed an application for a planning and survey grant from the Federal Urban Renewal Administration.<sup>56</sup>

### **Enlisting Community Participation in the Planning Process**

In the press and at several public hearings held in December 1962 and continuing through April 1963, representatives of T-NEMC and the BRA pledged that Chinatown properties would not be taken under the plan except to construct new housing for the Chinese population.<sup>57</sup> At a four-hour public hearing in December 1962, John Quarles, president of the New England Medical Center Hospitals and secretary of the administrative board of the Tufts-New England Medical Center, assured skeptics that, “our primary purpose in sponsoring this plan is not to get more land. What we are seeking is, first and most important, to improve the general character of the neighborhood—to restore the South Cove to a position of economic stability, respectability and prestige.” “We believe,” added Ed Logue, “that the medical center can be the strength around which perhaps 1000 new housing units can be built.”<sup>58</sup>

T-NEMC and the BRA also vowed to work in cooperation with the Chinese

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<sup>56</sup> Anthony Yudis, “Renewal Notes,” *Boston Globe*, November 22, 1962, 31; “South Cove,” Meeting Notes, May 18, 1964, BRA 3183.

<sup>57</sup> Anthony Yudis, “South Cove Renewal Strongly Supported,” *Boston Globe*, December 20, 1962, 1; Anthony Yudis, “Close Council Vote Seen On South Cove Plan Bid,” *Boston Globe*, April 21, 1963, 29.

<sup>58</sup> Yudis, “South Cove Renewal Strongly Supported,” 1.

community to develop these plans, citing the fact that the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and the Chinese Merchants Association had already been invited to participate in the planning process. However, the leaders of these associations were not unified in their agreement. Denny Moy, who was a restaurateur and the president of the CCBA, joined former Chinese Merchants Association president Chester Lee in endorsing the plan. However, restaurant owner Robert Lee, who had recently become president of the Merchants Association, denied knowledge of the plan when called upon to speak at a public hearing. Urging caution on the plan, Stanley Chin refused to give his endorsement to the project and sought further assurances that the Chinese community would not be forced to relocate. Despite the BRA's promise to preserve Chinatown, the community's recognized leaders remained wary and divided on the issue. To lessen the fears of the Chinese community, Ed Logue offered to sign a "Treaty of Friendship," which would put his promises in writing.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, on May 24, 1963, Mayor John Collins, Ed Logue, and Denny Moy of the CCBA signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU), which outlined the BRA's commitment to "protect and preserve the Chinese community as an important and integral part of the City" provided that the CCBA endorse the South Cove renewal project.<sup>60</sup> The MOU acknowledged that the Chinatown community had "suffered severe dislocation and reduction in its land area through highway construction by the Massachusetts Department of Public Works and the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority"

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<sup>59</sup> Yudis, "South Cove Renewal Strongly Supported"; "Obituaries: Denny Moy, 64, restaurateur and Chinese community leader," *Boston Globe*, May 20, 1981, 46; "New CCBA President Seeks Chinatown Unity," *Sampan*, January 1973, 2.

<sup>60</sup> A copy of this memorandum of understanding can be found in Appendix 1 of Chun Wan Lui, "Boston Chinatown - Housing and Land Development Strategies," (M.A. thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1979).

and that it was “further endangered by intrusion of commercial and other uses not related to the Chinese community.”<sup>61</sup> In recognition of the Chinese community’s desire for low-cost housing and space for community facilities and its desire for protection against future encroachments on Chinatown land, the parties agreed that T-NEMC would “not intrude in any way upon the Chinese community area as . . . outlined [below] except for the sub-area as outlined [below] and will not be permitted so to intrude in any urban renewal plan.” The agreed upon boundaries of Chinatown as determined in the MOU were defined by Kneeland Street to the north, the Massachusetts Turnpike to the east and south, Broadway Street to the south, and Harrison Avenue to the west. This area excluded Chinatown’s commercial core to the north of Kneeland Street, which was part of a separate downtown renewal area, but it fairly represented Chinatown’s residential zone at that point in time. The MOU also recognized that a section of Chinatown—bounded by Kneeland Street, Tyler Street, Oak Street, and Harrison Avenue—included sections of land that were owned by T-NEMC and would continue to be used by T-NEMC, including Posner Hall Dormitory, the Tufts Medical and Dental Schools, and adjacent parking lots. With these boundaries thusly negotiated, the parties agreed that no boundaries amendments would be made to the South Cove project that would adversely affect the Chinese community.<sup>62</sup>

The MOU finally specified that the CCBA would assume the responsibility of forming a development corporation to construct new low-income housing in Chinatown as part of the South Cove project and that new housing would “be constructed on a step-by-step basis so as to preclude dislocation of the Chinese families within the area and to

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<sup>61</sup> Appendix 1 of Lui, “Boston Chinatown.”

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

insure relocation of families within the Chinese community.” The CCBA would also be charged with forming an urban renewal committee to act as a representative of Chinese residents, organizations, and businesses. Under the terms of the agreement, no final plan incorporating Chinatown would be submitted for adoption without the approval of the CCBA and the Chinese Urban Renewal Committee.<sup>63</sup> As Chinatown had already relinquished space to the Central Artery and as it faced the demolition of some sixty residential structures due to the construction of the Massachusetts Turnpike extension, Stanley Chin and Robert Lee of the Merchants Association cautiously joined the CCBA in expressing support for the plan based primarily on the promise of much-needed housing construction in Chinatown as well as on the BRA’s assurances that Chinatown residents would not be forced to relocate to other areas.<sup>64</sup>

### **1965 South Cove Urban Renewal Plan**

With the formal endorsement of the CCBA as well as the guarded approval of the Merchants Association, the BRA proceeded with more advanced studies and planning in 1964, which culminated in the South Cove Urban Renewal Plan of 1965.<sup>65</sup> The 1965 Plan encompassed a 96.5-acre renewal area sandwiched between the central business district to the north and the New York Streets and the South End to the south. The renewal area included the theatre district, a part of the garment manufacturing district, office buildings, retail establishments, the residential neighborhoods of Chinatown and Bay Village, Don

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.; BRA, *Urban Renewal Plan: South Cove Urban Renewal Area*, 1-2.

<sup>64</sup> Yudis, “Renewal Notes,” 31; “South Cove Plan Backed,” *Boston Globe*, June 30, 1965, 2.

<sup>65</sup> See T-NEMC Planning Office, *Development of Tufts-New England Medical Center, 1965-1985*, 10-11; BRA, *South Cove Urban Renewal Documentary* (Boston: BRA, 1964); BRA, *Urban Renewal Plan, South Cove Urban Renewal Area*.



Bosco Technical High School, and Tufts-New England Medical Center.<sup>66</sup> The Plan's stated objectives were to "eliminate severe conditions of blight, deterioration, obsolescence, traffic congestion, and incompatible land uses in order thereby to facilitate sound development and orderly growth, and to achieve neighborhood stability."<sup>67</sup> To accomplish these objectives, the Plan aimed to facilitate the "necessary expansion and reorganization" of T-NEMC and to rehabilitate the residential neighborhoods of Bay Village and Chinatown by creating "decent, safe and sanitary dwellings." Additionally, it sought to provide sites for community facilities, improve traffic circulation, make infrastructure improvements, and beautify the area, all of these as measures "to intensify utilization of land to achieve more economically and socially productive uses" and "to prevent future obsolescence, deterioration, and congestion."<sup>68</sup>

The South Cove Plan divided the urban renewal area into five sub-areas. The largest of these was Chinatown, or what the plan called the "Tyler-Hudson Street Residential Community." In Chinatown, the Plan aimed to "preserve the present character of the area by retaining as much as possible of the existing housing and local street patterns" as well as to mitigate the "non-residential characteristics of the Massachusetts Turnpike and railroad cut, as well as the Turnpike retaining wall along Hudson Street."<sup>69</sup> The other four sub-areas were the New England Medical Center, Bay Village, Tremont-Shawmut Residential Area, and the Entertainment and Commercial District.<sup>70</sup>

Under the 1965 South Cove plan, 150 new housing units within the Chinese

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<sup>66</sup> BRA, *South Cove Urban Renewal Documentary*, 1-2.

<sup>67</sup> BRA, *Urban Renewal Plan, South Cove Urban Renewal Area*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

community were scheduled to be constructed on a 3.5 acre site on Harrison Avenue at the junction where the Massachusetts Turnpike extension and the Central Artery connected. T-NEMC, which had increased its land holdings between 1955 and 1965 from 3 to 10.5 acres, would acquire an additional 2.9 acres of land for institutional development as part of its master plan.<sup>71</sup> About 130 families, 400 individuals, and 90 small businesses would face relocation in two stages between 1965 and 1967. Of these, 50 Chinese families would be relocated to new housing within Chinatown, but only after the aforementioned new housing was available. Displaced residents would be given 90 days notice and be eligible for reimbursements of up to \$200 to cover moving expenses and property losses depending on the number of rooms of furniture that had to be moved, or up to \$500 for residents over age 62 who were unable to secure public housing. The project also called for the construction in a new location of a 300-500-pupil elementary school to replace the aging Josiah Quincy Elementary School at 88-90 Tyler Street. A community center would be constructed on the site of the old Quincy School.<sup>72</sup>

At the public hearings following the unveiling of the 1965 Plan, a growing contingent of urban renewal opponents from across the metropolitan region voiced their objections to the project. Irene Burns, a resident of the South Cove, captured the general

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<sup>71</sup> Lewis, "Hospital Bids for 2 Hub Theaters," 1; "Theater-Office Area Bought by Hospital," *Boston Globe*, January 10, 1962, 14. T-NEMC's increase in land holdings between 1955 and 1965 was comprised primarily of the acquisition of the Posner Hall Dormitory site on Harrison Avenue in 1956 and T-NEMC's purchase of the Wilbur Theatre and the 14-story Metropolitan office building both on Tremont Street, both in 1961. At time, it continued to lease the Wilbur Theatre and the Metropolitan Building to their existing occupants, though the Metropolitan Building would later be renamed the Biewend Building (after Tufts Trustee Cameron Biewend who helped fund the purchase of the property) and converted to medical center uses.

<sup>72</sup> Robert Gladstone & Associates, *Land Utilization and Marketability: South Cove Urban Renewal Project* (Boston: BRA, 1965), 12; BRA, *South Cove Urban Renewal Documentary*, 13, 17; "South Cove Urban Renewal Project (Project No. Mass. R-92), Application for Loan and Grant Part I: Final Project Report," BRA 658, Section R-223(3), 3 and Section R-223(5), 2; Anthony Yudis, "96-Acre South Cove Area May Be Next Urban Renewal Project," *Boston Globe*, March 28, 1965, 38; Anthony Yudis, "South Cove Next BRA Target," *Boston Globe*, May 21, 1965, 16; "South Cove Plan Backed," 2. For more on Quincy School, see discussion in chapter 5, this dissertation.

feeling of the opposition when she denounced the South Cove Urban Renewal Project as “a form of discreet thievery.” Joining Burns in opposition to the project were dozens of other residents from the South Cove as well as from Charlestown, Mission Hill, and even the suburbs. By this point, however, the BRA had already recruited the CCBA and other South Cove organizations and entities into its planning process. T-NEMC, Don Bosco Technical High School, the Bay Village Association, the CCBA, and the Chinese Merchants Association had all offered their support to the project, and this showing of approval among local groups overpowered the concerns of individual residents who stood to lose homes or those who opposed urban renewal on principle.<sup>73</sup> Thus in April 1966, after a decade of planning by both T-NEMC and the BRA, the South Cove Urban Renewal Project was officially approved. Acquisition, clearance, and relocation began that fall.<sup>74</sup>

The power dynamic on display in these public hearings, which was reproduced hundreds of times throughout the urban renewal program in the South Cove and elsewhere, evinces a central contradiction inherent in the “planning with people” approach embraced by Logue and other urban planners. By recruiting key local institutions into its planning process, the BRA was able to marginalize dissenters and claim that its renewal program had local approval and represented the general will of the people. However, the institutions that the BRA enlisted into its planning apparatus tended to be the most powerful of local institutions and the neighborhood groups tended to be

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<sup>73</sup> “South Cove Plan Backed,” 2; “So. Cove People Rap Renewal,” *Boston Globe*, July 1, 1965, 9; Mary Meier, “South Cove Renewal Protested,” *Boston Globe*, August 12, 1965, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Anthony Yudis, “BRA Hears Plans For Warehouse Change,” *Boston Globe*, June 25, 1965, 31.

comprised mostly of elites.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, many local residents were shut out of the process. Residents of Chinatown, for example, spoke little English and worked long hours in restaurants or garment factories, both of which served as barriers to their participation in public hearings. Moreover, many individuals in Chinatown had citizenship paperwork in limbo, were unfamiliar with or mistrusting of the political system, or depended on the CCBA and the Merchants Association for assistance with personal and business matters. All of these conditions had a chilling effect on political expression and participation, especially on political views that contradicted the neighborhood's powerful traditional leadership. In the South Cove urban renewal project then, ordinary residents of Chinatown had no meaningful way of participating in nor, more importantly, of defining the vision that T-NEMC and the BRA had already decided to pursue. For them, "planning with people" was less an expansion of their political power over the planning process than it was a reintensification and exploitation of their vulnerability.

Moreover, by the time that the BRA signed its "Treaty of Friendship" with the CCBA in 1963, the BRA had already defined its vision for renewal, and it offered a circumscribed set of options to its community partners. The CCBA faced the choice of endorsing an already fully formed plan with some concessions for new housing construction, or it could risk getting nothing at all as T-NEMC and the BRA pursued their own vision of progress. By offering concessions to groups like CCBA, for benefits such as housing, not only were the most vulnerable people of Chinatown excluded from the process even as the BRA claimed community approval, but the BRA also established the

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<sup>75</sup> See John H. Spiers, "'Planning with People': Urban Renewal in Boston's Washington Park, 1950-1970," *Journal of Planning History* 8:3 (August 2009), 221-247.

conditions of possibility for redevelopment for the CCBA, limiting the horizons for what could be imagined for the future of Chinatown and the South Cove to the particular vision already developed and embraced by T-NEMC and the BRA. This is not to say that Logue and other planners conspired to disempower urban residents but rather that the promise of inclusion as a planning principle bolstered rather than democratized state power.<sup>76</sup>

Though Logue embraced the principle of community participation more fully than his predecessors had, he did not originate the concept. In fact, the Housing Act of 1954 emphasized citizen participation in urban renewal, and Kevin Lynch in 1955 had considered it “vital to work cooperatively with neighborhood groups, enlisting their support in a common venture,” even as he envisioned the wholesale clearance of Chinatown’s residential neighborhood. “Most important,” Lynch argued:

will be the Chinese Community, and also the most difficult, since they are mistrustful, and disturbed by the expressway demolitions. It must be made clear that this plan represents an opportunity for new housing, new community buildings and new commercial locations for [the Chinese] people, and that some such positive action on their part is the only alternative to being pushed out entirely. This is true not only for this particular project, but in the long run for Chinatown as a whole, which is progressively being boxed in and whittled away . . . . It will be important to bring the community into the project as soon as possible, allowing expression of opinion and as much participation as can be evoked.<sup>77</sup>

Lynch was particularly blunt about the circumscribed set of choices that community participation in the South Cove renewal project represented for the Chinese community. In 1955 as in 1965, dominant visions of urban renewal were given a sheen of inevitability, and communities could either get on board or be railroaded by progress.

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<sup>76</sup> I am indebted here to Lisa Lowe’s discussion of the limitations and contradictions inherent to political representation for Asian Americans more generally. See Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 23-25.

<sup>77</sup> Lynch, *Medical Center in the South Cove*, 87.

While Logue seemed to offer a different approach to renewal from that of his predecessors, the underlying power dynamics of “planning with people” were actually continuous with rather than a departure from other techniques of urban revitalization whether they entailed highway construction, wholesale clearance, or rehabilitation. “Planning with people” can thus be understood as a refinement, extension, and recalibration of prior renewal methods. Though on one level, it appeared less violent and less brutal, “planning with people” in the 1960s often exploited existing community divisions, intensifying local conflicts over space and place in ways that generated new forms and sites of violence, which would only fully reveal themselves in the late 1960s and beyond.<sup>78</sup>

### **Implementing Urban Renewal**

One of the BRA’s first actions as part of the approved plan was to designate the Chinese Urban Renewal Committee, headed by Robert Lee and Ben S. Seetoo, as the tentative nonprofit developer of the 150 housing units specified in the Renewal Plan, and in 1966, they announced their vision for a \$4 million housing development in Chinatown. Designed by F. A. Stahl and Associates, the complex featured two, six, nine, twelve, and twenty-one story buildings connected by two elevators and a series of pedestrian bridges and arranged around a landscaped courtyard.<sup>79</sup> About 6,000 Chinese people lived in the metropolitan area in 1965, and it was estimated that some 3,600 or 60% of them lived in

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<sup>78</sup> On conflicts over Chinatown space that emerged in the aftermath of urban renewal, see discussion in chapters 5 and 6, this dissertation.

<sup>79</sup> Yudis, “BRA Hears Plans For Warehouse Change,” 31; Anthony Yudis, “\$4M Housing Development Planned for Hub’s Chinatown,” *Boston Globe*, January 28, 1966. Though records on the Chinese Urban Renewal Committee are scarce, the CCBA appears to have appointed members of its own organization and of the Chinese Merchants Association to this committee.

the city of Boston with about 2,500 or slightly over 40% being residents of the South Cove or the nearby South End. Nearly 70% of all Chinese residents of Boston were crowded into the South Cove or in immediately adjacent areas. A 1967 BRA study found that 89% of Chinese residents of Chinatown wished to remain in or near Chinatown.<sup>80</sup> And according to a survey conducted by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association on behalf of the BRA, Chinese Bostonians who had been displaced by the Central Artery and the Massachusetts Turnpike expressed a strong desire to return to Chinatown as soon as new housing was made available. This housing development was designed to meet this strong desire among most Chinese Bostonians to live in Chinatown.<sup>81</sup>

And in October 1966, T-NEMC announced its \$72.5 million plan for institutional development and expansion, scheduled to take place in three stages over fifteen to twenty years. The new “medical megastructure” would involve the construction of eight new facilities, including an adult-care unit, a new pediatric hospital, a twenty-story science building, a medical library, and several research buildings, as well as a “vest-pocket park between Tyler St. and Harrison Ave. to help tie the community together.”<sup>82</sup> The first two buildings to be constructed were a \$12 million Dental Health Sciences building at Washington and Kneeland Streets and an adjoining Health Services hospital building costing \$10 million.<sup>83</sup>

The Chinese Urban Renewal Committee’s housing project, which was named Tai

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<sup>80</sup> Walter L. Smart, *Diagnostic Report of Residents to Be Relocated, South Cove Urban Renewal Project* (Boston: BRA, 1967), 15.

<sup>81</sup> Gladstone & Associates, *Land Utilization and Marketability*, 3, 26.

<sup>82</sup> Herbert Black, “\$72.5 Million Teaching-Health Project Planned to Rejuvenate So. Cove Area,” *Boston Globe*, October 25, 1966, 2; Herbert Black, “\$72.5 Million Building Program: Tufts Medical Center Takes South Cove to Its Heart,” *Boston Globe*, June 16, 1968, A3.

<sup>83</sup> Black, “\$72.5 Million Building Program,” A3.

Tung Village, was delayed first by a legal claim by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority to a portion of the housing site and later by rising construction costs that placed the cost per housing unit above FHA approved cost limits.<sup>84</sup> After seven years of work, however, ground was finally broken for the 214-unit housing development in 1971. Performing the honors with golden shovels were Robert Lee, Ben S. Seetoo, and Shih Hing Lee from the Chinese Urban Renewal Committee and Ng She Cheong of the Chinese Merchants Association. The new housing was ushered in by a Chinese celebration, which included firecrackers, Chinese musical performances, and a dragon dance performed by local youth. Tai Tung Village was joined the same year by an additional 200 housing units in another urban renewal housing development in Chinatown called Mass Pike Towers, which was developed by Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries. Located two blocks west of Tai Tung Village and also overlooking the Massachusetts Turnpike, Mass Pike Towers were comprised of three structures rising 3, 10, and 13 stories high and grouped around a multi-level courtyard.<sup>85</sup> This total of 414 units of affordable housing were a welcome sight in Chinatown, but they only barely addressed the long-standing housing shortage in the neighborhood, which had only intensified since 1965. Despite the festive occasion at the Tai Tung Village groundbreaking, Shih Hing Lee warned onlookers that more housing was desperately needed in Chinatown, without which “Chinatown will be in name only.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Anthony Yudis, “Little Developer Interest Seen on Central District,” *Boston Globe*, October 23, 1966, B41; BRA, *Family Relocation Department Report, 1968-1969* (Boston: BRA, 1969), 5.

<sup>85</sup> “New Breakthrough in Housing,” *Boston Globe*, June 6, 1971, B41; Real Estate Research Corporation, *Urban Renewal Land Disposition Study: Boston, Massachusetts* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1974), 148.

<sup>86</sup> Anthony Yudis, “Dragons Usher in New Chinatown Housing,” *Boston Globe*, April 22, 1971, 3; Anthony Yudis, “Must Courts or State Banish Zoning Laws?” *Boston Globe*, April 25, 1971, B1.



## Post-1965 Immigration and a New Era for Chinatown

As urban renewal unfolded in Chinatown, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 compounded existing pressures on Chinatown land. The 1965 Act ended the national origins quota system that had been in place since 1921, replacing it with an eight-category preference system that favored the professional classes and family reunification. It resulted in a dramatic increase in the population of Chinese and Asian immigrants. Between 1960 and 1970, the Chinese population of Boston grew by 51% to nearly 8,000, making Boston home to the fourth largest concentration of Chinese Americans in the United States.<sup>87</sup> The 1965 Act radically altered the composition and class structure of urban Chinese America. Compared to earlier Chinese immigrants in the United States, this new wave of immigration was more diverse in class and educational background. Whereas Chinese Bostonians had previously been predominantly working class people from the Taishan prefecture in Guangdong province, post-1965 Chinese America included growing numbers of highly educated and skilled professionals from many different areas of China and Hong Kong.<sup>88</sup> In addition to highly educated and skilled immigrants, the 1965 Act also allowed for laborers and family members of existing residents to immigrate. This new influx of Chinese immigrants into Chinatown intensified the already high demand for affordable housing in Chinatown, creating an even more acute housing shortage in the neighborhood.

Because Chinatown could not house all of the Chinese immigrants seeking to live there, many Chinese immigrants settled in or relocated to other neighborhoods along the subway line, such as Allston-Brighton and Mission Hill; and they made regular trips to

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<sup>87</sup> Sullivan and Hatch, *Chinese in Boston, 1970*, introduction, 16.

<sup>88</sup> On the Taishanese migrations between the U.S. and China, see Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home*.

Chinatown to purchase Chinese groceries, to avail themselves of various social services, and to participate in neighborhood life. A large number of Chinese Americans moved into the nearby South End, and in particular, into the 500-unit Castle Square urban renewal housing development which opened in 1967 and was located just steps from Chinatown.<sup>89</sup> Kai Lee, a restaurant waiter, moved to Castle Square that year with his father, wife, and three children. He explained that Castle Square's proximity to Chinatown allowed the family to "have Americans on one side and Chinese on the other, and . . . still buy Chinese groceries." On why living near Chinatown was important to him, he said, "When you be all alone and you be Chinese you don't know the fashion for people. And my wife she don't know much English."<sup>90</sup>

In 1970, Chinatown had reached its capacity of about 1,900 Chinese residents. Meanwhile, about 2,900 Chinese Americans had made their home in the nearby South End and in particular the Castle Square development, whose occupants were about 30% Chinese, 30% black, 30% white, and 10% Puerto Rican. Chinatown, meanwhile, had the lowest median income in the city of Boston. Nearly 70% of heads of households in Chinatown had less than an eighth grade education. And some 80% of the Chinese people living in both Chinatown and the South End spoke little or no English.<sup>91</sup> While the 1965 Immigration Act allowed for skilled Chinese American professionals to enter the United States in large numbers for the first time, many Chinese Americans were exceedingly poor, uneducated, and non-fluent in English. For these people in particular, Chinatown

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<sup>89</sup> Walter L. Smart, *Family Relocation, 1967 Annual Report* (Boston: BRA, 1968); *Family Relocation Department Report, 1968-1969*, 5; BRA, *Neighborhood Profile, Chinatown/South Cove, Preliminary Draft* (Boston: BRA, 1974); Irene Matos Chen, Jared Katsian, Deborah Backus, and Ann Moy, interview by author, Boston, December 5, 2012.

<sup>90</sup> "Views of a New South End: The Poor," *Boston Globe*, August 1, 1967, 7.

<sup>91</sup> Sullivan and Hatch, *Chinese in Boston, 1970*, introduction, 16; BRA, *Neighborhood Profile, Chinatown/South Cove*; "Views of a New South End: The Poor," 7.

continued to be a critical home place.

The post-1965 influx also contributed to the transformation of Chinatown's traditional power structure. Although Chinatown was never truly monolithic or homogenous, the CCBA and the Chinese Merchants Association had served as Chinatown's effective if unofficial authority and public face for almost seven decades. The late 1960s marked the emergence of a new generation of young activists and civic leaders who challenged their authority. The incredible heterogeneity of post-1965 Asian immigration, the coming of age of a generation of Chinatown's young people, and the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s all combined to weaken the singular authority of Chinatown's traditional leadership. As new Chinese American organizations proliferated in the late 1960s and 1970s, the CCBA and the Merchants Association found it increasingly difficult to make the claim that they alone represented this fast-emerging Chinese American population, many of whom were well educated and saw little use for the paternalistic authority of Chinatown's traditional leadership. To an extent, these splits in Chinatown also emerged out of struggles within the community over urban renewal.

The Free Chinatown Committee was one of the new groups established at this time. Formed in 1971 by Chinese American college students and neighborhood youth, the Free Chinatown Committee was one of a number of groups that formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which challenged the existing order in Chinatown and signaled the political changes that would take hold of neighborhood in the coming years. Citing their work as part of an effort to defend "Chinatowns throughout the country . . . under siege," the Free Chinatown Committee saw itself as part of a national Asian American Movement. Critical of T-NEMC's expansion through urban renewal and its failure to

provide adequate medical services to the Chinatown community, the group accused T-NEMC of neglecting the people of Chinatown while exploiting their land. In 1971, they marched into the Executive Director's office with a list of demands, including a halt to institutional expansion and the provision of affordable bilingual medical services to the people of Chinatown. As part of their demonstration against T-NEMC, they also denounced the institution's policy of "communication with the recognized leaders of Chinatown," denouncing Chinatown's traditional leaders as "puppets" of T-NEMC.<sup>92</sup> Stunned by their actions, Shih-Hing Lee, president of the CCBA and a member of the Chinese Urban Renewal Committee, issued an apology to T-NEMC on their behalf.<sup>93</sup>

Inexperience prevented the Free Chinatown Committee from gaining much traction in their efforts, and the group soon disbanded. However, the Free Chinatown Committee signaled an emergent political consciousness and a growing discontent among a new generation of Chinatown activists that would crystallize in coming years. Members of this group would go on to participate in other struggles over Chinatown. One of these members, Michael Liu, went on to work as a community organizer in New York with I Wor Kuen, a radical Asian American organization that took inspiration in part from the Black Panther Party. Liu would later help establish the Chinese Progressive Association and the Asian American Resource Workshop in Boston's Chinatown, both prominent left-leaning organizations that would play major roles in neighborhood struggles in the

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<sup>92</sup> Michael Liu, interview by author, Brookline, MA, June 16, 2013; Michael Liu, Kim Geron, and Tracy Lai, *The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism: Community, Vision, and Power* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 52; Michael Liu, "The Asian American Movement Today," Azine: Asian American Movement Ezine, last modified September 26, 2009, accessed September 14, 2013, <http://apimovement.com/asian-american-movement/asian-american-movement-today>; Gong, "Chinatown Group Protests Neglect, Tufts Expansion."

<sup>93</sup> Suzanne Lee, personal communication with Michael Liu, March 15, 1998, cited in Liu, "Chinatown's Neighborhood Mobilization," 5.

late 1970s and beyond.<sup>94</sup>

Striking a political middle ground between Chinatown's traditional leadership and the Free Chinatown Committee were organizations such as the Chinese-American Civic Association (CACA). A social service organization founded in 1967, the CACA declared its purposes thusly: to communicate, socialize, and work for the Chinese American community; to bring families and youth together; to work to ensure that the Chinese community gets its fair share in civic programs; and to "engage in activities that will improve the Chinatown image and physical appearance and will further enhance Chinatown's position as a focal point for community activities."<sup>95</sup> Their members included both middle class and working class Chinese Americans, about a third of whom resided in Chinatown. Many had grown up in Chinatown and gone on to college, emerging now as a generation of young professionals. The CACA established a multi-service center to provide English lessons, employment services, and youth services to non-English speaking Chinese immigrants. In 1969, they founded the bilingual Chinese-English newspaper called the *Sampan*.<sup>96</sup>

Seeking to find common ground among the growing divisions in Chinatown of young and old, traditional and radical, immigrant and American born, the CACA held a conference on the "Future of Chinatown" in October 1971.<sup>97</sup> At the conference, which

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<sup>94</sup> Liu, interview; Gong, "Chinatown Group Protests Neglect, Tufts Expansion"; Ken Botwright, "An Exotic Front, but Chinatown Suffers," *Boston Globe*, December 11, 1969, 3; Liu, Geron, and Lai, *Snake Dance of Asian American Activism*, 59-63, 129-130

<sup>95</sup> Chinese-American Civic Association, "Proposal: Toward Living and Communicating Together," Boston, n.d., CHSNE.

<sup>96</sup> Lui, "Boston Chinatown - Housing and Land Development Strategies," 52-53; Chu, *Chinese in Massachusetts*, 65-66.

<sup>97</sup> Mark Hall and Frank Ling, *A Pre-Conference Study, Chinese-American Civic Association* (Boston: Harvard Urban Field Service, 1971), accessed May 12, 2014, <http://tccboston.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/chinatownplanningproject1971.pdf>; Chinese-American Civic Association,

was held at the Chinese Merchants Building at 20 Hudson Street, widening fissures within the Chinatown community were brought into sharp relief. Representatives of younger Chinatown organizations—including the Free Chinatown Committee, the Chinese Adult Education Committee, the Chinatown Drop-In Center, the Saturday English Classes Group, and the Chinese Golden Age Center—criticized Chinatown’s traditional leadership for failing to stand up to city, state, and federal agencies whose projects had “gobbled up” Chinatown’s land. They described the older associations as “monolithic cliques that no longer represent the interests of the Chinese people.” And they called for diversification of power and for greater participation in the decision-making process. According to Terry Kwan of the Chinese Adult Education Committee, “The Chinese population has changed drastically in the past two decades, but Chinatown’s hierarchy is the same.” Frank Chu, a young leader of the Chinatown Drop-In Center, compared Boston’s Chinatown to China in the early twentieth century, saying that both were threatened by imperialistic oppression from without and by conservative repression from within. “Until Chinatown’s power structure is changed drastically or challenged,” he proclaimed, “I see little hope for progress. . . . The present leadership is incapable of dealing with the rapidly changing developments in the community.” Ed Goon, the head of the CACA, pleaded for cooperation: “We must have the cooperation of the older group, the middle-aged group, and the younger groups if we are going to progress. . . . It is wrong for any one group, whether or not they agree with the other group, to work without the others. They must and should cooperate.”<sup>98</sup> Though not

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“Report of the Conference on the Future of Boston’s Chinatown” (Boston: Chinese-American Civic Association, March 1972).

<sup>98</sup> Don Clark, “Young Bitterly Attack Elders at Parley: Disputes Shatter Chinatown Unity,” *Boston Herald Traveler*, October 24, 1971.

without conflict, the conference succeeded in convening a cross section of the Chinatown community to make their grievances known, to recommend solutions to neighborhood problems, and to discuss their visions for Chinatown's future. One significant outcome of the conference was the formation of at least seven working groups focused on neighborhood issues, including adult education, economic development, schooling, recreation, health, and social services. Some of these groups continued to meet after the conference and later became formal organizations of their own, such as the South Cove Community Health Center and the Chinese Economic Development Corporation. Still, the conference concluded without a real consensus, and political divisions persisted. These tensions in the Chinatown community were the result of massive transformations within Chinese America refracted through the neighborhood's experiences of urban renewal and its legacies. In 1971, as in later decades, much of the conflict within Chinatown would revolve around competing visions for Chinatown's development, and through these struggles over urban space and place, Chinese Americans would also construct new identities and communities.

### **The Legacies of Urban Renewal in Chinatown**

Urban renewal left a complicated legacy in Boston's Chinatown. While it did generate important new housing construction, it also entailed significant demolition and displacement, which compounded the effects of the Central Artery and Massachusetts Turnpike extension. By the end of 1969, urban renewal had caused 470 households in the South Cove to make permanent moves, including over 700 Chinatown residents.<sup>99</sup> T-

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<sup>99</sup> BRA, *Family Relocation Department Report, 1968-1969*, 5; Andrew Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C: How Boston's Chinatown Won a Victory in the Fight Against Institutional Expansionism and

NEMC expansion alone involved the demolition of 167 units of housing.<sup>100</sup> By 1975, the South Cove urban renewal project had enabled the Medical Center to complete the construction of its new Proger Hospital facility, which housed the center's main inpatient services, as well as a new building for the Tufts University Dental School. Beginning in the 1960s, T-NEMC, in partnership with the BRA, utilized the federal urban renewal program to transform the itself from a loose assemblage of medical facilities on three acres of land to the nation's fifth largest hospital-based research center sited on thirteen acres of land. Urban renewal, in short, had solidified the position of the Tufts–New England Medical Center as a major part of Boston's emerging healthcare and knowledge-based economy, and it did so in large part through a consolidation of land in and around Chinatown.<sup>101</sup>

While the number of acres acquired, homes and businesses destroyed, and people displaced provide one measure of the impact of urban renewal, numbers tell only part of the story. At the heart of this phase in Chinatown's history is the way in which T-NEMC and the BRA managed to impose their vision of urban renewal as necessary, inevitable, and a universal urban good. Urban renewal relied on and produced a profoundly normalizing framework for governance, and those who were enlisted into its project played a part in authorizing and legitimizing the state's right to dictate the forms and sites of political contestation. Thus, it was through rather than in spite of the BRA's appeal to community participation that it managed to regulate and contain dissent. In this way, the BRA was able to claim community approval and participation in the urban renewal

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Environmental Racism," Occasional Paper (Institute for Asian American Studies, University of Massachusetts, Boston, September 1997), 2; Smart, *Diagnostic Report of Residents to be Relocated*, 7.

<sup>100</sup> Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 4; Trefethen, *Boston and Beyond*, 93-94.

<sup>101</sup> BRA, *Urban Renewal Plan: South Cove Urban Renewal Area*, 7-14; McKee, "Health-Care Policy as Urban Policy," 8-9.



program while in fact narrowing the terrain of legitimate political expression to that which it defined and controlled. As we will see, this recalibration of urban politics and planning would also generate new forms of social action that would explode in the 1970s.

While urban renewal did contribute to the construction of new affordable housing in the neighborhood, which has contributed to Chinatown's longevity as a working class residential neighborhood, the quality of life for Chinatown's residents as a whole were in many respects worse in the 1970s than in the 1950s, due in no small part to the very program that was intended to revitalize the city. In 1971, towards the end of the urban renewal era, one journalist observed, "Chinatown has probably suffered more from urban renewal and highway building than any other area in Boston."<sup>102</sup> And in 1974, a BRA study concluded that "Chinatown, more than any other neighborhood in the City, is adversely affected by the surrounding environment."<sup>103</sup> Having survived the highway construction program and the urban renewal program, they were now surrounded by increased traffic and pollution from two highways, increased land values and rents, and towering buildings that cast shadows down upon the remaining 3 and 4 story row houses that many Chinatown families continued to occupy. These legacies of urban renewal, rooted in the actions of T-NEMC and the BRA in the 1950s and 1960s, would resound through struggles over race and space in Chinatown for decades to come.

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<sup>102</sup> Andrew Miller, "Confucius Say: Beware of Urban Renewal," *Boston Magazine*, April 1971, 61.

<sup>103</sup> BRA, *Neighborhood Profile, Chinatown/South Cove*.

## CHAPTER 5

### **From Urban Renewal to Urban Revolt: New Landscapes of Struggle, 1967-1985**

#### **Introduction**

When Kevin White became mayor in 1968, he inherited the unfinished work of reconstructing Boston that John Collins and Ed Logue had set in motion during their eight years in office. During his first two terms in office, he continued their work and saw the completion of several projects that they had begun. However, responding to growing resistance to urban renewal and top-down urban planning, White also devoted greater emphasis to community planning and neighborhood services, declaring that “Boston needs people programs to match the building program.”<sup>1</sup> Although White’s focus on neighborhoods would give way to a greater emphasis on downtown development during his last eight years as mayor, when he first took office in the late 1960s, he supported and recruited neighborhood leaders into urban governance. Neighborhood activism in Boston and across the nation during this period altered how political leaders competed for power and effectively ending large-scale clearance projects and revising traditional planning practices to incorporate citizen review and participation procedures.

This chapter examines a set of urban struggles that were fought in and through Boston’s Chinatown from the early 1970s to the mid 1980s. Neighborhood activism in Chinatown from the 1950s to the late 1960s had primarily focused on mitigating the most

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Healy, “Political Circuit: Who Inherits Collins Vote?”, *Boston Globe*, June 12, 1967, 9.

disruptive impacts of urban renewal and maneuvering for limited benefits within the city's development program. Its primary actors were the neighborhood's conservative, traditional leadership. In the 1970s, the contradictions of urban renewal engendered new configurations of power and provoked a countermovement—what Daniel Bell and Virginia Held called a “community revolution”—within low-income communities and communities of color that saw their neighborhoods reconfigured in often devastating ways by urban renewal.<sup>2</sup> In Chinatown, this “community revolution” arose out of the conjuncture of the aftermath of urban renewal, the antiwar and civil rights movements, and the post-1965 demographic transformation of Asian America. New organizations and new leaders emerged out of this moment to confront a legacy of racial segregation and spatial subordination in Chinatown. They challenged the right of the state and its agents to demolish their neighborhood, and they challenged older neighborhood leaders who had cooperated with the Boston Redevelopment Authority as they created new visions and opened pathways towards an alternate urban future.

The battles fought in Chinatown during the 1970s and 1980s tackled a broad set of issues, including access to jobs, equal education, affordable housing, health and safety, and this activism was led by a more diverse cohort of urban leaders, which included college students, young professionals, and new immigrants as well as Chinatown's traditional power brokers, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and the Chinese Merchants Association. In vying for an adequate standard of living, these activists exposed and critiqued the racialization of space that underwrote the historical development of Boston's Chinatown. They also asserted new ideas of what it meant to be

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Bell and Virginia Held, “The Community Revolution,” *Public Interest* 16 (Summer 1969), 142-177.

Chinese American and developed new claims to Chinatown as crucial site and symbol of Chinese and Asian American identity, agency, and community.

### **Surviving the City: Chinatown in the 1970s**

By the 1970s, living conditions in Chinatown were among the worst in the city. A 1970 report produced by Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), Boston's antipoverty agency, found that, "In nearly every case, the Chinese community is shown to have greater problems than most others in the community."<sup>3</sup> Between 1960 and 1970, the city's Chinese population increased by 51%, from about 5,200 to 7,900. Two-thirds of this new population arrived in the five years after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which abolished the national origins quota system and allowed for the immigration of tens of thousands of Asian people. Many Chinese immigrants sought to live in Chinatown, but space there was in short supply. Since the completion of the Central Artery in 1959, highway construction, urban renewal, and institutional expansion had reduced the geographic area of Chinatown occupied by residents and businesses by one half. Insufficient housing stock led to severe overcrowding. Over three quarters of the area's dwellings had fewer rooms than occupants, compared to 8% in the city as a whole. Moreover, 72% of Chinatown's housing was found to be deteriorating or dilapidated, compared to 14% for the city as a whole. Although the Boston Redevelopment Authority estimated that about 1,200 people in total had been displaced from Chinatown by highway construction and urban renewal combined, the post-1965 influx of Chinese immigrants actually led to an overall increase in the neighborhood's Chinese population from 1,600 to 1,900 between 1960 and 1970 despite a decrease in the number of

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<sup>3</sup> Sullivan and Hatch, introduction to *Chinese in Boston, 1970*.

residential units. Chinatown thus became not only one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in the city but also the most racially segregated, with the highest ratio of nonwhite residents to white residents of any neighborhood in Boston. Those who could not find housing in Chinatown turned to other neighborhoods nearby and along the subway line. Beyond the 1,900 Chinese people living in Chinatown, 2,900 were estimated to be living in the immediate vicinity of the South End, 1,000 in Allston-Brighton, and 400 in Parker Hill-Fenway, with another 1,000 scattered throughout the city. For all of these people, Chinatown remained the focal point for shopping, jobs, and social life.<sup>4</sup>

Chinatown's ethnic economy strained to meet the needs of growing numbers of Chinese immigrants seeking work, and this left many in a precarious situation. Most Chinese men found employment in low-paying restaurant and laundry work while Chinese women were concentrated in the garment manufacturing industry. Chinatown maintained the highest percentage of service workers of any Boston neighborhood, with 82% of Chinese household heads employed in the service sector, compared to 12% for the city as a whole. As the Chinese population boomed, however, the restaurant industry became saturated, and opportunities for restaurant work became harder to find. Opportunities in laundry work were also fewer than in years past due to technological innovations in automated laundries, while the garment manufacturing industry was in the midst of a long-term decline. Limited education and fluency in English restricted the kinds of occupations Chinese immigrants could enter. Nearly 70% of heads of

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<sup>4</sup> Sullivan and Hatch, *Chinese in Boston, 1970*, introduction, 16, 20-21, 44; Betty Murphy, "Boston's Chinese: They Have Their Problems, Too!", *Chinese-Americans: School and Community Problems* (Chicago: Integrated Education Associates, 1972), 29-31. In 1965, 4,769 Chinese were recorded as emigrating to the United States. In 1967, this number was 25,096.

households had less than an eighth grade education, and only 12% were high school graduates. According to one estimate, about 75% of the Chinese population of Boston spoke minimal survival English or none at all.<sup>5</sup> These conditions made Chinatown one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in the city. Despite having larger families on average than the city as a whole, Chinatown had the lowest median family income of any neighborhood in the city of Boston—\$5,170 per year, with 63% of Chinese families earning less than \$6,000 and 21% less than \$3,000. By comparison, the median family income for the city as a whole was \$7,540.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, ABCD found growing social problems among Chinatown's youth. Chinese children were often left alone when both parents were working, and for a time there was no daycare service available.<sup>7</sup> Community activist Trevor Moo observed, "One of the saddest things to see . . . is the children who come here and don't know English. They are sometimes given from 20 to 45 minutes of daily secondary English instruction and then are put into the regular classroom." Chinese teenagers, Moo lamented, were also dropping out at an increasing rate, particularly those who struggled to learn English.<sup>8</sup> Although Chinese youth accounted for 97% of the student enrollment at the Josiah Quincy Elementary School in Chinatown, the school employed only one Chinese teacher. Citing the insensitivity of white teachers towards Chinese youth and the inadequacy of educational support in the neighborhood, former students often recounted that a Quincy School teacher called Chinese students by assigned numbers instead of by their names,

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<sup>5</sup> Murphy, "Boston's Chinese," 32.

<sup>6</sup> Sullivan and Hatch, *Chinese in Boston, 1970*, introduction, 44; Murphy, "Boston's Chinese," 30.

<sup>7</sup> Sullivan and Hatch, introduction to *Chinese in Boston, 1970*; Quincy School Community Council and Quincy School Project Staff, Planning Office, Tufts-New England Medical Center, *Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex* (Boston: Quincy School Planning Project, 1969), 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> Murphy, "Boston's Chinese," 32; Liu, interview.

claiming that Chinese names were too difficult to pronounce. This teacher also forbade Chinese students from speaking in her class and demanded that their communications be written on notes, signed with their numbers.<sup>9</sup>

In 1972, a youngster named Shiu-Kwong gave a poignant account of Chinatown life from the perspective of one of its youth in one of the first issues of *Sampan*, a bilingual community newspaper published by the Chinese American Civic Association:

Dear Santa:

I hope that you know where to find me. My family and I moved this year from our old and crowded apartment at Wong Dai Sin in Hong Kong to Boston in the U.S. We now live in an apartment in Chinatown. Things were strange at first but now are a little better. But I miss my friends.

. . . I don't see my mommy and daddy as much as I used to. Daddy works in a restaurant and Mommy sews at the garment factory. I hardly see Daddy because he works at night and Mommy goes to work before I go to school. My parents said that they had to work hard because of the high rent and because they love us. Because they do not have a chance to learn English they cannot find a better job. But how can they learn English if they work all day and night? I wish, Santa, I could have them to myself for a while. . . . I get pretty lonely. There are no playgrounds in Chinatown. If I did get a bike or a hot wheeler, where would I play with it? I was hoping for a sled, as I never had one before, because it never snows in Hong Kong, but where would I play with it? My father has no car to take us to playgrounds outside the city. . . .

I would . . . like to be able to have more time with all my family, especially with my mommy and daddy. I wish that they could have a chance to learn English, so they can find better jobs and then be able to spend more time with me. I would like to see my parents happier and not work so hard. I would like to ask for a sled, Santa, but I think I would much rather have my family around me more often than they are now.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cynthia Yee, interview; Liu, interview; Murphy, "Boston's Chinese," 32; CACA, "Report of the Conference on the Future of Boston's Chinatown," 39. A participant in the 1971 "Future of Boston's Chinatown" conference also observed that the Josiah Quincy School and the Abraham Lincoln School, where Chinese youth were concentrated, were perceived as a refuge for conservative teachers within the Boston School system who had tenure and seniority. According to the participant, many of these teachers felt that the Chinese pupils posed fewer disciplinary problems and seemed to regard assignment to these schools as a reward for faithful service to the Boston Public School system (*ibid.*).

<sup>10</sup> Shiu-Kwong, "An Open Letter to St. Nick," *Sampan* (December 1972), 4.

This plaintive letter to Santa captured a set of shared experiences that defined urban life in the U.S. for many Chinese immigrant workers and their families at the time. Not yet the broadsheet newspaper it would become over the next decade, *Sampan* at this time was a modest photocopied newsletter produced by CACA for Chinese Americans in the Boston area, both within and beyond Chinatown. Founded in 1972, the publication provided the CACA with a way to promote its services, to publicize community events, and to communicate information about social welfare programs to Chinese people in the area. As a CACA project, it also served as a forum for discussing issues relevant to this community, such as bilingual education and affordable housing in Chinatown; and it played a role in constructing a shared Chinese American identity and community through this coverage. Set in this context, Shiu-Kwong's letter told of a complex bundle of difficulties and dilemmas relating to immigration, language, work, housing, family, and education that would have resonated with many of *Sampan's* readers, whose lives were bound to one another through this collective urban experience of racialized, gendered, immigrant labor. These shared experiences would support the emergence of a new community consciousness centered on Chinatown, one that would give rise to a string of race- and place-based struggles for social change in the 1970s and 1980s.

### **“We Are A Whole New Generation of Chinese Americans”**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Chinatown's community was reconfigured not only by the influx of new immigrants but also by the emergence of a new generation of American-born Chinese who were now coming of age. Many of those who had grown up in Chinatown during the era of highway construction and during the early stages of urban renewal were now college students or college-educated young professionals. One of these



college students was Michael Liu, who, like many students in the late 1960s, was radicalized by the social movements of the period, particularly the antiwar movement and the civil rights movement. Born in 1948, Liu grew up in Chinatown at 100 Tyler Street with a father who worked as a restaurant waiter and a mother who worked as a seamstress in a garment factory, and he saw firsthand the destruction of many of the places he once frequented as a child in the 1950s and 1960s. Having been politicized by the social movements of the late 1960s and having witnessed the destruction of his home neighborhood, Liu returned to Boston after graduating from Swarthmore College in 1969 to engage in Chinatown community activism first as part of the short-lived Free Chinatown Committee in 1971 and later as a founder of two leftist organizations, the Chinatown People's Progressive Association (later the Chinese Progressive Association) in 1977 and the Asian American Resource Workshop in 1979.<sup>11</sup> Liu was one of many Chinese American college students who began in the late 1960s to work in Chinatown as English tutors, youth workers, and elder care volunteers and who sought in the 1970s to organize Chinatown's working families into a political force as part of a national Asian American movement.

These college students were joined by a slightly older cohort of college-educated American-born Chinese who were now emerging as young middle-class professionals, working in fields such as engineering, mathematics, medicine, and science. A group of these men and women formed the Chinese American Civic Association (CACA) as a social organization in 1967. By 1970, the organization had about 200 members, most in their 30s and 40s, from Chinatown as well as the suburbs. Caroline Chang, one of the group's leaders, typified the membership of CACA. Chang had grown up in Chinatown

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<sup>11</sup> Liu, interview.

in the 1940s and 1950s, and her family home at 48 Hudson Street had been taken by eminent domain in the 1960s for the construction of the Massachusetts Turnpike extension. After graduating from Boston University in 1962, Chang worked for eight years as a mathematician in the defense industry before being recruited to serve as the first manager of Chinatown's Little City Hall, one of sixteen such neighborhood offices that Mayor Kevin White created in his first term using Model Cities funding.<sup>12</sup> Some of CACA's members were Chinatown residents, but like Caroline Chang, many had also been displaced from Chinatown, gone on to college, and resettled in other parts of Boston or its suburbs. Regardless of where they lived, most had friends and family members who resided in Chinatown, and they continued to feel a deep sense of belonging in and ownership over the neighborhood long after moving away. As Caroline's brother Reggie Wong, also a CACA member, later recalled, "I don't know my next door neighbor in Newton . . . but I go here in Boston, and I know somebody in every department."<sup>13</sup>

Though it began as a social organization, CACA soon turned its focus towards community service and civic engagement, and it established a multi-service center that operated initially out of the Maryknoll Sisters Center, a Catholic mission at 78 Tyler Street. There, CACA volunteers offered free services to the Chinese community including interpretation and translation, housing information and assistance, employment counseling, and legal aid. Among CACA's early projects were voter registration drives,

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<sup>12</sup> Caroline Chang, interview by Ai-Li Chin, April 7, 1994, Chinese American Women Oral History Project Audiovisual Collection (CAW), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University (SLH); Caroline Chang, interview by Ai-Li Chin, October 22, 1995, CAW, SLH; Chu, *Chinese in Massachusetts*, 98. The Little City Halls program was created by mayor Kevin White during his first term in office. Little City Hall representatives in each neighborhood served as liaisons between Boston's neighborhoods and City Hall, bring various issues of concern in the neighborhood to the attention of the mayor. See Eric A. Nordlinger, *Decentralizing the City: A Study of Boston's Little City Halls* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972).

<sup>13</sup> Reggie Wong, interview.

civic programs, and door-to-door polls focused on pinpointing Chinatown's housing, health and employment needs. In the early 1970s, the group organized a free health care screening of the Chinatown community with the cooperation of Tufts-New England Medical Center (T-NEMC), and they coordinated an adult English education program for restaurant workers and garment workers in coordination with volunteer college students and the Maryknoll Sisters Center. Through these activities, CACA drew attention to Chinatown's social conditions and educated Chinese Americans about social welfare programs to which they were entitled, and they became leading advocates for adequate housing, education, employment, and social services in Chinatown.

CACA also played an important role in instilling a new sense of identity and community in Boston's expanding Chinese population. Beyond the resources and material support it provided to Chinatown's inhabitants, the CACA viewed civic engagement itself as forging of a modern Chinese American identity, culture, and community. As Caroline Chang put it in 1972, "We are a whole new generation of Chinese-Americans who look at this country as our home. We know we have to work within its systems if we are to solve our problems and preserve our cultural and economic center. We will have to have outside help to do this, even though it is an unprecedented step for us to seek support from non-Chinese sources." In the pages of *Sampan*, the CACA portrayed Chinatown's social conditions as emblematic of a broader Chinese American experience. It encouraged Chinese Americans to identify with Chinatown on the basis of a shared experience of racialization, and it called on them to recognize the predicaments of Chinatown's residents as their own:

The Chinese in America have long been regarded as the 'model minority'—meaning more often than naught [sic]—that the Chinese are

nicely acquiescent, obedient, and do not ‘rock the boat.’ With this label, the outside community has found it easy to ignore or overlook the problems of Chinatown. But the often ‘invisible’ and quiet minority—the Chinese, particularly those limited to the physical boundaries of Chinatowns, have needs, too. Yes, even in Chinatowns there are the typical urban ghetto problems: problems of housing, problems of cultural and language barriers, problems of unemployment and underemployment, problems of the elderly and the young, problems of space, education and health. . . . Now is the time, more than ever, for the Chinese community to work together on a common project, a project to benefit the members of the community. A united effort, a united voice is needed. . . .<sup>14</sup>

By drawing a link between the racialization of Chinese Americans as a model minority and the socio-spatial marginalization of Chinatown as a “ghetto,” the CACA invited Chinese Americans to embrace Chinatown as a discursive site of agency and affiliation, which enabled increasingly diverse and dispersed Chinese Americans to find common ground and to inhabit the same politics even though they did not necessarily inhabit the same neighborhood.

CACA’s advocacy offered a more transparent and democratic approach to community service than the CCBA, which distinguished it from the hierarchical and paternalist leadership style of the neighborhood’s traditional power brokers. As former resident Beverly Wing recalled:

. . . the city used to seek out one organization to be the spokes-agency of Chinatown and that is the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. . . . It relied upon that organization to represent the community because they . . . had access to people linguistically and with what seemed to be appropriate venues. Basically the people at the CCBA table were appointed or elected by their individual organizations and so one would think that they reflected their constituents’ voices and that there was a communication process, consultation process and they brought those opinions and voices back to the larger table. [However,] some kind of consensus was [usually] developed before presenting it to the community. They didn’t have community meetings, they didn’t have bilingual information, . . . and there certainly weren’t any Chinese language

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<sup>14</sup> “Editorial: United Voice Needed,” *Sampan* (February 1973), 5.

newspapers that were floating around that had a Boston focus, so people didn't get information the way they do now.<sup>15</sup>

Having been raised in Chinatown, sometimes as second or third generation Chinese Americans, and having been educated in American colleges and universities, the leaders of CACA possessed an intimate knowledge of Chinatown's political culture, and they understood both the significance and limitations of its traditional power brokers. At the same time, their fluency in American culture and familiarity with the American political system gave them a different political outlook than Chinatown's elders.

Despite their differences, the CACA paid its respects to Chinatown's traditional leadership as they built coalitions across various sectors of the community and the broader public. In December 1969, for instance, a delegation from CACA participated in an open hearing with officials of the Mayor's Office of Human Rights to inform them of various problems in Chinatown. As a result of this meeting, Kevin White authorized a "Mayor's Task Force for the Resolution of Grievances in Chinatown" to serve as a forum for the discussion of local problems and as a medium for raising awareness of the needs of Chinatown's denizens. Operating under the auspices of the CCBA, the task force consisted of about 40 members that included Chinese American professionals, businessmen, and college students divided into six committees: housing for the elderly, cultural identity, recreation, education, physical environment, and police protection.<sup>16</sup> CACA's role in the formation of this task force demonstrates how it navigated multiple political institutions within and beyond Chinatown by building coalitions that helped to

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<sup>15</sup> Beverly Wing, interview by Katie Li, December 5, 2003, audiocassette on file with author. Also cited in Katie Li, "Who Decides? The Formation of the Combat Zone in Boston and Chinatown's Role in Making the Decision" (unpublished paper, Campaign to Protect Chinatown, 2003), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Murphy, "Boston's Chinese," 33.

alter the neighborhood's political structure. The task force also illustrates the diversity of Chinese Boston and the range of issues that affected Chinatown.

CACA again endeavored to create 'unity' around Chinatown when it organized a "Conference on the Future of Boston's Chinatown" in 1971. The initial impetus for the conference sprung out of a search in the winter of 1970 for a new headquarters when CACA's landlord—the Chinese Merchants Association—embarked on a project to redevelop a row of buildings on Oxford Street into a modern business and housing complex. Although this project never came to fruition, the CACA realized in its search for space that there were other groups working in Chinatown that had goals similar to CACA and that many of these organizations were engaged in a similar search for space. In the hopes of better coordinating these efforts as well as better coordinating the use of space in Chinatown, the CACA considered the need for a master plan that might better align the neighborhood's limited space and resources with the needs of its community. Borrowing a technique that had been used to generate interest in a master plan in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, CACA decided to hold a conference to facilitate a community discussion about what a master plan might address. CACA enlisted Harvard University's Urban Field Service for assistance in surveying Chinatown's development needs; this culminated in a preliminary planning study and a conference in 1971, both of which affirmed the findings in the ABCD report and outlined numerous possibilities for how these problems might be addressed. The greatest needs identified through this process were in the areas of adult education, employment, education and childcare, recreation, health, housing, and land use, and committees were formed to continue working on these issues in a coordinated fashion. Efforts towards producing a Chinatown community

master plan would continue in various forms through the 1980s, and a master plan would not be officially recognized by the city until 1990, but this conference represented the first major effort to systematically assess the community's needs and priorities and to organize around a shared vision for a "safe, healthy and strong Chinese community." Disagreements were voiced in the process, but what emerged were stronger relationships and greater mutual understanding among Chinatown's various factions as well as a shared vision of what was wanted and needed in and for Chinatown among a wide spectrum of groups serving the area. As we will see in this and in the following chapter, this effort launched a range of projects, which would crucially shape Chinatown's development over the next three decades.<sup>17</sup>

As CACA fashioned a political alternative to the singular authority of the CCBA, it insisted that the problems facing Chinatown must be solved by the whole community: "the unique problems of the Chinese community . . . require that we ourselves within the community have control over these services. Who knows better the problems of the Chinese community than ourselves. Who most accurately understands the needs of the Chinese, other than ourselves. We must meet that challenge."<sup>18</sup> As they cultivated a more open, democratic, and inclusive politics in Chinatown, this new generation of activists mobilized a racial and political consciousness among Chinese Americans that regarded Chinatown as a site and symbol of agency, affiliation, and community-making.

### **Planning the New Josiah Quincy School**

While the Boston Redevelopment Authority identified the CCBA as its

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<sup>17</sup> Hall and Ling, *Pre-Conference Study*; CACA, "Report of the Conference on the Future of Boston's Chinatown."

<sup>18</sup> "Editorial: United Voice Needed," 5.

community representatives within the larger urban renewal planning process, Chinatown's new cohort of community leaders seized a role for themselves in one important aspect of urban renewal, which was the planning of a new school facility in Chinatown. In 1965, the BRA had called for the replacement of the 120-year old Josiah Quincy Elementary School at 88-90 Tyler Street with the construction in a new location of a 300-500-pupil elementary school as part of its South Cove Urban Renewal Plan.<sup>19</sup> Built in 1847, the Josiah Quincy Elementary School in Chinatown was the first school in the nation to arrange students by grades, and it was the oldest school building in Boston still in use. In 1944, George Strayer had conducted a survey on behalf of the city's Finance Commission that detailed the dilapidated condition of many of Boston's school buildings, noting that schools in Boston's predominantly minority neighborhoods were in particular need of repair. Noting broken doors and leaky ceilings, Strayer deemed the Quincy School obsolete and recommended that it be abandoned and replaced by a new school building. These findings were reaffirmed in a 1962 report on Boston schools authored by Cyril Sargent of the Harvard Graduate School of Education on behalf of the Boston School Department and the Boston Redevelopment Authority. Drawing special attention to school projects in districts that were eligible for federal urban renewal funds, the report recommended the construction of eighty-six new school buildings in the city, including one to replace the aging Quincy School.<sup>20</sup> Constructing a new Quincy School

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<sup>19</sup> BRA, *South Cove Urban Renewal Documentary*, 13, 17; "South Cove Urban Renewal Project (Project No. Mass. R-92), Application for Loan and Grant Part I: Final Project Report," BRA 658, Section R-223(3), 3 and Section R-223(5), 2. Yudis, "96-Acre South Cove Area May Be Next Urban Renewal Project," 38; Yudis, "South Cove Next BRA Target," 16; "South Cove Plan Backed," 2.

<sup>20</sup> George D. Strayer, "A Digest of the Report of the Boston School Survey, Conducted Under the Auspices of the Finance Commission of the City of Boston" (Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1944); "The Sargent Report," *Boston Globe*, September 14, 1962, 14; "\$132 Million School Program Called Vital," *Boston Globe*, October 5, 1962, 16; Frank W. Kibbe, Jr., *The Quincy School Project – Final Report, Year One* (Boston: Quincy School Planning Project, 1967); Nina McCain, "New School Complex



also formed an important part of T-NEMC's plan for institutional expansion and renewal in Chinatown, as its planners hoped that the new school would be attractive enough that some members of its staff would live in the neighborhood and send their children there. To this end, the South Cove Urban Renewal Plan called for the construction of 120-150 units of new housing for T-NEMC students and staff as part of the "Quincy School Complex," with 25% of the urban renewal parcel designated for housing and 75% for the school facility itself.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, in December 1966, T-NEMC's Planning Office and the Boston School Department announced the beginning of an ambitious program to develop a new Quincy School in the South Cove. The new facility, they proclaimed, would offer an innovative environment that would serve as a new model for urban education. The building, it was announced, would go beyond simply providing a learning environment for children. It would function as a "community resource," which would supply a wide range of information and services to the local community, including employment assistance and counseling, recreation and physical education, medical services, legal aid, and housing. In this way, the Quincy School would be more than just a school; it would be a "participating member of a conglomerate community fulfilling a variety of needs as they are discovered within this complex urban social system."<sup>22</sup> For the first two years of

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Combines Community, Social Services," *Boston Globe*, December 7, 1969, B2; "The Sargent Report," 14; "\$132 Million School Program Called Vital"; Adam R. Nelson, *The Elusive Ideal: Equal Opportunity and the Federal Role in Boston's Public Schools, 1950-1985* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 23-29.

<sup>21</sup> Leila Sussman and Gayle Speck, "Community Participation in Schools: The Boston Case," *Urban Education* 7, no. 4 (1973), 344-346; QSCC and Quincy School Project Staff, *Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex*, 48-49; Kibbe, Jr., *The Quincy School Project*, 8, 50; BRA, *Urban Renewal Plan: South Cove Urban Renewal Area*, 6; BRA, *Illustrative Site Plan, South Cove Urban Renewal Area, Massachusetts R-92* (Boston: BRA, 1965).

<sup>22</sup> Bertram Waters, "Tufts, Hub to Renew Old School," *Boston Globe*, December 13, 1966, 15; Bertram Waters, "Tufts Launches Urban Education Program: Boston Schools Today," *Boston Globe*, December 18,

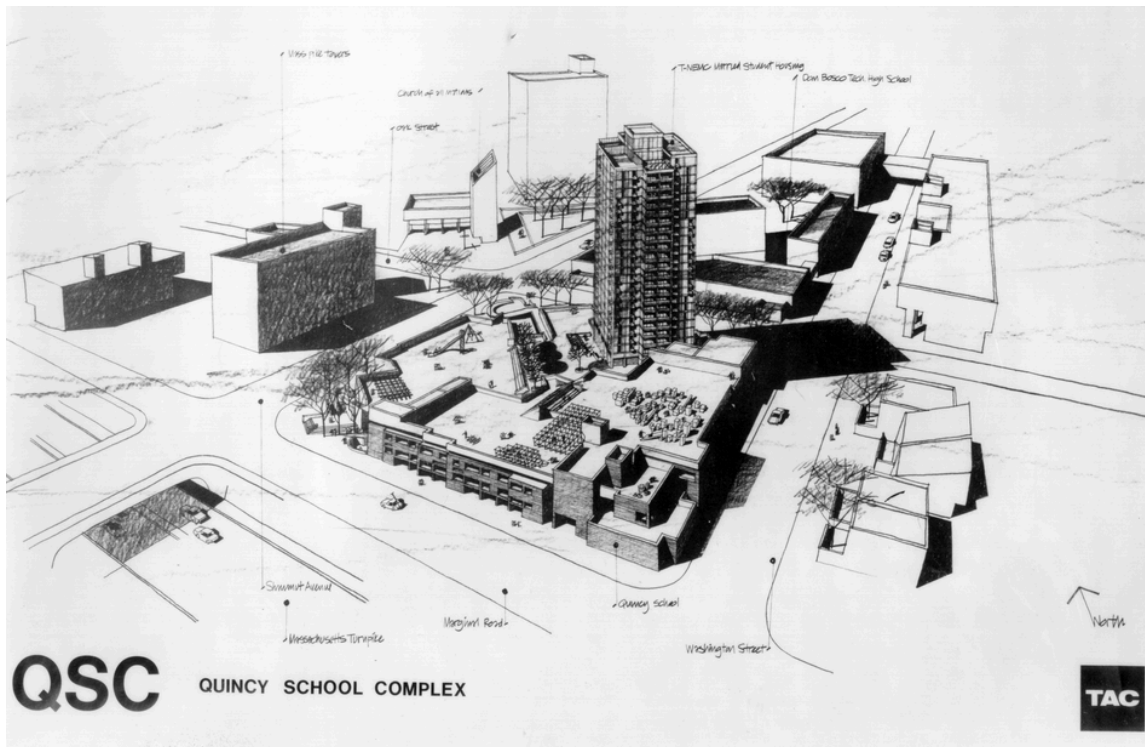


Figure 5.1. Quincy School Complex Design. QSCC and Quincy School Project Staff, *Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex*, 1969.

planning, staff from T-NEMC planning office—who were charged with overseeing the project—worked with a “community advisory council,” which included representatives from the Public Facilities Department, the Boston Redevelopment Authority, and the Boston School Department. During this time, the Quincy School project staff searched for ways to involve people from local neighborhoods the new school was to serve but had little success in attracting interest. As a remedy, the planners of T-NEMC decided to run a recreation project for neighborhood children in the summer of 1968 and to hire a young Boston-born Chinese American woman who had friends and relatives in Chinatown and Castle Square in order to interest more local families in the Quincy School Project. These

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1966, A72; Black, “\$72.5 Million Building Program,” A3; QSCC and Quincy School Project Staff, *Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex*, 48-49; Kibbe, Jr., *The Quincy School Project*, 5-8.

efforts attracted 56 people to a public meeting held at Castle Square Apartments on August 15, 1968. When parents living in the neighboring sections of Bay Village, Castle Square, and Chinatown learned of plans for a new school building, many were angry that they had not learned about the project sooner and that planning had been underway for almost two years with no community input. After listening to the project staff describe what they had been doing for the previous twenty months, participants at the meeting enacted the principle of “planning with people” and asked what were described as “hostile questions” of the project staff. According to Tufts University sociologist Leila Sussman, who observed the meeting, the key question was, “By what right does the T-NEMC plan a school for our children without our participation?” An agreement was reached that evening that representatives of the project staff and community residents would continue to meet together. This group included a number of residents who had publicly opposed the South Cove Urban Renewal project, including Irene Burns and Helen Goodnow of Bay Village, as well as a number of individuals whose homes had been destroyed by highway construction and urban renewal.<sup>23</sup>

Out of these meetings emerged a permanent organization, the Quincy School Community Council (QSCC), which would later become incorporated. When members of the group proposed that the council become formalized, T-NEMC staff objected that it had no funds for community work in their budget. Members of the group met this objection with the offer to work without funds. T-NEMC staff proposed an organizational structure, which gave them membership in the permanent group and made it possible for the staff or members of the local communities to veto the proposals of the other. The

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<sup>23</sup> Sussman and Speck, “Community Participation in Schools,” 344-346; QSCC and Quincy School Project Staff, *Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex*, 112-116, 124-126.

community representatives rejected this voting structure and countered with another, which divided the council among representatives of T-NEMC, Chinatown, Bay Village, Castle Square, and the South End. It was agreed that the Bay Village Association would choose its representatives on the council and the Castle Square Neighborhood Association its representatives. CCBA agreed to allow CACA to choose its delegates for Chinatown. The local communities were given 14 seats on the council: 5 for Castle Square, 3 for Bay Village, 1 for the South End, 5 for Chinatown, and 5 for T-NEMC project planning staff. Decisions were to be made by a majority vote.<sup>24</sup>

In March 1969, The Boston Redevelopment Authority made available an unused building at 34 Oak Street near T-NEMC as temporary headquarters for the Council. This building sat on an urban renewal parcel that the BRA had agreed to hold as part of a land bank for future T-NEMC expansion, and it would become the site of one of Chinatown's most important battles over land use and urban development in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>25</sup>

The building at 34 Oak Street illustrated the shortage of recreational space for young people in the area as youth immediately began knocking on its doors to ask if they could use it. The building then became a de facto drop-in center and meeting place for young people in the area who, according to Sussman, "sanded the floor and painted the second-story room where the council meets and where they, on other evenings, have held

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<sup>24</sup> Sussman and Speck, "Community Participation in Schools," 344-346; QSCC and Quincy School Project Staff, *Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex*, 112-116, 124-126. Leila Sussman estimated that in the first eight months of the QSCC's existence, 3,000 volunteer hours had gone into Council meetings and at least an equal number into working sub-committee meetings.

<sup>25</sup> McCain, "New School Complex Combines Community, Social Services," B2; Sussman and Speck, "Community Participation in Schools," 344-346; QSCC and Quincy School Project Staff, *Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex*, 112-118. See the struggle for Parcel C, discussed in chapter 6, this dissertation.

parties.”<sup>26</sup>

The Quincy School Project and the Quincy School Community Council thus illustrate some of the contradictions of urban renewal. Even as the demolition and displacement entailed by urban renewal enabled T-NEMC to quadruple its landholdings at the expense of Chinatown’s longstanding community, it also facilitated the construction of a massive new community facility, which continues to serve as a key neighborhood resource four decades later. And even as urban renewal’s architects tended to consult only the most powerful elites under the banner of “planning with people,” the Quincy School Community Council showed how these processes could be pried open to more diverse constituents.

Like the CACA, the QSCC modeled a political alternative to Chinatown’s traditional power brokers. While the most active members of the QSCC were the college-educated professionals who were most able to dedicate time and energy towards the project, the QSCC included “a diverse range of incomes, . . . parents and non-parents, conservatives, moderates, and radicals, and an age range from the teens to the sixties.”<sup>27</sup> Through the QSCC, ordinary people asserted their right to shape the development of their own neighborhoods, and they carved out limited zones of freedom by turning dominant spaces, like the unused building at 34 Oak Street, into community space. By 1973, QSCC had also halted T-NEMC’s plans to construct housing for its students and staff as part of the Quincy School Project; instead, they successfully pushed for the construction of subsidized housing aimed at Chinese elderly. The result was Quincy Tower, a 16-story building comprised of 143 units of affordable housing for the elderly. As a 1971

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<sup>26</sup> QSCC and Quincy School Project Staff, *Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex*, 112-116.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

statement prepared by the QSCC put it: “What the council represented to us back in 1968 was a chance to seize responsibility for a portion of our lives. We saw a chance to prevent the new Quincy School from becoming just one more institution, like T-NEMC, with the power to shape our lives, and the lives of our children.”<sup>28</sup> In this way, the Quincy School Community Council—together with the CACA and with college student activists—transformed segregation into congregation, exploiting opportunities created by the liberal state and its agents to build new institutions through which Chinatown’s denizens could exercise a degree of control over their shared urban future.<sup>29</sup>

### **School Desegregation**

As new configurations of Chinese American identity and community created a new political culture and a new sense of place in Chinatown, a concurrent struggle for racial justice that was being fought in Boston’s public schools over the issue of school desegregation would bring about another set of realignments in the neighborhood. While chroniclers of Boston’s “busing crisis” have tended to portray it as a battle fought between white and black Bostonians, Chinese Americans also played a part in this drama.<sup>30</sup> The experiences, perspectives, and activities of Chinese Bostonians during this period are revealing of Chinatown’s broader social, cultural, and political transformations, as Chinatown’s new constituents reinvented what it meant to be Chinese

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<sup>28</sup> “Problems of Quincy School,” *Boston Globe*, August 10, 1971, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 55.

<sup>30</sup> On school desegregation in Boston, see Lukas, *Common Ground*; Alan Lupo, *Liberty’s Chosen Home* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1977); Ronald Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Michael Ross and William Berg, *“I Respectfully Disagree with the Judge’s Order”: The Boston School Desegregation Controversy* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981); Jeanne Theoharis, “‘I’d Rather Go to School in the South’: How Boston’s School Desegregation Complicates the Civil Rights Paradigm,” in *Freedom North*, eds., Theoharis and Woodward, 137.

American in the city. In particular, Chinatown's participation in Boston's battle over school desegregation underscores the centrality of Chinese American women in Chinatown's transformation during this period. Drawing on a set of shared experiences of racialized, gendered immigrant labor in Chinatown, Chinese American women challenged both the sexist paternalism that characterized the neighborhood's traditional power structure and the patriarchal domesticity that constrained women in their homes and familial relationships as they contested the marginalization of Asian people in the racial order of the city and the nation. These working class women, many of whom had arrived in Chinatown as part of the post-1965 wave of immigration, joined the emerging generation of young, American-educated Chinese Americans in forming alternative ideas of identity, community, and place.

On June 21, 1974, federal district court judge Wendell Arthur Garrity, Jr. ordered the immediate desegregation of the Boston public schools.<sup>31</sup> When classes began in September, the city famously exploded in violence. Mobs of white protesters attacked school buses carrying black students to the formerly all-white South Boston High School with "bricks, bottles, eggs, and epithets."<sup>32</sup> By mid-October, race riots had erupted in the black neighborhood of Roxbury, and in December, a black student at Hyde Park High School assaulted a white student with a knife. Local and national newspapers and television networks issued daily reports on "the Boston school crisis," and street fighting continued for the remainder of the year.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Morgan v. Hennigan, 379 F. Supp. 410 (D.C. Mass., June 21, 1974).

<sup>32</sup> Nelson, *Elusive Ideal*, xiii.

<sup>33</sup> Nelson, *Elusive Ideal*, xiii-xiv; For daily coverage of events, see Ross and Berg, "I Respectfully Disagree With the Judge's Order."

In his judgment, Garrity found the Boston School Committee guilty of deliberately ignoring and circumventing the Racial Imbalance Act of 1965 and of intentionally maintaining a segregated school system.<sup>34</sup> The Racial Imbalance Act had called on “all school committees [in Massachusetts] to adopt as education objectives the promotion of racial balance,” and it required local school systems to eliminate racial imbalance in any school that was more than 50% nonwhite. Failure to comply would result in loss of state education aid. Although “anti-busing” activists, led by Louise Day Hicks and her organization R.O.A.R. (Restore Our Alienated Rights), denounced Garrity’s order as one of federal agencies imposing unwelcome ideas on local schools “from outside” or “from above,” the federal order was primarily a remedy for noncompliance with state law, which itself was an outcome of a local struggle, led by black parents in Boston for racial and educational justice in the city’s public schools. In the 1950s, this group of black parents, led by activist Ruth Batson and operating under the aegis of the NAACP, found that the city spent 10% less on textbooks, 19% less on libraries, and 27% less on healthcare for black students than it did for white students. They found that the curriculum at many predominantly black schools was often outdated and blatantly racist, and black students were overwhelmingly tracked into manual and vocational classes rather than college preparatory ones. Teachers at predominantly black schools were less permanent and often less experienced than those assigned to white schools. After raising these issues with numerous school officials and meeting resistance from both the Boston School Committee as well as the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, they organized freedom schools for black children and demonstrated in a series of boycotts, rallies, and marches, which attracted national

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<sup>34</sup> Theoharis, “I’d Rather Go to School in the South,” 137.



attention. Lobbying efforts on the part of the black community and its allies finally led to the passage of the Racial Imbalance Act in August 1965.<sup>35</sup>

On a basic level, Garrity's ruling in 1974 was an affirmation of what local black parents and activists had been arguing since the 1950s—that segregation in the public school system was supported and exacerbated by political, administrative, and legal structures within the city. After the passage of the Racial Imbalance Act in 1965, the Boston School Committee had resisted the state's order to develop a desegregation plan, and its members repeatedly evaded, defied, and diluted state efforts to desegregate Boston's public schools.<sup>36</sup> This battle of wills between the Boston School Committee and the state legislature lasted for almost a full decade. Seeing little other recourse in the face of the School Committee's blatant disregard of the law, black parents, operating through the NAACP, sued the School Committee in federal court. Garrity's judgment described in detail how the actions of the School Committee had blatantly exacerbated the problem of segregation and unequal school resources. As a remedy, Garrity ordered the Boston School Committee to begin desegregation in the fall of 1974 in a multi-phase plan developed by the state. The first phase would require 23 of the 65 "racially imbalanced" schools to be corrected through busing, starting with high schools and middle schools in 1974 before progressing to elementary schools in 1975.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Theoharis, "'I'd Rather Go to School in the South,'" 137. Theoharis points out that the language of "forced busing" elided the fact that a busing program had in fact been active for years in Boston, and that it had been used primarily to bus white students out of predominantly black schools. This language masked the central issue of racial segregation by focusing on the remedy itself rather than the underlying issue.

<sup>36</sup> Theoharis, "'I'd Rather Go to School in the South,'" 132-133; Ross and Berg, *"I Respectfully Disagree With the Judge's Order,"* 90.

<sup>37</sup> Theoharis, "'I'd Rather Go to School in the South,'" 137; Despite popular belief that the judge forced his own ideas on the city, Garrity did not come up with Phase 1 of the plan, but relied on one that had come out of the litigation around the Racial Imbalance Act in the Massachusetts courts.

The majority of Boston's Chinese students in eighth grade and below were enrolled in the Josiah Quincy School in Chinatown and the Abraham Lincoln School in Bay Village. According to enrollment figures in 1972, Chinese students comprised 97.1% of the Quincy School and virtually all of its students of color. At the Lincoln School, Chinese students comprised 47.6% of the student population, the majority of its 79.6% student of color population.<sup>38</sup> Because the student population in the two schools of the Quincy-Lincoln district that served Chinatown were greater than 50% nonwhite, many of its students would be reassigned to new schools. This meant of course that although parents in Chinatown had devoted thousands of hours to developing a new school facility to replace the dilapidated Quincy School, many of them would be unable to reap its full benefits due to school reassignments for desegregation. The new Quincy School would not be completed and opened until 1976, two years into the implementation of the desegregation program. By this time, half of the children in Chinatown would be traveling each day to schools in Charlestown and the North End in order to achieve "racial balance," and they would never be students at the new Josiah Quincy School. Meanwhile, beginning in 1976, white students would be bused into Chinatown to take advantage of the newer, larger facilities, among them the daughter of the Mayor, Kevin White.<sup>39</sup>

### **Phase I of the Busing Desegregation Plan**

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<sup>38</sup> "Effects of Balance Plan," *Boston Globe*, June 17, 1974, 34; "Imbalance Law to Affect Chinatown," *Sampan* April 1971, 1; Manli Ho, "Bused Chinese Kids Well Received in North End," *Boston Globe*, September 14, 1974, 5; "175 Students Bused in Boston Chinatown," *Sampan*, September 1974, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander Hawes, Jr. "'Lion' Dances at Dedication of School." *Boston Globe*, November 1, 1976, 5. When the Quincy School opened, Mayor Kevin White's daughter Patricia was a first grade student. At the dedication ceremonies, White said, "If my daughter comes home from school struggling to pronounce just one Chinese word, I know it's been a good experience" (ibid.).

When parents in Chinatown learned that their children might be reassigned to new schools, many were apprehensive and confused. On the evening of May 31, 1974, a group of about 150 Chinese parents attended a community meeting with Superintendent Peter Ingeneri at the Chinese Merchants Association building in order to ask questions and to raise their concerns about the state's desegregation plan. The convener of the meeting was the Massachusetts Chinese Education Committee, a group of Chinese teachers and parents that had formed out of the CACA conference in 1971 and that had taken it upon themselves to disseminate and interpret desegregation information to non-English speaking Chinese parents. In 1971, the group participated in the Massachusetts Coalition for Bilingual Education to help pass the state's transitional bilingual bill—the first such law in the nation—by organizing the Chinese community to write letters of support and to testify on behalf of the bill. Massachusetts General Law 71A required school districts that hosted twenty or more students speaking the same non-English native language to provide those students with a minimum of three years of transitional bilingual education. This law enabled the Quincy School to hire several bilingual teachers, and despite its poor physical conditions, the Quincy School became a key provider of a valuable educational service for Chinese children.<sup>40</sup> At the meeting, Deanna Wong, chairman of the Chinese Education Committee voiced concern that the goals of racial balancing—which would disperse non-English speaking Chinese students—might conflict with the needs of bilingual education, which required those students to be grouped together. The most immediate concern for most Chinese parents, however, was the safety of their children. “Will the state provide school buses? Can you guarantee the

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<sup>40</sup> “Imbalance Law to affect Chinatown”; Manli Ho, “Chinese-Americans Ask Effect of Busing,” *Boston Globe*, April 1, 1974, 15; CACA, “Report of the Conference on the Future of Chinatown,” 40.

safety of the children en route to and at the school?” asked one parent. “Why are we being transferred out? Can’t they transfer other children into our schools?” asked another. According to the superintendent, the capacity of the Quincy School would not allow for an equal number of white students to be bused in to achieve the goal of racial balancing. As for student safety, Ingeneri advised parents to direct those concerns to the Department of Public Safety.<sup>41</sup>

On the first day of school, school buses became targets of violent attacks, prompting Governor Francis Sargent to call for the National Guard and the 82nd Airborne Division of the U.S. Army to stand by on alert. While students of color from neighborhoods like Chinatown, Roxbury, and Dorchester attended schools in predominantly white neighborhoods, most white students boycotted the first day of school. The story was different, however, at Michelangelo Middle School in the North End, which saw 85% attendance, one of the highest rates of attendance in the city. Of the 230 students of color that were newly enrolled to the Michelangelo for “racial balancing,” 50 black students were bused in from the South End and 174 Chinese students came from the Lincoln-Quincy district.<sup>42</sup>

In praising the good behavior of Chinese pupils on the first day of school, a number of North Enders invoked the model minority stereotype, which tacitly and sometimes explicitly rebuked African Americans for making “trouble.” “Everything went very smoothly,” said Principal Luke Petrocelli. “I’m not worried about the Chinese. They’re happy to be here, and they’re good students and everyone in the North End

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<sup>41</sup> “Imbalance Law to affect Chinatown”; Ho, “Chinese-Americans Ask Effect of Busing,” 15; Manli Ho, “Chinatown Feels Ignored on Busing,” *Boston Globe*, June 17, 1974, 1.

<sup>42</sup> “Imbalance Law to Affect Chinatown”; Ho, “Bused Chinese Kids Well Received in North End,” 5; “175 Students Bused in Boston Chinatown,” 1.

welcomes them.” Others implicitly compared Chinese students to black students: “We don’t mind having the Chinese bused in—better than anybody else,” stated Maryann Pepicelli, a white mother of the North End. Pat Quarato, a white sixth grader, was more explicit: “Some of them are shy, but they’re mostly nice and they don’t start any trouble like some of the black kids.” A Chinese employee of the Boston Public School department responded to these comments with humor, calling attention to the stereotyping: “Us Chinese, of course everyone went to school—makes it look like it fits their stereotypical image of Chinese as diligent, passive and quiet, doesn’t it.”<sup>43</sup>

Racial stereotyping notwithstanding, safety was the foremost concern for Chinese students and their parents as violence erupted throughout the city in September 1974. Kitty Chu, whose two children Michael and Tina were among those bused to the Michelangelo School in the North End, remarked, “The kids are safe and that was our primary concern.” Michael Chu, who started sixth grade at the Michelangelo school had initially resisted the idea of being bussed out of Chinatown: “I want to stay at the Quincy,” he said. “All my friends are Chinese. I know the people here in Chinatown. I live here. I don’t know what’s at the Michelangelo and it’s very scary.” But he was reassured by his first day: “It was much better than I thought,” he observed. “Most of the white kids are pretty friendly. And some of my friends from the Quincy are here too.”<sup>44</sup> For Boston’s Chinese community, Phase I of the busing desegregation program was relatively peaceful. They would be drawn into the city’s racial violence, however, in the summer of 1975, when two Chinese teenagers were charged with the murder of a white girl in Charlestown.

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<sup>43</sup> Ho, “Bused Chinese Kids Well Received in North End,” 5.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

## **The Tam Brothers Murder Trial**

On May 22, 1975, at 10:10pm, Mary Eaton witnessed Boston police arrest two Chinese teenagers, James Tam, 19, and his brother George, 17, from their home in the federally funded Mishawum Park Apartments on Tibbets Town Way in Charlestown: “I saw them being taken out of their apartment. They were crying for their mother who doesn’t speak English. They were bleeding quite badly, they looked a mess, they must really have gotten a bloody beating.” Three hours later, Patrice Borden, a white 16-year-old girl who had recently dropped out of Charlestown High School, died of stab wounds at Massachusetts General Hospital. James Tam was charged with murder, and both were charged with assault and battery with a dangerous weapon.<sup>45</sup>

James and George Tam had emigrated from Hong Kong with their mother in 1971 and had recently moved into the Mishawum Park Apartments in September of 1974. James Tam attended Boston High School as a work-study student set to graduate that summer and to enroll at Brandeis University in the fall while George Tam was a student at Brighton High School. Described by neighbors as “quiet, nice and polite,” the brothers were often seen meeting their mother at the bus stop when she returned from work. According to Mary Eaton, “Everyone up here, the neighbors say it isn’t them. It’s the gang of Charlestown kids. Nobody in their right mind would start something with those Charlestown kids. . . . If these kids did it, they did it to protect themselves.”<sup>46</sup>

Activists in Chinatown viewed the charges brought against the Tam brothers as a case of racism and police misconduct. When they pressed for a fuller investigation into

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<sup>45</sup> Manli Ho and Ann Kircheimer, “Chinese Groups Seek Investigation of Street-Fight Murder,” *Boston Globe*, June 1, 1975, 25.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

the Borden murder case, they discovered that police reports were vague and one-sided in describing the fight as a “general melee” among rival gangs. A statement signed by 34 Chinatown agencies pointed out that none of the other youths cited in police reports, all of whom were white, were charged.<sup>47</sup> Lieutenant Detective Arthur Kelly of the Boston Homicide Unit acknowledged accusations that the Boston Police Department reports were “non-objective,” as they were given by the white youth involved in the fight: “Their story is that the Chinese lads were the aggressors, but as I say that’s a one-sided point of view. It appeared to have racial overtones. There were conversations in the past about ‘Chinks’ but I don’t work over there all the time, so I’m not qualified to say.”<sup>48</sup> On June 18, Charlestown District Court Judge Richard Woods found probable cause for grand jury consideration of the charges against the Tam brothers.<sup>49</sup> In the same month that the Tam brothers were arrested, two Chinese men had been assaulted by a pair of white men in the parking lot of Mass Pike Towers in Chinatown. When two Boston police officers arrived in response to calls for help, they arrested the two Chinese men rather than their white assailants. Activists in Chinatown again accused the police of racial discrimination and misconduct, but neither police officer was formally charged or reprimanded.<sup>50</sup>

Over the next year, community activists launched a campaign to exonerate the Tam brothers. Leaders of several Chinatown organizations established a Tam Brothers Defense Fund headed by youth worker Jane Leung in order to raise \$10,000 for the brothers’ bail, for their attorney’s fees, and for James’ summer school tuition that would

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<sup>47</sup> Gloria Chun, “Support the Cause,” *Sampan*, August 1975, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Ho and Kircheimer, “Chinese Groups Seek Investigation of Street-Fight Murder,” 25.

<sup>49</sup> “Grand Jury to Get Charlestown Street Fight Case,” *Boston Globe*, June 5, 1975, 7; John Tsang, “Chinatown Parents Feel Threatened by Phase 2,” *Boston Globe*, August 3, 1975, 10.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Nien-chu Kiang, “Discrimination or Dignity: The Struggles Continue,” in Chu, *Chinese in Massachusetts*, 72.

allow him to graduate high school since his arrest had forced him to drop out of Boston High School. On August 4, 1975, the Grand Jury of Suffolk Superior Court indicted James Tam on the charge of second-degree murder, which carried a minimum sentence of twenty years in prison. Following the Grand Jury decision, the Tam Brothers Defense Fund held a two-day education campaign in Chinatown in order to “alert the Boston Chinese community about the murder case and about the implicit racial overtones of the charges.”<sup>51</sup> An editorial in the September 1975 issue of *Sampan* framed the Tam Brothers case as an example of anti-Asian racism in U.S. society: “If you have known the pain of repressed anger and indignation in response to bigoted remarks and actions . . . If you are tired of accepting the passive, do-nothing, be-stepped-on role stereotyping Asian Americans . . . If you are a concerned individual who is upset about this society’s failure to deal with blatant racial discrimination . . . If you want to do something positive . . . Contribute to the Tam Brothers Defense Fund.”<sup>52</sup> Donations were made by the CCBA in Boston and in New York, and contributions came from throughout the Northeast and as far away as Honolulu.<sup>53</sup>

While the Chinese had been praised as model minorities in the North End, they were vilified in Charlestown. By August, racial harassment had forced the Tam family to abandon their Charlestown home and move to Brighton. According to the Tam Brothers Defense Fund Committee, the Tam family was among 60 Chinese people living in the Mishawum Apartments that were harassed, threatened, and forced to relocate to other

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<sup>51</sup> “\$10,000 goal set for Tam Brothers Defense Fund, Contributions asked,” *Sampan*, August 1975, 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> “Tam Brothers Defense Fund Nearing Goal,” *Sampan*, September 1975, 1.



parts of Boston since the incident occurred.<sup>54</sup> James and George Tam would eventually be found innocent of all charges on June 15, 1976.<sup>55</sup> However, it was in the summer of 1975, in the wake of James Tam's indictment for murder and amid the explosive atmosphere of racial violence throughout the city, that Chinatown parents received notice that their youngest children would be bused that fall from Chinatown to Charlestown, which was one of the centers of anti-desegregation anger and activity and the place where Patrice Borden's murder had just inflamed racial tensions.

### **Phase II of the Busing Desegregation Plan**

In June 1975, one month after Patrice Borden's murder, parents of students enrolled in "racially imbalanced" elementary schools received letters informing them that their children would be bused that fall. The second phase of the desegregation plan expanded beyond middle and high school students to include elementary school students in grades one through five. Hundreds of Boston's youngest Chinese children—who were concentrated in the Quincy-Lincoln school district serving Chinatown and Castle Square—were assigned to elementary schools in Charlestown including the Warren Prescott, Prince, and Bunker Hill Elementary Schools. Students receiving bilingual education were assigned to the Harvard Kent Elementary School, also in Charlestown.<sup>56</sup>

The Tam brothers murder trial cast a pall over Chinatown and intensified the fear and confusion felt by many of its families. According to Nancy Mah, a Chinese mother of

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<sup>54</sup> "Grand Jury to Get Charlestown Street Fight Case," 7; Tsang, "Chinatown Parents Feel Threatened by Phase 2," 10; "Atty. Zalkind: very important case," *Sampan* (October 1975), 2.

<sup>55</sup> "Mass. News in Brief," *Boston Globe*, June 15, 1976, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Marian Hwang, "Chinese Parents Demand Safety for Children," *Sampan*, September 1975, 2-3. See also Fred Ho, "Effects of Desegregation on Boston Chinatown" (1976), 1:P, Fred Ho Papers, Archives and Special Collections, Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries, Storrs, CT.

three living in Chinatown, “Everybody [in Chinatown] heard about the fight. . . People have some negative impressions about Charlestown because it seemed to be a clear case of discrimination. It wasn’t just a fight, it was a case of racism.”<sup>57</sup> Fanny Wong, age 7, recalled, “We didn’t know what was happening. Suddenly, all your friends were asking, ‘Did you get your letter?’ We were scared about going to a new school, and we heard all these things about Charlestown—we heard they were bombing the buses—and we didn’t want to go there.”<sup>58</sup> May Yu, a garment worker living in Chinatown and the mother of three boys, ages 7 to 13, remarked that she would never forget seeing mobs of white demonstrators throwing rocks at buses full of children. All three of her sons had been reassigned from the Quincy School to the Harvard Kent School in Charlestown. “[The boys] were too small, small and scared,” she recalled.<sup>59</sup>

Because the letters informing parents about their children’s school assignments were written in English, many Chinese parents were unable to read them. Upon receiving their letters, several Chinese mothers approached Suzanne Lee, a 24-year-old bilingual education teacher at the Quincy School, for assistance in translating the letters and clarifying the situation.<sup>60</sup> Lee had just finished her first year as a teacher in a position that had been created as a result of the state’s transitional bilingual education bill. An immigrant herself, Lee was intimately familiar with the consequences of public policy on the everyday lives of marginalized people, especially immigrant women and children.

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<sup>57</sup> Manli Ho and Carmen Fields, “Chinatown, South End Have Same Thought: Education,” *Boston Globe*, September 2, 1975, 3. See

<sup>58</sup> Karen Lindsey, “Pride and Promise,” *Boston Herald Sunday Magazine*, May 12, 1985, 12.

<sup>59</sup> May Yu, interview by Lorraine Shen, Boston, March 8, 2012, quoted in Lorraine Shen, “The Chinese American Experience During Desegregation Busing in Boston” (B.A. thesis, Tufts University, 2012), 28-29.

<sup>60</sup> Suzanne Lee, “International Women’s Day,” (lecture, Chinese Progressive Association, Boston, March 6, 2010); Lindsey, “Pride and Promise,” 12. Suzanne Lee recalls that a group of three women approached her initially.

Since the early twentieth century, the Chinese exclusion laws, which prohibited Chinese male workers from bringing over their wives, had separated Lee's family across the Pacific. Her grandfather and later her father worked in the restaurant and laundry industries in Boston's Chinatown while her grandmother and her mother remained in China. In the late 1950s, Lee's mother reunited with her father in Boston, but Suzanne was left in the care of her grandmother in Hong Kong. Lee watched her mother leave for the U.S. when she was six years old, and she would be eleven before she would see her mother again. When she came to Boston in 1961, it would also be the first time that she met her father and her new baby sister. Lee recalled that at the time, "I was really resentful towards my family, particularly my mother," she recalls. "Why did she leave me?" Like Michael Liu, Lee attended college in the late 1960s, and she cites the civil rights and antiwar movements as pivotal to the development of her political consciousness as an immigrant, a woman, and a racial minority. She also came to understand through her participation in these social movements that racist immigration policy—rather than her mother—was to blame for the split households that defined an entire generation of Chinese American families. It was then that she decided, "I was going to devote my life to working in a way that changes things in the community. People should have a say in what goes on—particularly children and women that are always at the bottom of the barrel." As a student at Brandeis University, she volunteered to serve as an English tutor for Chinese women garment workers in Chinatown. Lee joined a group of Chinese college students who, starting in 1969, taught English to about 200 Chinese women garment workers on Saturdays at the Quincy School. She would continue to teach these classes for 15 years. For a time, this group, which was

coordinated by the Chinese American Civic Association, provided the only bilingual education program available to adults in the community.<sup>61</sup> In these women, Lee recalls, she recognized her mother and friends of her mother. This recognition of a shared experience of racialized, gendered immigration drew Suzanne Lee to Chinatown as it shaped her affinity for working class Chinese immigrant women and her decision to confront their collective social marginalization.<sup>62</sup>

With Suzanne Lee's assistance, about a dozen Chinese women began meeting in the living rooms of their Chinatown apartments in the summer of 1975 to discuss their concerns for the safety of their children.<sup>63</sup> Xin-Hua Lee, the mother of 7-year-old Mazy Wong, was one of a number of mothers who went from door to door appealing to other Chinatown parents living in Tai Tung Village, Mass Pike Towers, Castle Square, and surrounding streets to come to meetings.<sup>64</sup> As more and more parents joined, attendance at these weekly meetings grew to nearly two hundred.<sup>65</sup> Meetings moved out of living rooms and into larger spaces, including the auditorium in Tufts-New England Medical Center's Posner Hall.<sup>66</sup> Adopting the name Boston Chinese Parents Association (BCPA), the Chinatown-based group began organizing Chinese parents—primarily mothers—around issues of educational equality as they related to school desegregation.

Among BCPA's first actions were to send letters to Judge Garrity and to city and school officials in the summer of 1975 expressing their concerns about the safety and

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<sup>61</sup> Murphy, "Boston's Chinese," 32; Catherine Tse, "Politics of Deindustrialization and Grassroots Organizing Among Chinese Garment Workers" (B.A. thesis, Harvard University, 1987), 47. Because most Chinese men worked in restaurants and laundries, they did not have Saturday free to take these courses.

<sup>62</sup> Suzanne Lee, interview by Lorryne Shen, Boston, February 8, 2012, cited in Shen, "The Chinese American Experience," 30.

<sup>63</sup> Shen, "The Chinese American Experience," 30-31. These women included May Yu, May Chen, Pauline Wong, Nancy Mah, Xin-Hua Lee, Xue-Hua Long, and Betty Chu.

<sup>64</sup> Suzanne Lee, interview by author, Boston, August 15, 2009; Lindsey, "Pride and Promise," 12.

<sup>65</sup> Suzanne Lee, interview by Shen, cited in Shen, "The Chinese American Experience," 32.

<sup>66</sup> Suzanne Lee, interview by author.

welfare of their children. When they received no response, BCPA members approached the CCBA for assistance in their role as the traditional arbiters of Chinatown community affairs. Here, the women of BCPA directly confronted the patriarchy that characterized Chinatown's traditional power structure. Suzanne Lee accompanied four women members of BCPA to a CCBA meeting to speak about their concerns over the busing order and to seek assistance. Lee recalls that the men presiding over the meeting belittled the women as ignorant about public affairs and dismissed their concerns as a waste of time. They were told that the issue of school desegregation was government business and that women should not get involved in public affairs. Lee recalls that one CCBA representative asked them pointedly, "What do your husbands think?" The women left the meeting outraged and with a tarnished image of the community's traditional leadership.<sup>67</sup>

The BCPA was comprised mostly of Chinese women largely because of the gendered division of labor within Chinatown. Chinese women were concentrated in the garment manufacturing industry, with most working as seamstresses in the garment factories near Chinatown. Although somewhat diminished from its former glory days, the garment district on Kneeland Street continued to operate as a center of the Boston clothing industry after the end of World War II. With a postwar labor shortage coinciding with the lifting of Asian exclusion laws that permitted more Chinese women to enter the U.S., garment factories began hiring Chinese women for the sewing trades in the enormous garment lofts near Chinatown.<sup>68</sup> Chinese women came to dominate the labor market in this industry in part because many of the factories were close to Chinatown,

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.; Suzanne Lee, interview by Shen, cited in Shen, "The Chinese American Experience," 33.

<sup>68</sup> Krim, *Chinatown-South-Cove Comprehensive Survey Project*, 20.

and the jobs required little to no English language ability. Moreover, garment factory owners tended to view Chinese women's "nimble fingers," "docility," and "ability to sit patiently" as making them particularly suitable for this work.<sup>69</sup> Their husbands, on the other hand, were concentrated in the restaurant industry, which often required them to work ten to twelve hour shifts that typically extended late into the evening. Not only did their long hours make participation in political organizing difficult, but these men often felt beholden to members of the CCBA, who owned and operated many of these restaurants, and they often shied away from publicly challenging their authority.

The women who participated in the BCPA often did so in defiance of husbands as well as of parents, in-laws, and community leaders who discouraged them from attending organizing meetings. After an eight-hour workday at the garment factories and then an evening organizing on behalf of their children, many women endured hostility and abuse from their husbands, who disapproved of their political organizing. Husbands scolded their wives for participating in BCPA meetings and activities, warning that their reputations would be ruined. Many women were afraid to participate, and those who did faced threats from their husbands and were branded troublemakers by community leaders. In one case, Suzanne Lee recalls that a woman participant, upon returning home from a meeting at night, discovered that her husband had locked her out of her house.<sup>70</sup> Other men punished their wives by withholding their pay or by gambling their wives' earnings away. According to Suzanne, "Our kids were more supportive [than our husbands]." Suzanne also recalls that the Lee Family Association admonished her father

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<sup>69</sup> Delia D. Aguilar, "Lost in Translation: Western Feminism and Asian Women," in Sonia Shah, ed., *Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire* (Boston: South End Press, 1997), 162.

<sup>70</sup> Suzanne Lee, interview with author. This woman would later go on to divorce her husband. Suzanne Lee, interview with Shen, Boston, February 8, 2012, cited in Shen, "The Chinese American Experience," 33.

for failing to “control” his daughter’s political activities. To participate in this public struggle over educational equality, Chinese women had to overcome the patriarchal expectations of their husbands and in-laws and that of Chinatown’s traditional community leaders at the same time that they challenged the invisibility of Chinese American women, children, and families in the minds of the broader public, which viewed desegregation as a matter affecting only people who were black or white.<sup>71</sup>

After receiving little support from the CCBA and little response from school officials, the members of BCPA turned to more confrontational tactics drawn from the social movements of the time: they drew up a list of demands, which they presented to the Boston School Board on July 30, 1975. Their demands included a request that at least 60 Chinese students attend a school where any Chinese at all were in attendance; that each school where Chinese students were assigned have at least two Chinese teachers and two transitional aides on site; that Chinese escorts be placed on buses transporting Chinese students; that security be provided for students upon their arrival and departure from schools, that at least half of the police force assigned to any school be from precincts other than the local one, and that the Boston School Department hire at least two Chinese staff members to help translate official communications for Chinese parents.<sup>72</sup> In making these demands, Chinese parents sought not only physical safety but also a linguistically accessible and culturally relevant education for their children.

Students eligible for bilingual education were required to be present in a critical mass in

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<sup>71</sup> Suzanne Lee, “International Women’s Day”; Liu, Geron, and Lai, *Snake Dance of Asian American Activism*, xiii. Kalina Yingnan Deng discusses similar dynamics of race, gender, and class in the Boston Chinatown community with regards to Chinese women’s participation in labor organization in the 1980s. Kalina Yingnan Deng, “Visibly *Ah Mou*: Community Organizing as Minority Solidarity in the United States,” *On Our Terms: The Undergraduate Journal of the Athena Center for Leadership Studies at Barnard College* 1, no. 1 (2013), 1-13.

<sup>72</sup> “Chinese Parents Assoc. Issues statement on busing,” *Sampan* (August 1975), 4.

order to receive instruction in their native language. However, the desegregation plan's emphasis on "racial balance" was focused on spreading students around. By focusing on the differential impact that the order would have on a group of children that were neither black nor white, these demands critiqued the flawed logic of "racial balance" and the black/white racial paradigm that underlay the desegregation plan.

On August 6, 1975, the Boston School Committee granted a meeting to the BCPA to discuss their demands. When May Chen, Betty Chu, and Nancy Mah spoke of their concerns, with Suzanne Lee serving as an interpreter, committee members John Kerrigan and Paul Ellison exhibited what the women described afterwards as a "condescending and racist attitude." According to Chen, "When we sat before them, all those two did was to whisper and snicker while we were intent on answering questions. I want to know what they thought was so funny—the fact that we can't speak English, that we're Chinese?"<sup>73</sup> When, in the remaining month before school, the women received no response from the School Committee, the BCPA proposed a boycott of school. After a meeting of about 150 parents, the BCPA held a press conference on September 3, 1975, highlighting what they called "racially discriminatory tactics and . . . insensitivity of the School Committee" in dealing with the transfer of Chinese students. They criticized the issuance of all official communications from Boston Schools in English only as well as the exclusion of Chinese parent representatives from the biracial advisory councils. The group threatened "more severe action" if the Boston School Committee did not take measures in the next few days "to comply [with their demands] for quality education and safety."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ho and Fields, "Chinatown, South End Have Same Thought: Education," 3.

<sup>74</sup> Hwang, "Chinese Parents Demand Safety For Children," 2-3; Ho and Fields, "Chinatown, South End Have Same Thought: Education," 3.



Three days before the start of the school year, Associate Superintendent of BPS Charles Leftwich met with the BCPA in an effort to come to an agreement on the parents' demands, but the parents left the meeting unsatisfied with the continued lack of commitment to concrete plans or action.<sup>75</sup> On Sunday, September 7, the BCPA voted to stage a boycott on the first day of school, and they issued a press release reiterating their grievances and declaring their intentions: "Chinese parents are united in boycotting all schools because we feel that school and court officials, by not taking concrete action on our demands, have demonstrated an overall disregard for the rights of all Chinese parents and students."<sup>76</sup> With the school year set to begin the next day, BCPA members telephoned every Chinese family in Boston that had children scheduled to be bused to inform them of the boycott action. For those that could not be reached by phone, the women woke up at dawn and kept post at various bus stops to inform parents of the action.<sup>77</sup>

Of roughly 2,000 Chinese students enrolled in Boston Public Schools, over 1,000 were scheduled to be bused, and over ninety percent of these students participated in the boycott.<sup>78</sup> One journalist reported that "the Tai Tung Village bus stop was crowded. . . . Many Chinese parents watched the buses arrive, but none allowed their children to

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<sup>75</sup> Stephen Curwood, "Chinese Parents Votes to Keep Children Home," *Boston Globe*, September 8, 1975, 13.

<sup>76</sup> Michael Liu, "Snake Dance of Asian American Activism: Selected Sources and Resources," *Azine*, <http://apimovement.com/book/export/html/618>; Ho and Fields, "Chinatown, South End Have Same Thought: Education," 3.

<sup>77</sup> Suzanne Lee, interview with author; Suzanne Lee, interview with Shen, Boston, February 8, 2012, cited in Shen, "The Chinese American Experience," 40.

<sup>78</sup> "Bulletin," *Sampan*, September 1975, 1; Katie Li, "What Happens When the Revolution Doesn't? An Examination of the Asian American Movement Through the Lens of Theory and Practice" (B.A. thesis, College of the Holy Cross, 2005), 73.

board.”<sup>79</sup> When Suzanne Lee arrived at the Harvard Kent School in Charlestown, where she was assigned to teach the fifth grade, she had a message waiting for her at the front desk from a representative of the Justice Department who wanted Lee to set up a meeting with the Chinese parents. At the meeting, which took place two days later, a Justice Department representative, speaking in Chinese, asked the BCPA representatives if they knew that what they were doing was illegal. The women challenged this assertion, citing the boycotts organized by R.O.A.R. and accusing the Justice Department of enacting a double standard. After having received little response to numerous letters and requests to meet with the Justice Department, the Department of Education, and the School Committee, Lee asked the Justice Department representative why they were so concerned that the Chinese families end their boycott. According to Lee, the representative explained that Chinese students were needed to serve as a “buffer” between the black and white students.<sup>80</sup> For Lee and for the parents of BCPA, this response illustrated the inadequacy and injustice of a bipolar black-white racial framework, which rendered the safety, needs, and concerns of Chinese students and parents both invisible and subordinate.

Garrity’s opinion in *Morgan v. Hennigan* had framed the issue of racial segregation entirely in terms of black and white, as had the plaintiffs and defendants at the trial. The desegregation plan likewise made few considerations for people who were neither black nor white. Earlier in the summer, Chinese parents had discovered that they had not been factored into the establishment of the court-mandated “biracial councils,”

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<sup>79</sup> Manli Ho, “Opening Day in Some of Boston’s neighborhoods: Chinatown,” *Boston Globe*, September 9, 1975, 16.

<sup>80</sup> Suzanne Lee, interview by author. Suzanne recalls that first name of the Justice Department representative that she spoke to was Barbara. Suzanne Lee, interview by Shen, cited in Shen, “The Chinese American Experience,” 42.

which were to be established at every school participating in Phase II of the desegregation plan.<sup>81</sup> When BCPA members arrived at the biracial council elections at City Hall on July 17, 1975, they found themselves in a meeting with primarily black parents while a hostile group of white parents boycotted outside. They also learned that seats on the council were designated only for black and white parents, and that no consideration had been made for Chinese participation. Although their voices were silenced in the desegregation process, their bodies were expected to be part of it. At the same time, these kinds of encounters gave Chinese Americans new opportunities in which to interact with and form ideas about both white and black Americans, and it helped BCPA members to develop a better understanding of racial hierarchies and their relative position in these hierarchies. According to Chinese American teacher and activist Stephanie Fan, “The [biracial councils] incident at City Hall a few weeks ago really had an impact on [the Chinese parents]. It began to dawn on them what the real situation was. . . . Initially they were skeptical of going to school with blacks because of all the negative stereotypes they’ve had of blacks. But I think the incidents in Charlestown and City Hall have changed it a bit . . . changed it a lot.”<sup>82</sup> Such encounters allowed BCPA members not only to develop a new consciousness of themselves as racialized people, but it also facilitated the formation of affinities across racial lines that could be mobilized to challenge racial hierarchies. When the BCPA announced their boycott, they made sure to distinguish their boycott from those organized by R.O.A.R. “It must be realized,” they declared, “that we boycott in order to affirm the right of all minorities to equal quality

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<sup>81</sup> Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 89.

<sup>82</sup> Ho and Fields, “Chinatown, South End Have Same Thought: Education,” 3.

education.”<sup>83</sup> These opportunities for interracial solidarity were available to Chinese youth as well. As Julio Lee, Jr., one of two Chinese students who did not participate in the boycott at Charlestown High, walked home from his bus stop at the end of his first day of school, a reporter asked him how it went. “It wasn’t bad,” he replied. “The black kids were friendly.”<sup>84</sup>

The Chinese boycott lasted for three days, by which point the Justice Department had agreed to implement almost all of BCPA’s demands, with the exception of the demand for two Chinese teachers and two Chinese transitional aides at every school where Chinese students were assigned because these would have required action on the part of the teacher’s union. Most BCPA members were satisfied, however, with the assurance of safety for their children. Suzanne Lee continued teaching at the Harvard Kent Elementary School for six more years. Although no major incidents of violence involving Chinese students occurred in the Charlestown schools during this period, Lee recalls that the atmosphere remained tense and sometimes hostile towards Chinese students. She often fought with other teachers, for example, over matters such as punishing Chinese students for conversing in their native language in the cafeteria or in school hallways.

Although most accounts of school desegregation in Boston have framed it as a biracial drama between black and white families, Chinese Bostonians played a part in the conflict. The BCPA’s battle for visibility, for safety, and for an inclusive education

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<sup>83</sup> Liu, “Snake Dance of Asian American Activism: Selected Sources and Resources”; Ho and Fields, “Chinatown, South End Have Same Thought: Education,” 3.

<sup>84</sup> Ho, “Opening Day in Some of Boston’s Neighborhoods: Chinatown,” 16; “First Day of School at Charlestown High School,” *The Ten O’Clock News* (Boston: WGBH, September, 8, 1975); “Judy Stoia Reports on How Busing Has Affected Boston’s Chinese American Community”, *The Evening Compass* (Boston: WGBH, September 19, 1975).

reshaped the outlooks of the parents and children involved, and it altered how Chinese Bostonians viewed themselves as urban citizens, as political actors, and as racialized minorities. BCPA's activism also disturbed popular ideas of what and whom Chinatown represented as a place. Though Chinese Americans were numerically a small proportion of the city's population, BCPA mobilized a potent critique of power relations in Chinatown and in the city at large. It forced urban elites to reconsider Chinatown and its racialized communities as a political constituency, and it also challenged and exposed the limits of Chinatown's traditional authority figures.

Unequal schooling, however, was just one aspect of a multifaceted landscape of struggle that redefined Boston's Chinatown in this period. Buoyed by their success in getting their concerns addressed, many of the members of BCPA would go on to participate in other campaigns for social and political change in Chinatown. In 1975, for example, members of BCPA would be instrumental in organizing a Tenants Association at Tai Tung Village.<sup>85</sup> In 1977, Suzanne Lee would go on to help found the Chinatown People's Progressive Association (CPPA), which was inspired by similar organizations affiliated with a national Asian American movement in San Francisco and New York—the Chinese Progressive Association and the Progressive Chinatown People's Association respectively. CPPA was perhaps the most politically left-leaning organization to emerge in Boston's Chinatown at this time. Unlike most other Chinese American organizations, for example, its members celebrated Chinese communism and admired revolutionary figures such as Mao Zedong and Malcolm X. In its inaugural newsletter, CPPA's founders cited BCPA's organizing as one of the inspirations for its formation, and a

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<sup>85</sup> Suzanne Lee, interview by author; Marilyn Wu, "Asian Women Organizing," *Progress*, Fall 1985; "Tai Tung Tenants' Meeting Produces Complaints," *Sampan*, April 1974, 1; Tse, "Politics of Deindustrialization," 49.

number of the women who had been part of BCPA became active in the organization. Among its goals were the normalization of relations between the U.S. and China, combating T-NEMC expansion in Chinatown, and improving working and housing conditions of Chinatown's residents.<sup>86</sup> As CPPA's name implied, Chinatown was a rallying point for Chinese American leftists in the 1970s as they strove to address local conditions of racial and urban inequality under the broad rubric of combating racism, capitalism and imperialism, all key ideological goals of the Asian American movement. The BCPA inspired the emerging generation of Chinese Americans to deepen their attachments to Chinatown and to focus their activism on a wide range of issues there. Citing the activism of both the BCPA and the Tam Brothers Defense Fund, a September 1975 editorial in *Sampan* hailed the arrival of a "new consciousness" among the region's Chinese Americans: "There is a new spirit, a new feeling for our brethren, and a new concern for our community. . . . This heightened consciousness will make us all stronger somehow. These bicentennial times are upon us all. There are still quiet revolutions occurring."<sup>87</sup>

### **Justice for Long Guang Huang**

In the mid-1980s, this "heightened consciousness" was brought to bear on a police brutality case that seemed to represent the full force and power of Chinatown's racial and spatial subordination. On May 1, 1985, Long Guang Huang, a 56-year-old recently immigrated Chinese restaurant worker, was visiting Chinatown on his day off

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<sup>86</sup> Chinatown People's Progressive Association, Newsletter 1, no. 1, February 1978, 2-3, Chinese Progressive Association Records (CPA), Archives and Special Collections, Northeastern University (NEU), Box 2, Folder 23. See also Michael Liu and May Louie, interview by Mark Liu, Boston, November 23, 2006, MP3 audio file in author's possession.

<sup>87</sup> "A New Consciousness," *Sampan*, September 1975, 2.

from work when Francis G. Kelly, Jr., an undercover Vice Squad detective, assaulted him in broad daylight near the busy corner of Kneeland Street and Harrison Avenue. Kelly punched Huang in the head several times and arrested him on charges of soliciting a prostitute and assault and battery of a police officer. Huang was hospitalized with a concussion for five days, and his injuries prevented him from working for three months.<sup>88</sup> Upon learning of the incident, many in the Chinese American community considered Huang's beating a case of police brutality and anti-Asian racism, and Chinatown became the site of intense community activism during the summer of 1985. Hundreds attended community meetings, thousands signed petitions, and supporters from across the city and the country made donations to support Huang's legal defense and medical recovery. On June 18, demonstrators marched from Chinatown to City Hall, where they held a rally that attracted over four hundred people.<sup>89</sup> The coordinating group was Asians for Justice, a coalition that formed to respond to anti-Asian violence in Boston in the wake of the racially motivated slaying in 1982 of 27-year-old Chinese American Vincent Chin by Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz, two laid off autoworkers in Detroit. Ebens and Nitz blamed the Japanese auto industry for the loss of their jobs and took their anger out on Chin, who they mistook for Japanese. As punishment, Ebens and Nitz were fined \$3,000, given three years probation, and served no jail time. The lenient sentencing generated enormous public outrage among Asian Americans and led to the formation of numerous

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<sup>88</sup> Gary McMillan and Doris Sue Wong, "Suit Eyed Against Hub Officer," *Boston Globe*, May 4, 1985, 1; Kiang, "Discrimination or Dignity," 72-73; Gregory Witcher, "'I'm afraid,' Says Victim of Chinatown Beating," *Boston Globe*, December 13, 1985.

<sup>89</sup> Justice for Long Guang Huang flyer (1985), CPA, NEU, Box 7, Folder 15; Denise Ann Thomas, "Yi Bu, Yi Bu Lai: The Evolution of Politics and Planning in Boston's Chinatown" (M.A. thesis, Tufts University, 1987), 91; Betty Hok-Ming Lam, "Committee Lists Demands," *Sampan*, May 22, 1985, 1; "The Long Road to Justice: A Case Chronology," *Sampan*, August 28, 1985, 1.

Asian American organizations across the country.<sup>90</sup> In Boston, Asians for Justice drew attention to and helped individuals respond to local acts of racial violence and harassment. Prior to the beating of Long Guang Huang, the most high profile case on which it had focused its energies was that of Anh Mai, a 24-year-old Vietnamese refugee who was fatally stabbed by U.S. marine Robert E. Glass, Jr. in a racially motivated attack in 1983.<sup>91</sup> Huang's beating in Chinatown occurred on the very day that Glass was sentenced to life in prison. Within a week, Asians for Justice had established the Committee to Support Long Guang Huang, for which Suzanne Lee served as a coordinator.<sup>92</sup>

The murder of Anh Mai and the slaying of Vincent Chin, which made abundantly clear that anti-Asian violence did not distinguish among ethnicities, haunted the police beating of Long Guang Huang. The beating also occurred during a period of intense anti-Asian violence in the city and across the country. Since 1975, hundreds of thousands of refugees displaced from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia had arrived in the United States. This migration comprised the "largest, nonwhite, non-Western, non-English-speaking group of people to enter the country at one time."<sup>93</sup> In the Greater Boston area, the increased population of Southeast Asians was particularly visible in Cambridge,

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<sup>90</sup> *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*, directed by Christine Choy (New York: Filmmakers Library, 1988), VHS; Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 55-81.

<sup>91</sup> Diane Lewis, "Trial to Start in Slaying of Refugee, Asian Coalition Says Attacks Go On," *Boston Globe*, March 24, 1985, 40; Steve Marantz, "Immigrants Find No Warm Welcome," *Boston Globe*, July 29, 1983, 1; Thomas Palmer, "Marine Gets Life Term in Stabbing," *Boston Globe*, May 2, 1985, 25; Gregory Witcher, "Tattered Dreams; Once in America, Some Asians Find Bigotry, Violence," *Boston Globe*, March 31, 1986, 1

<sup>92</sup> Elaine Song, "To Live in Peace... Responding to Anti-Asian Violence in Boston" (Boston: Asian American Resource Workshop, October 1987), 28; Kiang, "Discrimination or Dignity," 72-73.

<sup>93</sup> David Whitman, "Trouble for America's 'Model Minority'." *U.S. News and World Report*, February 23, 1987, 18-19; Bill Ong Hing, *Making and Remaking Asian American through Immigration Policy, 1850-1990*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 135; David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 237.



Dorchester, Lowell, Revere, and Worcester. By 1987, nearly 10,000 Southeast Asians lived in Boston, making up half of the city's Asian population. During the same period, the beginning of an economic recession in 1977 led to a rise in anti-immigrant scapegoating. Lingering racism and resentment from the Vietnam War joined these circumstances to create an environment of fear and hostility for Asian Americans and particularly Southeast Asians.<sup>94</sup> As Gail Kelley points out, "Vietnamese were not exactly welcome into this country. Many Americans opposed granting them asylum; they saw the Vietnamese as reminders of a war that Americans should never have fought . . ." <sup>95</sup> During the summer of 1985 alone, a Vietnamese family was attacked in South Boston, a Cambodian household was attacked in East Boston, fourteen Cambodian families were burned out of their apartment building in Revere, and Bun Vong, Cambodian refugee, was beaten to death in Medford. Numerous other cases of racial harassment, violence, vandalism, arson, and murder targeting Asian Americans were reported throughout the 1980s in various parts of the Greater Boston area, including Arlington, Brighton, Dorchester, Lynn, and Mattapan.<sup>96</sup>

Although Kelly claimed that Huang struck him first, most observers found this to be implausible. Many commented that Huang was half a foot shorter than Kelly and two-thirds his weight. Ten witnesses also came forward to report that Huang offered no resistance except to try to flee and that Kelly hit Huang in the face several times, leaving him bleeding and crying. Three of these witnesses—all employees of T-NEMC—also

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<sup>94</sup> Kiang, "Discrimination or Dignity," 72-73; Song, "To Live in Peace," 6.

<sup>95</sup> Gail P. Kelley, "Coping With America: Refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in the 1970s and 1980s." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 487, no. 1, September 1986, 148.

<sup>96</sup> Kiang, "Discrimination or Dignity," 72-73 Peter Bagley, "Bung Vong Trial Starts Soon amid Debate on Racism," *Sampan*, March 19, 1986, 1. For more on anti-Asian violence in Boston in the 1980s, see Song, "To Live in Peace."



Figure 5.2. Long Guang Huang, ca. 1986. CPA, NU, Box 10.

testified that they had heard the alleged prostitute, Audry A. Manns, say, “Kelly, Kelly, he’s not the guy. He’s the wrong man.”<sup>97</sup> Moreover, having worked as a farmer in Guangdong, China for four decades prior to relocating to the United States, Huang was never formally educated and did not read, speak or write English.<sup>98</sup> Thus, many questioned whether he would have been capable of soliciting a prostitute. The case attracted national attention among Asian American organizations across the country and international attention from the Chinese consulate and the mayor of Hangzhou, Boston’s “sister city” in China. Among Asian American activists locally, “Justice for Long Guang Huang” became a rallying cry, and the campaign attracted a wide range of Asian American participants, including college students, suburban professionals, Chinatown

<sup>97</sup> McMillan and Wong, “Suit Eyed Against Hub Officer,” 1. At trial, Kelly’s lawyer went so far as to argue that Huang possessed a hidden knowledge of martial arts that he had exercised against Kelly.

<sup>98</sup> Witcher, “‘I’m Afraid,’ Says Victim of Chinatown Beating.”

residents, and working class immigrants. Michael Liu, who participated in the organizing, observed, “Workers in the coffee shops followed the developments in the newspapers closely. Small crowds would gather to read the daily information posters put up outside the CPA even as the signs were being put up. The weekend information tables in the community were very popular. Restaurants donated food for fundraisers cooked by kitchen workers wearing red ‘Justice for Long Guang Huang’ buttons.”<sup>99</sup> As community activist Peter Kiang put it, the Huang case “symbolized the powerlessness that Chinatown residents experience daily.”<sup>100</sup>

After three months of community activism, Huang was acquitted of all criminal charges, and Kelly was suspended for a year without pay. Public pressure forced the Boston police to open up its internal police misconduct hearings in the Long Guang Huang case to the public in 1986. This was the first time the Boston Police Department had ever allowed a public hearing for an internal investigation, and it set a precedent for other cases of police brutality against racial and sexual minorities in later years.<sup>101</sup> In 1989, Huang would win an \$85,000 settlement from a civil rights suit against the Boston Police Department.<sup>102</sup>

### **Against the Combat Zone**

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<sup>99</sup> Michael Liu, “Campaign for Justice: The Case of Long Guang Huang,” *East Wind* (Spring-Summer 1987), 33-35.

<sup>100</sup> Kiang, “Discrimination or Dignity,” 72-73.

<sup>101</sup> James Jennings, “Changing Urban Policy Paradigms: Impact of Black and Latino Coalitions,” in *Blacks, Latinos, and Asians in Urban America*, ed. Jennings, 5; Song, “To Live in Peace,” 24; Kim Westheimer, “Long Guang Huang Victory a Model for Organizing: Transsexual Charges Boston Police Brutality,” *Gay Community News*, February 22, 1986; Kim Westheimer, “Record of First Attack Disappears: Transsexual to Sue after 2nd Attack,” *Gay Community News*, March 8, 1986.

<sup>102</sup> Lai, Leong, and Wu, “Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle,” 12-13, n. 63.

In addition to the anger that arose in response what seemed a blatant case of police misconduct, much of the outrage generated by the Huang case also represented years of resentment, anger, and frustration at having to live, work, and raise families beside the so-called “Combat Zone,” an adult entertainment district located on Washington Street that was associated with prostitution, drugs, and organized crime.<sup>103</sup> In order to reach schools, grocery stores, and train stations, Chinatown residents passed through blocks of pornographic stores, peep shows, and strip clubs. In a 1979 BRA report on the Combat Zone, a Chinatown social agency administrator summarized the feelings of many in Chinatown:

Anyone who says that the Combat Zone does not create a lot of problems for Chinatown residents doesn't live here. Sure, the Combat Zone isn't much of a problem in the daytime; it's at night when it becomes a problem, especially around two and three o'clock in the morning. Prostitutes use our doorways, apartments get ripped off, dope dealing goes on, hookers and pimps are all over the place, and cars are being stolen. My backyard was swept clean the other day, but I could take you back there now and you'd find four or five prophylactics on the ground. I close the gates, but the prostitutes get in anyway. We're used to the congestion and traffic, the car horns blowing at night. This isn't the real concern, the real concern is with safety and decency. We don't like prostitution on our front steps or in our backyards.<sup>104</sup>

Community activist Andrew Leong recalls that used condoms were often found in the neighborhood's playgrounds and that the Quincy School was often broken into during the evening for sex and drug use.<sup>105</sup> Asian women were often subjected to racist and sexist comments from passersby. Michelle Yee, who lived in Mass Pike Towers, reported that

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<sup>103</sup> Peter Bagley, “Marine gets life term in killing of Anh Mai,” *Sampan*, May 8, 1985, 1. Kiang, “Discrimination or Dignity,” 72-73; Song, “To Live in Peace”; Journalists Jean Cole, Al Sallie, and Frank Thompson coined the ‘Combat Zone’ moniker in 1964 in a series of articles on the area for the *Boston Daily Record*. After overhearing a military police officer describe the area as a “real combat zone,” Cole used the phrase, and the *Boston Daily Record* chose it as the title of the series. “Ask the Globe,” *Boston Globe*, January 27, 1980, H50.

<sup>104</sup> BRA, *Theatre and Entertainment District* (Boston: BRA, 1979), 19.

<sup>105</sup> Andrew Leong, interview by author, Brookline, MA, July 6, 2009.

she was often followed down the street, whistled at, and propositioned for sex on her way through her own neighborhood.<sup>106</sup>

The creation of the adult entertainment district on Washington Street had its roots in Boston's urban renewal planning during the 1950s. The original site for many of Boston's adult entertainment businesses had been Scollay Square, which had served as a port of call for the U.S. military, particularly Navy men, during the first and second world wars.<sup>107</sup> When Scollay Square was redeveloped into Government Center, the area's businesses, workers, and working class residents were displaced. The BRA took the title of every building in the 40 acres of Scollay Square by 1962 and razed virtually all the buildings within a matter of months. In total, over 1,000 buildings were razed and some 20,000 residents displaced. Ground was broken for Government Square on October 18, 1962, and City Hall and other government buildings were completed there by the end of the 1960s. Most of the businesses in Scollay Square closed permanently, but some relocated to a four block area along Lower Washington Street, about six blocks away, bounded by the Central Business District to the north, Chinatown to the east, T-NEMC to the south, and the Boston Common to the west. By August, 1974, a *Boston Globe* survey found that "on one three-block section of lower Washington Street alone, there are five bars featuring strip shows, six X-rated movie houses and six adult bookstores complete with peep shows. There are at least 17 similar establishments in the area."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> BRA, *Against the Zone* (Boston: Asian American Resource Workshop, 1986), VHS.

<sup>107</sup> David Kruh, *Always Something Doing: Boston's Infamous Scollay Square* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1999).

<sup>108</sup> BRA, *Entertainment District Study: Interim Report* (Boston, BRA, 1974), 3; "Combat Zone is Still Alive and Well...and Still Hard Core," *Boston Globe*, August 28, 1974; Norman Marcus, "Zoning Obscenity: or the Moral Politics of Porn," *Buffalo Law Review* 27 (1977), 1, 3; William J. Toner, "Regulating Sex Businesses," Planning Advisory Service Report No. 327 (Chicago: American Society of Planning Officials, 1977), 7; Salvatore M. Giorlandino, "The Origin, Development, and Decline of Boston's Adult Entertainment District: The Combat Zone," (M.A. thesis, Massachusetts Institute of

In response to this development, the Boston Redevelopment Authority considered condemning the properties by eminent domain but realized that this would simply result in their relocation to another part of the city. They could physically destroy lower Washington Street, but they could not destroy the demand for sex goods and services. At the time, Detroit had pioneered a strategy of dispersing its sex businesses such that none could be established within 1,000 feet of another, and owners of each required the approval of 51% of the residents within a 500-foot radius. Fearing the establishment of sex businesses throughout the city of Boston, however, the Boston Redevelopment Authority opted to propose a zoning amendment that would contain these businesses to an “adult entertainment district.” According to the amendment, no sex businesses would be allowed to operate beyond lower Washington Street between Essex and Kneeland Streets.<sup>109</sup>

The Boston Zoning Commission voted to approve the amendment on November 14, 1974. After the amendment was adopted, BRA Director Robert T. Kenney hailed the initiative as “a first step towards keeping adult entertainment areas out of the city’s residential neighborhood” and noted that the amendment received support from “downtown business interests and neighborhood groups in the Back Bay, Beacon Hill, Bay Village and Chinatown areas of the city.”<sup>110</sup> Chinatown was the only residential neighborhood that was directly adjacent to the Combat Zone; however, little public outreach was done to inform Chinatown residents or solicit their opinions. Chinatown’s only representative at the Zoning Commission meeting was Little City Hall manager

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Technology, 1986), 18; Daniel A. Gilbert, “Why Dwell on a Lurid Memory?": Deviance and Redevelopment in Boston’s Scollay Square,” *Massachusetts Historical Review* 9 (2007), 103-133.

<sup>109</sup> BRA, *Boston’s Adult Entertainment District* (Boston: BRA, 1976).

<sup>110</sup> Robert Jordan, “Boston Board Approves Zone for Adult Shows,” *Boston Globe*, November 15, 1974, 1, 17.

Peter Chan, who delivered a curious testimony that criticized the history of urban policy in Chinatown even as he resigned himself to endorsing the plan:

Chinatown, Boston, is one of those communities you gifted with all kinds of problems. We are surrounded by the Combat Zone, the Mass. Turnpike and the expressway. There is talk that a methadone clinic will be built next to our doorstep. In the past decade, we know too well how often we have been ignored and discriminated against by the various government agencies. As a community, we have been disrupted by urban renewal. We have raised our voices of protest and often to no avail. It seems the most logical thing to do, now, is to simply accept what is decided upon us . . . We are constantly reminded we should give our government enough faith to function properly and, also, for the best interest of the City . . . Because of our faith and optimism in a governmental process, I sincerely recommend the proposed amendment to your Commission for approval.<sup>111</sup>

While Chan claimed to speak on behalf of the Chinatown community, in reality he had consulted only with Robert Lee, the president of the CCBA. Chan later claimed to have mailed residents a bilingual letter with a map urging people to express their opinions at the Zoning Commission meeting, but many residents claimed never to have received their letter. Chinatown resident Neil Chin only received a letter informing him about the hearing three days after the vote had already taken place.<sup>112</sup>

The only dissenting voice in Chinatown came from the CACA. In a written statement to the Boston Zoning Commission, May-Ling Tong, a representative of the CACA, noted with irony that the BRA considered it worthwhile to contain the Combat Zone “to protect all other Boston neighborhoods . . . [but] it seems to have forgotten that

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<sup>111</sup> City of Boston Zoning Commission, “In the Matter of Text Amendment Application No. 44, Map Amendment Application No 165,” September 11, 1974, Inspectional Services Department, Boston City Archives; Jordan, “Boston Board Approves Zone for Adult Shows,” 1, 17; “Combat Zone ‘Containment’ Proposal Passes,” *Sampan*, November 1974, 1-2.

<sup>112</sup> City of Boston Zoning Commission, “Text Amendment Application No. 44, Map Amendment Application No 165,” Boston: September 11, 1974, Inspectional Services Department, Boston City Archives; Interview with anonymous resident by Katie Li, Boston, November 26, 2003, cited in Li, “Who Decides?,” 9; “Combat Zone ‘Containment’ Proposal Passes,” 1-2.

there is a very neglected community and residential area bordering the Combat Zone.”<sup>113</sup> Twenty years later, *Boston Globe* columnist Adrian Walker would note that the presence of a residential Asian American community “seems hardly to have registered in the public consciousness. . . . In well over 100 *Boston Globe* stories on the area from 1960s and early 1970s, there is *not one mention* of the Asian community.”<sup>114</sup>

Created as an after-effect of urban renewal and sanctioned by the city without community approval, the Combat Zone represented yet another state-sponsored violation of Chinatown space. Thus, when Long Guang Huang was charged and arrested for soliciting a prostitute in Chinatown, activist and former resident Michael Liu responded, “Why, in the first place, is there prostitution in our community? The whole responsibility of this incident rests on the city. The Chinese community has no say on what’s happening in the community. The city should compensate Huang for any damages.”<sup>115</sup> Activists outraged by Huang’s arrest recognized that the violence he endured was deeply intertwined with the postwar history of Chinatown’s development. In its August 1985 newsletter, the Chinese Progressive Association<sup>116</sup> connected Long Guang Huang’s beating and arrest to a longer history of urban development in Chinatown: “The case is integrally related to the safety and welfare of Chinatown’s residents. The Combat Zone is a centre for prostitution, drugs and pornography. It should not have been located next to our community, and our children should not be exposed to degeneracy. The police should be more responsible to the community. We can see the need for greater control over our

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<sup>113</sup> “Combat Zone ‘Containment’ Proposal Passes,” 1-2.

<sup>114</sup> Adrian Walker, “The Fight for Chinatown: Its Long-Overlooked Residents May Be the Ultimate Winners,” *Boston Globe*, October 23, 1994, A3.

<sup>115</sup> Lam, “Committee Lists Demands,” 1-2; McMillan and Wong, “Suit Eyed Against Hub Officer,” 1.

<sup>116</sup> By 1985, the Chinatown People’s Progressive Association had changed its name to Chinese Progressive Association to reflect a broadened mission.



own community. That is why we have supported demands for elimination of the Combat Zone.”<sup>117</sup> The following month, CPA continued, “If the Combat Zone were never moved next to Chinatown 20 years ago, these things would never have occurred. We must fight to eliminate the Combat Zone or else we will continue to be beaten and harassed.”<sup>118</sup> This connection was brought into even sharper relief at a Chinatown community meeting, where Mayor Raymond Flynn explained to an agitated crowd that his plan for the Combat Zone was to gradually eliminate it by attracting developers to the area so that rising property values and rents would force peep shows and pornographic bookstores out of business. Chinatown’s community members fired back with sharp criticism. Peter Kiang, a graduate of Harvard University who had helped establish Asians for Justice and served as a spokesman for the Committee to Support Long Guang Huang, pointed out that housing was the number one problem in the Asian community: “To increase the property values in such a way that pornographic bookstores can no longer afford to stay means that low income immigrant people also cannot live there. . . . Chinatown’s survival would be at stake.”<sup>119</sup>

When Huang was cleared of all charges in August, activists began organizing midnight patrols through the Combat Zone, armed with flashlights and cameras.<sup>120</sup> They also organized a midnight demonstration against the Combat Zone on the evening of October 28, where Chinatown residents and activists, including Suzanne Lee and Michael

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<sup>117</sup> CPA Newsletter, August 1985, CPA, NEU, Box 2, Folder 26.

<sup>118</sup> CPA Newsletter, October 1985, CPA, NEU, Box 2, Folder 26.

<sup>119</sup> Carol Pearson, “Asians Express Dissatisfaction with Beating Case Response,” *Boston Globe*, June 4, 1985, 19

<sup>120</sup> Liu, “Chinatown’s Neighborhood Mobilization,” 87-88; L. Kim Tan, “Johnny Court Residents Ready to Kick Out Johns,” *Sampan*, September 25, 1985, 1-2; “Kicking the Bums Out,” *Sampan*, October 9, 1985, p. 1.

Liu, voiced their anger and frustration at both recent events as well as a history of unequal urban development.

Both the public outrage that erupted in response to Long Guang Huang's beating and arrest and the demonstrations against the Combat Zone that followed were rooted in a critique of racialized space and uneven geographic development. It was bitter irony that Chinatown would be the site of the city's postwar sex district given its former reputation as a vice district and as a space of illicit activity and sexual transgression in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>121</sup> This was a reputation after all that Chinatown's midcentury ethnic elite had hoped to escape by conforming the neighborhood to the imperatives of urban renewal; and yet it was urban renewal, which had returned this reputation to Chinatown.

While complaints about the Combat Zone sometimes took the form of a morality campaign against sexual deviance and indecency, a good many of the area's residents and community members made it clear that they did not blame the sex businesses or the prostitutes themselves so much as they blamed the pimps and the patrons who treated the area as an illicit dumping ground.<sup>122</sup> According to one Chinatown resident, "The prostitutes aren't the ones who are responsible for a lot of crime, and they, in fact, are victims of crimes, since they're robbed and beaten by johns, and even robbed by the police. A lot of the crime that goes on is done by 'mug boys' and 'mug girls' who are

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<sup>121</sup> Josh Sides, "Excavating the Postwar Sex District in San Francisco," *Journal of Urban History* 32, no. 3 (March 2006), 374; Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction," 367-394; Light, "Ethnic Vice Industry," 464-479.

<sup>122</sup> BRA, *Theatre and Entertainment District*. 20.



Figure 5.3. Michael Liu speaking at a demonstration against the Combat Zone on the evening of October 28, 1985. *Against the Zone*.

teenagers who pose as prostitutes to rob johns. They pick their pockets.”<sup>123</sup> A member of the nearby Bay Village Neighborhood Association explained, “Our main concern is not so much prostitution as it is the violence that goes along with it, along with the traffic and the trash.” Another Bay Village Neighborhood Association member interjected, “Prostitution is not a victimless crime: punks rob the prostitutes, all women become solicited on the street, and people defecate and urinate in the street.”<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, former resident David Moy, who later became executive director of the Quincy School Community Council, recalls that it was an open secret in Chinatown that some of the Chinese men in the community patronized the Combat Zone’s prostitutes. Some of them

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 15.

even formed meaningful and sustained relationships with prostitutes, and to an extent, Moy viewed them as a part of the neighborhood. Moreover, according to Moy, the prostitutes themselves weren't bad people. They were often "down-on-their-luck and abused women who came into the line of work through poor circumstances."<sup>125</sup>

As a whole, Chinatown activists, residents, and community members did not refrain from making moral claims about the sexual behaviors associated with the Combat Zone. Activists and community leaders, however, tended to put those claims in service of a broader critique of racial and spatial marginalization, taking primary aim at the city's history of uneven geographic development. For example, speaking before a large crowd at a demonstration on October 28, Michael Liu framed the drugs, prostitution, and crime associated with the Combat Zone as an environmental burden on the Chinese community, the latest in a long history of unequal urban policies affecting Chinatown:

First it was the Central Artery. Then it was the Massachusetts Turnpike. Then the city used its legal powers to take houses from our families to give to Tufts for their expansion. Finally . . . the city decided to concentrate the city's pornography district next to Chinatown in front of our families, our parents, our children. What they do not want in front of their families and their children, they gave to Chinatown. [A woman in the crowd shouts in agreement, "We don't want it either!"] Let me say the obvious. Chinese are the equal of other people in this city. Chinese have contributed as much as anyone else to this city. But the city did not treat us as equals."<sup>126</sup>

The Combat Zone, Liu averred, was underwritten by the racialization of space. As historian Craig Wilder has shown, segregation was the "initial stride" of domination that allowed white consolidation of social benefits and made people of color the primary consumers of public ills. Under conditions of segregation, neighborhoods of color

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<sup>125</sup> David Moy, interview by author, Boston, July 13, 2009; Betty Hok-Ming Lam, "The Human Side to Prostitution," *Sampan*, September 26, 1984, 1; Roswell Angier, *"A Kind of Life": Conversations in the Combat Zone* (Danbury, NH: Addison House, 1976).

<sup>126</sup> CPA Newsletter, December 1985, CPA, NEU, Box 2, Folder 26; *Against the Zone*.

underwrote the life chances of those outside their borders.<sup>127</sup> Liu's 1985 speech bears a similarity to Little City Hall manager Peter Chan's testimony before the Boston Zoning Commission in 1974. Although their responses to the Combat Zone were almost antithetical—one demanded the Zone's eradication while the other resigned himself to its inevitability—both framed the Combat Zone within Chinatown's history of uneven geographic development, and both recognized that racial segregation and spatial subordination had made Chinatown into one of the city's sacrificial zones. The campaign against the Combat Zone thus focused on exposing and critiquing the moral geography that underlay Boston's historical development.

Chinatown activists continued to criticize the Combat Zone, and after a number of high profile murders, they were eventually joined by local businessmen, the Mayor Raymond Flynn, the Boston Redevelopment Authority, and many other Bostonians, all of whom now wished for the Combat Zone's demise. Ultimately, however, what put an end to the Combat Zone was a combination of technological innovation, economic change, and ethnic entrepreneurship. The videocassette recorder, introduced in the late 1970s, gave people an alternative to the particular forms of entertainment that the Combat Zone provided, reducing the demand for live sex shows and x-rated theaters. Perhaps an even greater threat though was the rise of the professional services and the finance, insurance, and real estate industries, which brought a boom to downtown office space. Between 1976 and 1985, employment in professional services soared 62%, business service jobs 55%, and finance/insurance/real estate sector 32%.<sup>128</sup> This contributed, as Raymond Flynn had predicted, to raising real estate values and pricing the Combat Zone out of

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<sup>127</sup> Craig Steven Wilder, *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 216.

<sup>128</sup> Rachele L. Levitt, ed. *Cities Reborn* (Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute, 1987), 18.

existence. As many other had feared, however, this rise in land values would also have dire consequences on Chinatown's working class residential community.

Lastly, it deserves mention that it was Vietnamese entrepreneurs, all of them refugees, who were among the first to open non-sex-related businesses in the Combat Zone, and their consolidation of storefronts in the area played an important role in the Zone's demise. Half of the Vietnamese who arrived in Boston between 1985 and 1987 were ethnic Chinese, and while the Vietnamese community largely resided outside of Chinatown, many frequented Chinatown and their presence was noticeable in the stores, bakery shops, and restaurants that they opened there.<sup>129</sup> For them, opening a shop in the Combat Zone was an opportunity to establish a foothold in New England's major Asian district, which drew a ready customer base for their market and restaurant products. "Right now it seems like the Combat Zone will soon come to an end," said Dinh Lan, who escaped by boat from Vietnam and opened up Cho Thai Binh Market in 1989 in the heart of the Combat Zone, where he joined a number of other Vietnamese-owned establishments that had opened up in the early 1980s. "We can develop more businesses over here," he added. "Other people will try to move in and there will be more people to invest." As a result of this activity, together with the economic and technological changes in the 1980s, the number of pornographic establishments in the area shrunk from over 30 in 1984 to only 5 in 1989.<sup>130</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>129</sup> Chu, *Chinese in Massachusetts*, 57.

<sup>130</sup> Robert O'Malley, "Chinatown Expands into Combat Zone: Vietnamese Businessmen Lead the Way," *Sampan*, April 19, 1989, 1; "The Combat Zone," *Chinatown Banquet*; Lily Huang, "Place- and Race-based Activism: Boston's Chinatown and its Struggle for Parcel C and Community" (B.A. thesis, Vassar College, 2007), 49.

The battles fought in Chinatown in the 1970s and 1980s were enabled by a new racial and political consciousness among Chinese and Asian Americans that emerged in tandem with the antiwar and civil rights movements and that drew inspiration from the black power movement's identification with third world liberation struggles. These struggles for racial justice that centered on Chinatown, including those that extended beyond its borders, were also fundamentally spatial struggles. As George Lipsitz observes, "race-based social movements are made possible and owe much of their existence to the ways in which race becomes meaningful through shared experiences of racialized space."<sup>131</sup> Chinese and Asian American activists in Boston made Chinatown into a focal point of their struggles for education, jobs, housing, health, and safety because they understood the ways in which the racialization of space had made Chinatown into one of Boston's sacrificial zones, and they understood that "social relations take on their full force and meaning when they are enacted physically in actual places."<sup>132</sup> In the aftermath of urban renewal, communities whose neighborhoods were transformed without their consent developed new strategies of resistance rooted in asserting a right to place, that is the right to reside in, to occupy, to claim a particular place.<sup>133</sup> Without the power to directly control the production of space, a new cohort of Chinese and Asian Bostonians constructed Chinatown as a discursive site of agency, affiliation, and imagination. Calling upon a repository of alternative histories, memories, and geographies in Chinatown enabled Asian Bostonians to imagine identity, community, and place anew and to make claims to a broad range of civil, social, and economic

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<sup>131</sup> Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 54.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>133</sup> Michael Peter Smith and Michael McQuarrie, "Remaking Urban Citizenship," in *Remaking Urban Citizenship: Organizations, Institutions, and the Right to the City* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 50-52.

rights.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Lowe, introduction to *Immigrant Acts*.



## CHAPTER 6

### **“Because This Land is Sacred”: The Struggle for Parcel C, 1978-1994**

You know how long Hudson Street is? How many families were on that street? On summer nights everybody used to sit on the sidewalk. You could walk down that street and say ‘Hi, Hi, Hi.’ The street’s still there, but now it’s a highway. Where I used to live is now a parking lot for Tufts.  
– Tommy Lee, 1971<sup>1</sup>

Parcel C is a symbol of the community. We say 'no' because this land is sacred.  
– Andrew Leong, 1994<sup>2</sup>

#### **Introduction**

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Chinatown’s residents and community members waged a series of battles over equal education, workers rights, affordable housing, police brutality, and anti-Asian violence. Alongside these struggles, which would continue to unfold through the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s, they engaged in a protracted conflict with Tufts-New England Medical Center (T-NEMC) and the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) over the implementation of urban renewal and its aftereffects. The formation of the Quincy School Community Council in 1969 and the

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<sup>1</sup> Miller, “Confucius Say: Beware of Urban Renewal,” 65.

<sup>2</sup> Zachary R. Dowd, “Chinatown Group Lauds Garage Defeat,” *Boston Globe*, October, 26, 1994, 20.

Free Chinatown Committee's impassioned demonstration against T-NEMC in 1971 were among the Chinese community's first expressions of anger over renewal. Beginning in 1978, members of both groups would take part in a shifting activist coalition that launched a series of challenges to the continued expansion of the T-NEMC campus in Chinatown over the next two decades. These disputes would lead to the development of a Chinatown Community Master Plan in 1990, and they would crest during an eighteen month standoff in 1993 and 1994 over plans to build an 8-story, 455-car garage on a half-acre plot of land in Chinatown that would become known as Parcel C. The long struggle over the future of this small lot came to represent more than four decades of accumulated resentment over Chinatown's postwar history of highway construction, urban renewal, and institutional expansion.

By the 1990s, Parcel C was one of few remaining parcels of undeveloped land in Chinatown. Once home to residents, the 24,000 square foot plot, bounded by Oak Street, Ash Street, Nassau Street, and May Place, had been acquired for institutional expansion and urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s. The Boston Floating Hospital purchased a portion of this land in 1956 as per Kevin Lynch's earlier recommendations for the medical center's development via urban renewal in Chinatown. The Boston Redevelopment Authority took the rest of the properties for urban renewal in late 1960s under the South Cove Urban Renewal Plan.<sup>3</sup> Under a 1966 Cooperation Agreement with T-NEMC, the BRA had agreed to release this and nine other urban renewal parcels to the

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<sup>3</sup> Lynch, *Medical Center in the South Cove*, 12, 57-62; BRA, *Urban Renewal Plan: South Cove Urban Renewal Area*; Chinatown / South Cove Neighborhood Council, *Chinatown Community Plan: A Plan to Manage Growth* (Boston: BRA, 1990), 59-63; New England Medical Center Hospital, Inc., "Draft Environmental Impact Report for New England Medical Center Parcel C Garage," (February 28, 1994) EOE #9536, at 1-13 to 1-17, CPA, NEU, Box 7, Folder 2; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 3-4; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 10-11.

medical institution for future development in Chinatown on an as-needed basis, in accordance with the institution's regularly updated master plans and as the institution secured the necessary resources for development.<sup>4</sup> Since then, plans for the plot had included a "Service and Supply Center," various designs for parking structures, and a hospital facility for doctors and patients.<sup>5</sup> As late as 1993, however, the plot remained undeveloped, serving as an 80-car surface parking lot for T-NEMC patients and staff with three aging row houses that the BRA leased as office space to several Chinatown community agencies.<sup>6</sup> It remained undeveloped for nearly three decades in part because T-NEMC had focused on developing larger parcels of land but also because of sustained community opposition, which began with a dispute over the site in 1978. Over the next decade and a half, this site would become a key battleground over the meaning of Chinatown's past as well as the shape of its future.

### **Challenging T-NEMC Expansion, 1978-1983**

In 1977, Stanley Chen, a Chinese American contractor and developer who had helped oversee the construction of Quincy Tower the previous year, secured funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for the development of 230 units of subsidized housing geared towards Chinese elderly in the South Cove Urban

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<sup>4</sup> The 1966 Cooperation Agreement and 1968 Supplement can be found in Appendix 2 of Tufts University and New England Medical Center, *Facilities Master Plan, 1982-1992*, Preliminary Submission (Boston: Tufts-New England Medical Center, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Tufts-New England Medical Center, "Master Plan" (1974), BRA 1857; New England Medical Center Hospital, Inc., "Draft Environmental Impact Report for New England Medical Center Parcel C Garage," (February 28, 1994) EOE #9536, at 1-13 to 1-21, CPA, NEU, Box 7, Folder 2; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 11.

<sup>6</sup> CNC, *Chinatown Community Plan*, 59-63; New England Medical Center Hospital, Inc., "Draft Environmental Impact Report for New England Medical Center Parcel C Garage," (February 28, 1994) EOE #9536, at 1-13, 1-17 to 1-20, CPA, NEU, Box 7, Folder 2; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 4; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 10, 21.

Renewal area.<sup>7</sup> Chen considered building on a small lot in nearby Bay Village but faced opposition from the Bay Village Neighborhood Association, whose members supported housing for the elderly but felt that a dense high-rise project was incompatible with the character of Bay Village, which consisted of mostly low-rise brick townhouses. The Bay Village Neighborhood Association proposed a smaller development of 80-90 units and meanwhile joined Chen in investigating alternative sites in Chinatown. Together, they found that virtually all suitable sites for development were either owned by T-NEMC or assigned to the medical institution under its 1966 Cooperation Agreement with the BRA.<sup>8</sup>

Chen identified an undeveloped urban renewal parcel on Oak Street as the most suitable site for his housing project in Chinatown and proposed a joint venture with T-NEMC that would involve around 140 units of subsidized housing for the elderly constructed atop a 300-car underground garage for T-NEMC patients, students, and staff.<sup>9</sup> The Oak Street site in question was also home to the Quincy School Community Council, which had been leasing the building at 34 Oak Street from the BRA from almost a decade. By this point, the Council had expanded its work beyond asserting a community voice in the planning of the recently completed Quincy School Complex to include a day care center, adult English classes, a youth drop-in center, and other community services. In July 1978, as Stanley Chen and T-NEMC were engaged in discussions for the site, the BRA attempted to shut down the building occupied by the

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<sup>7</sup> “Low-Income Units in Boston area to receive \$7m: Housing Projects Get HUD subsidy,” *Boston Globe*, September 10, 1977, 1.

<sup>8</sup> T-NEMC, Appendix 2 in *Facilities Master Plan, 1982-1992, Preliminary Submission*; Anthony Yudis, “Chen Gets Deadline on Plan for Elderly” *Boston Globe*, January 14, 1979, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Chinatown Housing and Land Development Task Force, Letter to U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development (October 16, 1979) BRA 735; “Quincy Community Council Group Protests BRA deal,” *Sampan* (August 1978), 10; “Tufts plans major Chinatown construction,” *Sampan* (October/November 1978), 2; Liu, “Chinatown’s Neighborhood Mobilization,” 57-58.

QSCC with little prior warning. Council members expressed alarm and concern that no consideration had been given to the continuation of Quincy School Community Council programs and services, and they criticized all parties involved for the lack of open communication and community participation in the planning process. “No one in Chinatown opposes low income elderly housing,” they declared in a public statement, “[but] why is a high rise project that was opposed by the Bay Village community considered by the BRA to be acceptable to the Chinese community without any input and consent from Chinatown residents? . . . Any further development without input and participation by Chinatown residents endanger the existence of Chinatown.”<sup>10</sup>

T-NEMC’s planners expressed interest in Stanley Chen’s proposal, but it made public a master plan in October 1978 that laid out a different vision, including the construction of three new facilities over the next ten years that would span hundreds of thousands of square feet and place an entire city block under the medical center’s ownership. On the Oak Street site, T-NEMC planned to construct a new hospital facility and a parking structure and refused to entertain proposals for housing.<sup>11</sup>

In response, a group of lawyers, architects, and residents who shared the Quincy School Community Council’s position—that residents ought to have a meaningful role in determining land use and development decisions in their neighborhood—came together in 1978 to form the Chinatown Housing and Land Development Task Force. The group grew to about forty members in its first year, and it included young Chinese American

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<sup>10</sup> Doug Simmons, “Tufts to grow more in district facelift,” *Sampan* (June/July 1978), 2; “Quincy Community Council group protests BRA deal,” 10; “Tufts plans major Chinatown construction,” *Sampan* (October/November 1978), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Chinatown Housing and Land Development Task Force, Letter to U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (1979), BRA 735; Doug Simmons, “Tufts to grow more in district facelift,” *Sampan* (June/July 1978), 2; “Quincy Community Council group protests BRA deal,” 10; “Tufts plans major Chinatown construction,” *Sampan* (October/November 1978), 2; Liu, “Chinatown’s Neighborhood Mobilization,” 57-58.

professionals, Chinatown residents, and white activists with ties to the QSCC. Perturbed that the Community Council and its affiliated programs might be displaced from their Oak Street site at any time, the Task Force concerned itself most immediately with challenging the continued expansion of T-NEMC in Chinatown without “input and consent from Chinatown residents.”<sup>12</sup> Weeks after T-NEMC released its master plan in October 1978, the Task Force staged a demonstration in opposition to continued institution building in Chinatown that attracted some 200 participants. In a flyer for the rally, Chinatown Housing and Land Development Task Force framed its opposition to the medical institution’s expansion plans through Chinatown’s history of uneven urban development: “When nobody wanted the Southeast Expressway, where was it built? Chinatown! When nobody wanted the Mass Turnpike, who got stuck with it? Chinatown!! When nobody wanted the parasitic institution of Tufts-New England Medical Center, where was it dumped? Chinatown!!! Now when we have federal money to get some much needed housing for the elderly built in Chinatown, who stops us— Tufts!”<sup>13</sup> T-NEMC development consultant Robert Vey acknowledged at the time that neither T-NEMC nor the BRA had lived up to their obligations to Chinatown. However, T-NEMC refused to revise its plans, and the BRA claimed that it had no authority to alter the institution’s internal planning process.<sup>14</sup>

Although the Task Force had opposed Stanley Chen’s proposed project for the Oak Street site, the group recognized the need for low-income housing in Chinatown and

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<sup>12</sup> Chinatown Housing and Land Development Task Force, Letter to U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (1979), BRA 735; “Quincy Community Council group protests BRA deal,” *Sampan* (August 1978), 10; Liu, “Chinatown’s Neighborhood Mobilization,” 59. CHLDTF members included Carol Lee, Regina Lee, Lawrence Cheng, Marilyn Lee-Tom, Vincent Lee, Richard Levy, and Davis Ja, among others.

<sup>13</sup> Chinatown Housing and Land Development Task Force, Letter to U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (1979), BRA 735; Liu, “Chinatown’s Neighborhood Mobilization,” 59.

<sup>14</sup> Community Task Force on Housing and Land Development in Chinatown, minutes for meeting on October 27, 1978, cited in Liu, “Chinatown’s Neighborhood Mobilization,” 63.

worked with Chen over the next few months to secure alternative sites for his project, which eventually took the form of a 94-unit building in the initial Bay Village location and a 137-unit building a few blocks away.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Task Force organizers gathered signatures on a petition demanding greater community participation in housing and land development decisions in Chinatown. They worked with the Chinatown People's Progressive Association to draw attention to Chinatown's growing "housing crisis," which they blamed on past destruction of housing caused by highway construction, urban renewal, and institutional expansion. Beyond simply opposing expansion, the group developed and circulated a "Chinatown Housing Plan (CHOP)" that identified six potential sites—four of which were owned or assigned to T-NEMC—where family housing might be constructed. In these ways, organizers urged "the Chinese community to join the Task Force in an attempt to stop Tufts-New England Medical Center and other institutions and to support the struggle for low-income family housing in Chinatown."<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, T-NEMC continued buying up land in Chinatown and building on it. In December 1978, the institution purchased a parcel of land and the three buildings on it at the corner of Harrison Avenue and Harvard Street for \$500,000. As a condition of sale, T-NEMC demanded that landlord Robert Rodday deliver the property empty of the 25 tenants who lived there but refused to offer relocation assistance for displaced tenants. Regina Lee, a Task Force member and an attorney at Greater Boston Legal Services, helped the tenants resist eviction for a year and successfully secured \$4,000 per tenant for relocation assistance from Rodday. T-NEMC would consolidate this and an adjacent

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<sup>15</sup> Chinatown Housing and Land Development Task Force, Letter to U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (1979), BRA 735; "Group Plans 2 Apartment Buildings," *Boston Globe*, June 7, 1980, 31.

<sup>16</sup> Chinatown Housing and Land Development Task Force, Letter to U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (1979), BRA 735.

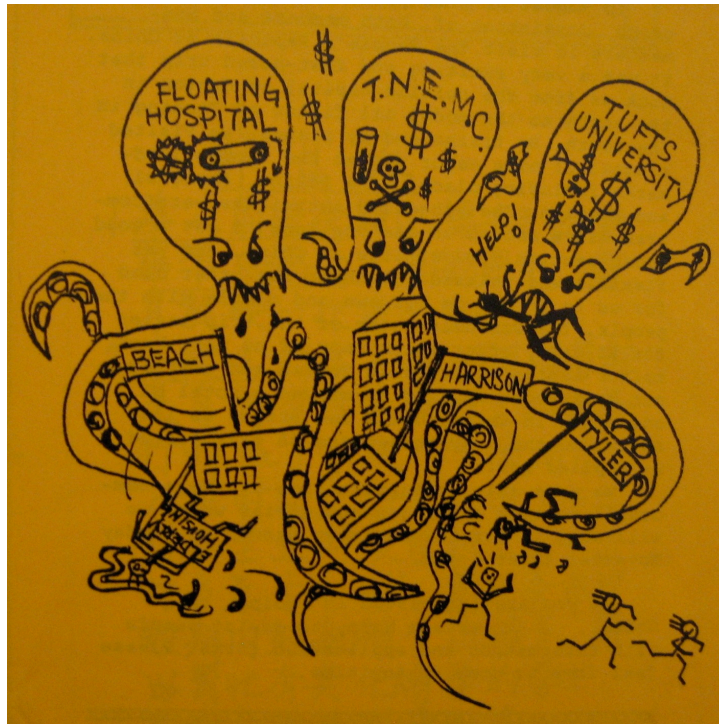


Figure 6.1. An artist's rendering of Tufts-New England Medical Center expansion in Chinatown. *Chinatown People's Progressive Association Newsletter* 1, no. 1, November 1978, CPA, NU, Box 2, Folder 23.

parcel for the construction of a \$15 million Health Sciences Education Building in 1982.<sup>17</sup>

In 1979, T-NEMC built a 14-story, \$23 million USDA Human Nutrition Research Center at the corner of Washington Street and Stuart Street.<sup>18</sup> At the groundbreaking ceremony on December 12, 1979, Task Force organizers led a two-hour demonstration

<sup>17</sup> "Chinatown Tenants Fight Eviction, Tufts' Plan," *Sampan*, April/May 1979, 1; Will Wooten, "Tufts Must Relocate, Aid Evicted Rodday Tenants, BRA Warns," *Sampan*, July 1979, 4; "Rodday Tenants Settle on Relocation Money," *Sampan*, December 1979, 1; Edward McInnis, "Tufts' Lease on Two Kneeland Street Buildings Threatens Over 600 Jobs in Chinatown," *Sampan*, May 1981, 1, 7; Edward McInnis, "T-NEMC Gets \$15 million To Construct Health Services Education Building," *Sampan*, March 1982, 1; See also T-NEMC, *Facilities Master Plan, 1982-1992, Preliminary Submission*. The buildings were 131 Harrison Avenue, 137 Harrison Avenue, and 28 Harvard Street. The Health Sciences Education Building would be renamed the Sackler Center.

<sup>18</sup> Liu, "Chinatown's Neighborhood Mobilization," 59-60; "USDA Nutrition Center One Step Sloser to Reality," *Sampan*, October 1979, 1; "Public Meeting to Seek Ways to Negotiate with Tufts on Land Use," *Sampan*, January 1980, 1, 4.



and disrupted the ceremony by marching onto the stage. Seizing control of the microphone, activists called attention to the loss of residential and community space to institutional development before the president of Tufts University, its board of trustees, and other guests. In response, Dr. Allen D. Callow, chairman of the board of trustees, remarked, "I was unaware, after 30 years in the area, of the strength and depth of feelings (of the Chinatown residents) and the seriousness of the problem."<sup>19</sup>

One of the more contentious acquisitions occurred in May 1981 when T-NEMC quietly purchased two garment factory buildings owned by the Drucker Company at 15 and 35 Kneeland Street. These buildings housed more than 25 garment manufacturers and contractors, and 600-800 workers employed there stood to lose their jobs. This number represented nearly 10% of Boston's garment industry workforce and over one third of the total number of garment workers in the immediate vicinity. More than half of those who would lose their jobs were Chinese residents of Chinatown, where 75% of working women were employed as seamstresses.<sup>20</sup> Task Force activists charged that over a decade of T-NEMC expansion had resulted in the loss of housing and the dislocation of families and businesses. Now, CHLDTF organizer Kam Yun Lee pointed out, T-NEMC was also taking away the community's jobs and its livelihood.<sup>21</sup> As members of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, most of the Chinese women who would lose their jobs were the sole providers of their families' health insurance since their husbands often worked in non-unionized restaurants without benefits. In this and other

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<sup>19</sup> "Public Meeting to Seek Ways to Negotiate with Tufts on Land Use," *Sampan*, January 1980, 1, 4; "Chinatown Land for Chinatown [photograph]" *Sampan*, January 1980, 9; Liu, "Chinatown's Neighborhood Mobilization," 60.

<sup>20</sup> McInnis, "Tufts' Lease on Two Kneeland Street Buildings Threatens Over 600 Jobs in Chinatown," 1, 7; "EDIC Seeks a Spirit of Cooperation To Save City's Garment Industry," *Sampan* (July 1981), 2; Robert A. Jordan, "Lease of 2 Chinatown Buildings Hit," *Boston Globe*, April 23, 1981, 14.

<sup>21</sup> McInnis, "Tufts' Lease on Two Kneeland Street Buildings Threatens Over 600 Jobs in Chinatown," 1, 7.

ways, Chinese women garment workers formed the backbone of the Chinatown community, and the loss of these jobs would seriously damage the health of the community as a whole.<sup>22</sup> If that were not enough, the Kneeland St. properties were not included in the 1965 South Cove Urban Renewal Plan nor were they ever represented in the T-NEMC Master Plan. Glenn Hutloff of CHLDTF called T-NEMC's "surreptitious" move to consolidated additional properties beyond agreed upon urban renewal boundaries "arrogant and racist." "Our biggest enemy in this area is Tufts and its expansion," Kam Yun Lee agreed. The Task Force called for an immediate moratorium on any actions that would affect the tenancy of the garment shops and called on the BRA to intervene and to "accept responsibility for the results of their revitalization strategy" in Chinatown.<sup>23</sup>

T-NEMC released an updated institutional master plan in 1982, which outlined another set of renovation and construction projects to be undertaken over the next decade. At this point, members of the Chinese American Civic Association, the Chinatown Housing and Land Development Task Force, the Quincy School Community Council, and the South Cove Community Health Center responded by forming a broad community coalition to develop and promote an alternative set of proposals for development in Chinatown.<sup>24</sup> With the backing of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, the coalition held a press conference on May 2, 1983 and presented their proposals to 300

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<sup>22</sup> Peter J. Howe, "Laid-off Garment Workers Celebrate; Retraining Benefits Won After Fight," *Boston Globe*, November 2, 1986, 37; Peter Nien-chu Kiang and Man Chak Ng, "Through Strength and Struggle: Boston's Asian American Student/Community/Labor Solidarity," *Amerasia Journal* 15, no. 1 (1989), 287-288; Margarita C. Lam, "Chinese Immigrant Women in the Garment Industry in Boston, Massachusetts, 1965-1985" (B.A. thesis, Harvard University, 1991), 49; *Through Strength and Struggle* (Boston: Worker's Center, Chinese Progressive Association, 1988); Deng, "Visibly *Ah Mou*."

<sup>23</sup> McInnis, "Tufts' Lease on Two Kneeland Street Buildings Threatens Over 600 Jobs in Chinatown," 1, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Doris Sue Wong, "Coalition Calls for Tufts Building Moratorium, Proposes More Housing and Jobs for Chinatown," *Sampan*, May 1983, 1, 8-9. The South Cove Community Health Center was established in 1971 by the Chinese Community Health Care Task Force, which was formed as part of the Chinese American Civic Association's 1971 "Future of Chinatown" Conference. See CACA, "Report of the Conference on the Future of Chinatown," 45-53.

residents, workers, and elected officials in the auditorium of the Quincy School Complex. After explaining its grievances over the medical institution's history of expansion in Chinatown and critiquing the inadequate consideration given to environmental impacts in the T-NEMC master plan, the coalition discussed the need for more low-income housing, job assistance and training programs, and expanded community services. Coalition members called on T-NEMC to work with the Chinese community to develop more than 700 new units of housing and to provide "meaningful employment" to Chinatown residents. With regard to the Oak Street site, Quincy School Community Council Executive Director Bob Bickerton urged T-NEMC to reconsider its plans to construct a parking garage that would displace the Community Council and Acorn Day Care Center. The waiting list for the city's only Chinese bilingual day care center was 150 children, he explained, and the waiting list for adult ESL classes topped 600. Finally, the coalition requested that T-NEMC agree to a moratorium on expansion as "an indication of good faith." T-NEMC representatives applauded the community's planning effort but dismissed many of the proposals as unrealistic and indicated that the institution was "unalterably opposed" to a moratorium.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time that this coalition brought public attention to urban development in Chinatown and to the impact of institutional expansion, Bill Chin, president of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, led an effort to negotiate with T-NEMC behind the scenes in order to find satisfactory concessions for the Chinatown community. The CCBA invited two representatives of CHLDTF, attorney Regina Lee and architect Lawrence Cheng, to join five representatives of CCBA on the seven person negotiating team. After several months of meetings with T-NEMC officials, negotiations ended on

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<sup>25</sup> Wong, "Coalition Calls for Tufts Building Moratorium," 1, 8-9.

September 15, 1983 when Bill Chin signed a Memorandum of Understanding on behalf of the CCBA with the New England Medical Center and the Trustees of Tufts College. Under its terms, T-NEMC agreed to contribute \$600,000 to CCBA for the development of low-income housing, \$100,000 for a program to train Asian workers for jobs at the hospital, and \$100,000 to provide a scholarship for local Asian American students applying to Tufts University. It also agreed to provide 24-hour on-call interpreter services within the medical center, to make its auditorium in the new Health Sciences Education Building available for community use, to refrain from vacating the buildings at 34-36 Oak Street and 199 Harrison Avenue until the agencies located therein (Quincy School Community Council, Acorn Day Care Center, Boston Chinese Youth Essential Services) could relocate to comparable alternative spaces. Finally, it agreed to solicit community input in its institutional planning process going forward. In return, CCBA, acting as spokespersons for Chinatown, agreed to support the four developments that T-NEMC was then pursuing on Harrison Avenue, Kneeland Street, and Washington Street by issuing statements of support on behalf of the Chinatown community to all relevant public bodies and to speak in support of the projects at all public hearings. It was specified that all agreements would be terminated if a permit, license, or approval was denied for any of the projects “wholly on the basis of opposition by the community or lack of active support.”<sup>26</sup> This arrangement bore some similarities to the 1963 “Treaty of

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<sup>26</sup> Gloria Chun, “Chinatown, TNEMC Agreement,” *Sampan*, September 1983, 2; Lydia Lowe, “Community Reaction to Announcement,” *Sampan*, September 1983, 2; Regina Lee and Kam Yun Lee, “Community Members Made Agreement Possible,” *Sampan* (September 1983), 5; Liu, “Chinatown’s Neighborhood Mobilization,” 75; Chu, *Chinese in Massachusetts*, 64; CCBA 1983 Memorandum of Understanding, in “Tufts-New England Medical Center” (1987), BRA 4540. According to Michael Liu, the site on which CCBA was to develop low-income housing with the \$600,000 provided by T-NEMC sat vacant for more than a decade, after which CCBA leased it to a businessman, who opened a branch of the Super 88 Asian supermarket chain on the site. How these funds were used is a matter of dispute within the community, and there has not been a transparent accounting of their dispensation. Liu, “Chinatown’s

Friendship” to the extent that T-NEMC offered limited community benefits in exchange for the community’s support of its projects. And, as it had in 1963, the CCBA acted on behalf of the Chinatown community without the input or consent of those who would be most affected.

Community reactions were mixed. On the one hand, Task Force members celebrated “the unification of Chinatown to oppose Tufts-New England Medical Center” as “an important step” and the 1983 agreement as a “victory for the people of Chinatown in their struggle to maintain Chinatown as a place for working people to live.” On the other hand, activist Michael Liu noted that, “Chinatown got something and Tufts got something. But we gave an awful lot . . .” Similarly, Gloria Soo Hoo, a youth worker and a student cautioned, “They’re giving us money for scholarships, and that’s good. But we need the buildings more than anything. We need space. We need room.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Planning with People Once More, 1984-1990**

When Raymond Flynn ran for mayor in 1984, he campaigned on a populist platform that promised to direct more power and resources to the city’s neighborhoods. In 1985, Flynn’s Office of Community Participation followed through on those promises by establishing a Chinatown Neighborhood Council (CNC), one of five pilot neighborhood councils in the city, as a way of giving residents a greater role in city affairs. The Council received early notification from the city on various matters affecting the neighborhood and advised the city on neighborhood concerns, the delivery of city services, and issues of urban planning and development. The Mayor’s Office of Community Participation

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Neighborhood Mobilization,” 75.

<sup>27</sup> Lowe, “Community Reaction to Announcement,” 2; Lee and Lee, “Community Members Made Agreement Possible,” 5.

appointed twenty-one people to the council for its first year in operation, but council members would be determined by a neighborhood election the following year.<sup>28</sup> As the Mayor's newly appointed Asian community liaison, community activist Marilyn Lee-Tom advised the Office of Community Participation in the selection of the inaugural council members. Lee-Tom had lived in Chinatown previously and most recently served as the executive director of the Chinatown Housing and Land Development Task Force.<sup>29</sup> Members of the first Chinatown Neighborhood Council represented a range of neighborhood agencies and community organizations including CHLDTF, QSCC, CCBA, the Chinese Merchants Association and the Chinese Progressive Association as well as local tenants organizations, college students, and other community activists. As a political body recognized by the city, the Council had the potential to undermine the traditional authority of the CCBA as the public face of Chinatown. In 1984, before the CNC was established, the CCBA released a statement questioning the purpose of neighborhood council, which it viewed as duplicating a function of the Benevolent Association. Meanwhile, CPA, CHLDTF, QSCC, and other organizations challenged the CCBA's self-assigned role and championed the creation of a neighborhood council, which they argued would provide a forum for dialogue among the various factions in the neighborhood.<sup>30</sup>

About one month before the creation of the Council, T-NEMC began discussing its plans to construct a 750-900 car garage in Chinatown with the seven-person

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<sup>28</sup> L. Kim Tan, "Flynn Appoints 21 to 1st C-T Neighborhood Council," *Sampan* November 6, 1985, 1, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Betty Hok-Ming Lam, "Lee-Tom Sees Activist's Role," *Sampan* June 19, 1985, 1, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Suzanne Lee and Henry Wong, letter to Raymond Flynn, September 30, 1984, CPA, NEU, Box 1, Folder 14; "CCBA Issues Statement on Neighborhood Council," *Sampan*, November 21, 1984, 1; Betty Hok-Ming Lam, "Community's Decisions to Set Up Neighborhood Council Differ," *Sampan*, November 21, 1984, 1, 4.

negotiating team that had been established by the CCBA in 1983. Plans for a parking garage of various sizes had been a part of the medical institution's planning documents dating back to Kevin Lynch's 1955 study. In February 1986, T-NEMC planners identified three possible sites for a garage: the 32-34 Oak Street parcel occupied by the Quincy School Community Council and other agencies, an abutting parcel to the west, and an extension of an existing parking lot on Tremont Street several blocks away. When T-NEMC presented its garage plans to the Chinatown Neighborhood Council in spring of 1986, the Council expressed concerns about the impacts of a large aboveground parking structure on a small residential neighborhood, noting its close proximity to homes and schools. The Council unanimously voted to oppose a garage at any of the sites as proposed. One member offered that the council might be more amenable to a smaller underground garage as a foundation for a mixed-use structure that included housing.<sup>31</sup>

In the fall of 1986, T-NEMC returned to the CNC with another proposal for alternative garage sites, but it focused on the parcel abutting the 32-34 Oak Street parcel along its western border. To offset the harms of a large garage in a residential neighborhood, T-NEMC offered to incorporate the construction of a new YMCA facility into the parking structure. Chinatown's YMCA branch had long been an important recreational space for the neighborhood's youth, but it had been operating out of temporary facility with an inflatable roof since 1971.<sup>32</sup> The executive director of the Chinatown YMCA, Richard Chin, was also a member of the Chinatown Neighborhood

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<sup>31</sup> Lynch, *Medical Center in the South Cove*; BRA, *Urban Renewal Plan: South Cove Urban Renewal Area*; T-NEMC, *Facilities Master Plan, 1982-1992, Preliminary Submission*; Anna Wong Yee, "NEMC Proposes Large, Parking Garage," *Sampan*, February 19, 1986, 1; Peter Bagley, "Community Leaders Concerned about Effect of NEMC Plan," *Sampan*, February 19, 1986, 1, 3; Peter Bagley, "Chinatown Council Opposes Design of NEMC Garage," April 2, 1986, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Bagley, "NEMC Proposes New YMCA in Car Garage," *Sampan* October 1, 1986, 1, 3.

Council, and he encouraged the council to support the proposal. However, other council members were divided. Although council member Yuk Sung supported the construction of a new YMCA, he observed, “This sounds like a deal between NEMC and the YMCA, not one for the whole community.” Council member Shirley Mark Yuen strongly opposed the garage proposal, citing negative impacts on the urban environment and on public safety as well as the history of T-NEMC expansion in Chinatown: “Ever since the 1950s, Tufts/NEMC has persisted in its demands of taking Chinatown’s rightful land. In the past thirty years, we have lost residential space, office space and industrial space because of the medical center’s development. If we don’t fight to keep those free remaining parcels of land, Chinatown may cease to exist and become a community of the past.”<sup>33</sup>

In December, the CNC determined that a new YMCA facility alone would not sufficiently offset the harmful impact of a new garage on Oak Street. It thus rejected T-NEMC’s proposal for a garage with a YMCA and urged the institution to further investigate alternative sites and to increase its offer of community benefits.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, the Council held a community meeting and distributed a questionnaire to gather community opinions on the issue. Of the 578 respondents, 68% indicated opposition to a parking garage in the neighborhood. This indication of community opposition to a garage led the Council to vote in February 1987 to reject the garage project in Chinatown altogether, regardless of community benefits. NEMC vice president Judith Kurland announced that, although T-NEMC still wished to reach an agreement with the Chinatown Neighborhood Council, the institution had a legal claim to the Oak Street site

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<sup>33</sup> Shirley Yuen, “Garage’s Impact Will Be Felt,” *Sampan* October 1, 1986, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Bagley, “Deadline to Name Site for NEMC Garage Is Right Around the Corner,” *Sampan*, January 21, 1987, 26.



and would proceed with its building plans there despite community opposition.<sup>35</sup>

In an effort to challenge T-NEMC's claim to the site and to prevent the Oak Street building from being demolished for a parking garage, the Quincy School Community Council tried another strategy altogether. During the summer of 1986, the QSCC commissioned Cambridge artists Wen-ti Tsen and David Fichter to design a mural for the eastern side of the 34-36 Oak Street building that would depict the Chinatown community and make publicly visible its historic claim to the site. Rich in symbolic imagery, the colorful mural depicted the history of Chinatown from its formation in the 1870s to the community's contemporary struggles over space. The mural featured images of laundrymen, restaurant workers, and seamstresses; images of Ping On Alley, where Chinese first settled in Boston; and images of urban change, including the prewar elevated train and the demolition of homes for highway construction and urban renewal. The image of a wrecking ball crane facing a building resembling the 34-36 Oak Street buildings offered commentary on the contemporary battle to save the site from demolition. To underscore the point, a window on the building itself was incorporated into the mural design such that anyone peering out of the window would appear to be the target of the looming wrecking ball. A boat overflowing with people navigating a storm represented the Southeast Asian refugee migration, which was transforming the community's composition. An image of a demonstrators marching and bearing signs that read "Housing!," "Justice for Asians," and "Save Our Community" in English, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Sanskrit depicted past and present struggles over anti-Asian violence, affordable housing, and community space. These demonstrators also illustrated the

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<sup>35</sup> Peter Bagley, "NEMC Car Garage Is Rejected by No Vote in Neighborhood Council," *Sampan*, February 18, 1987, 1-2.



Figure 6.2. Chinatown Community Mural Project, Oak Street, 1986, Wen-ti Tsen private collection.

neighborhood's transformation into a rallying point for the Asian American Movement. Other areas of the mural depicted scenes of community life, which evoked Chinatown's future development possibilities, including diverse portraits of gardeners growing Chinese vegetables, grocery store and restaurant workers, doctors serving Chinese families, adults learning English, a multiracial classroom of schoolchildren, and a Chinese boy and girl playing volleyball. These various elements were brought together by the visual metaphor of an endless green and gold cloth being woven by Chinese garment workers, who served as the mural's central figures. The cloth featured a repeating motif that incorporated the Chinese characters 万字不斷, a phrase that roughly translates to "ten thousand unceasing words." This theme of historical continuity connected Chinatown's historical development as a center for the Chinese American community to its ongoing struggle for survival as a residential neighborhood and an Asian American home place. Based on interviews with over 100 Chinatown community members and featuring the faces of actual people in the neighborhood, the mural asserted a place identity rooted in history and linked to a racialized community. In the top left and right corners of the mural were the Chinese characters 互助 and 團結, which translated roughly to "help each other" and "unite," and the mural would be titled "Unity/Community." The Chinatown Community Mural Project was completed over the summer with the help of many youth and adult volunteers, and it helped turn the Oak Street building into a potent symbol of community and place as activists continued to clash with T-NEMC for control of the site.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Wen-ti Tsen, interview by author, Cambridge, MA, May 8, 2009; "The Chinatown Mural Project: A Tribute to Unity and Community," dedication and opening ceremony program booklet (September 24, 1986), private collection of Wen-ti Tsen, copy in author; photograph of mural by Wen-ti Tsen, private

At the same time, the Quincy School Community Council sought approval from the BRA to acquire its Oak Street property, which encompassed two connected buildings and a playground called Hundred Hand Park. The Community Council had occupied 34 Oak Street since 1969 and had begun leasing 36 Oak Street from the BRA in 1984. Volunteers had recently built Hundred Hand Park on a vacant lot on 28-32 Oak Street. In addition to the Council, these buildings housed the Acorn Child Care Center, an after school program for youth, adult English as a Second Language programs, and the Chinatown Housing and Land Development Task Force. The Council had already invested over \$200,000 into a two-phase renovation of the properties and planned to invest \$100,000 more in a third and final phase of renovation after receiving title for the property, which would include a redesign of the playground and physical improvements to the building at 34 Oak Street. In May 1987, the BRA gave tentatively designation to the Quincy School Community Council as the developer of 28-36 Oak Street.<sup>37</sup>

In mid-June 1987, Suzanne Lee, Carol Lee, and Marilyn-Lee Tom of the Chinatown Neighborhood Council arranged to give a personal tour of Chinatown to BRA director Stephen Coyle in order to give him a direct view of the pressures on Chinatown land and to make an appeal for his support in the face of T-NEMC's intention to build a garage despite community opposition. As they walked down Harrison Avenue, they saw a young child riding a tricycle between cars in a T-NEMC parking lot. According to the three CNC members, Coyle was deeply moved by the scene. After the tour, Coyle said he

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collection of Wen-ti Tsen, copy on file with author; Wong Sue, "Chinatown Mural Shows a Century of Memories," *Boston Globe*, August 25, 1986, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Ricardo Millet and Ting-Fun Yeh, Memorandum to Steven Coyle regarding Final Designation of Redeveloper of Parcel 3b (June 33, 1988), in BRA, "Tufts New England Medical Center" (1987) BRA 4540; "QSCC May Soon Get Title of Building," *Sampan*, May 20, 1987, 4; Robert O'Malley, "NEMC Files Suit to Take Oak Street Building," *Sampan*, July 6, 1988, 1; Teresa M. Hanafin, "BRA Will Take Steps to Halt Medical Center in Chinatown," *Boston Globe*, July 1, 1988, 61; Diego Ribadeneira, "BRA Wins Land Dispute with N.E. Medical Center," *Boston Globe*, November 23, 1988, 32.

understood “why the line had to be drawn on [the garage] and had to be drawn then.” Thereafter, Coyle began to more forcefully defend the Neighborhood Council against T-NEMC’s push to build a garage in Chinatown.<sup>38</sup> To be fair, by the time Coyle toured Chinatown in 1987, he may have already been inclined towards sympathy for the community’s concerns. Coyle shared some of Flynn’s populist orientation, and the mayor had remarked that the two men shared a “politics of compassion.”<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, he certainly demonstrated his support with greater energy after visiting Chinatown in 1987. In a memorandum to the CNC and NEMC at the end of June, Coyle forcefully recommended that T-NEMC focus its energies on designing an underground parking structure, which would sit beneath 80 housing units and no hospital facility. “With less than four acres of publicly-owned land remaining in Chinatown, the construction of new affordable housing must be the top priority in city land disposition decisions,” Coyle wrote. Echoing views long held by Chinatown activists, Coyle held that the central issue in Chinatown was no longer a garage, but instead the quality of life, its residential character, and community control. He added that future T-NEMC expansion would be subject to strict review, and any developments in the T-NEMC master plan would have to wait until the CNC and the BRA had drafted a master plan for the Chinatown community.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Carol Lee, interview by author, Boston, February 22, 2010; Suzanne Lee, interview by author; Marilyn Lee-Tom, interview by author, Wellesley, MA, January 20, 2010; Peter Bagley, “City Memo on Parking Garage Indicates Growing Support of Chinatown in BRA,” *Sampan*, July 1, 1987; Robert O’Malley, “Voters Ratify Draft Master Plan,” *Sampan*, April 6, 1988; Liu, “Chinatown’s Neighborhood Mobilization,” 91.

<sup>39</sup> John King, “How the BRA Got Some Respect: Boston Redevelopment Agency Believes in Doing It All,” *Planning* (May 1990), 7.

<sup>40</sup> Bagley, “City Memo on Parking Garage Indicates Growing Support of Chinatown in BRA”; “Chinatown Launches Its Own Master Plan,” *Sampan*, August 5, 1987, 4; “Major Topics Are Examined by Neighborhood Council,” *Sampan*, May 21, 1986, 7; “At the Neighborhood Council,” *Sampan*, July 2, 1986, 2; Peter Bagley, “Dorchester Hospital Considers Proposal to Move to Chinatown,” *Sampan*, June 3, 1987.

In August 1987, after both the Chinatown Neighborhood Council and the BRA had opposed T-NEMC's garage proposal, St. Margaret's Hospital in Dorchester stunned community members when its representatives revealed that it was investigating the Oak Street parcel for the construction of a joint St. Margaret's-T-NEMC hospital facility in Chinatown. Community members harshly criticized both St. Margaret's Hospital and T-NEMC for failing to solicit community input or approval, and many were shocked that St. Margaret's would even consider building on such a contentious site. Stephen Coyle and Raymond Flynn immediately issued public statements opposing the St. Margaret's relocation, and St. Margaret's would withdraw its plans the next March.<sup>41</sup>

In response to these conflicts, the Chinatown Neighborhood Council and the BRA embarked in earnest on the development of a comprehensive community master plan that would address the social, economic, and environmental concerns of the Chinatown neighborhood. The overriding objective, according to BRA planner Ting-Fun Yeh, was "to ensure the continued viability of the neighborhood by developing a shared vision for Chinatown through a broad-based community process."<sup>42</sup> The BRA offered technical and financial support for the master planning process, which drew broad participation at its first meeting on November 18, 1987. Some 200 residents and community members came together then to imagine possibilities for Chinatown's future: "What if Beach Street was converted into a pedestrian mall, allowing more people to shop freely in the heart of Chinatown? What if low-rise houses were built here, surrounded by grassy lawns and gardens? Or perhaps what if open parks and other recreational facilities were built,

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<sup>41</sup> Peter Bagley, "St. Margaret's Hospital Unveils Proposals for Chinatown Move," *Sampan*, August 5, 1987, 1, 4; Peter Bagley, "Hospital Relocation Is Sharply Criticized at Chinatown Meeting," *Sampan*, August 19, 1987, 1, 3; O'Malley, "NEMC files suit to take Oak Street building," 1; Bagley, "Dorchester Hospital Considers Proposal to Move to Chinatown."

<sup>42</sup> Ting-Fun Yeh, "Abstract for Community Plan," *Sampan*, November 18, 1987, 4.

providing room for children to run and play and adults to gather at park benches to rest and read newspapers.” As the “Big Dig” project to depress the Central Artery had just received federal funding, other residents imagined, “If we could have the area back, there would be enough space for new housing.” Possibilities such as these were raised and discussed at the first public meeting for the “Chinatown Community Plan.”<sup>43</sup> In April 1988, Chinatown community members voted at a public meeting to ratify a draft of the Chinatown Community Master Plan, which included goals for increased affordable housing, the preservation and development of community agencies, the stabilization and expansion of Chinatown’s business and residential areas, and control over the impact of new developments on the area’s traffic patterns. At the meeting where the vote took place, Stephen Coyle remarked, “A master plan involves more than saying no to inappropriate development. It requires the community and the city working together to establish what is the right kind of development for the community.” Coyle added that the Chinatown plan is one “that expresses the vision of the community and not just the vision of city planners” and that “people all around Boston will be looking to what you do to see if the process works.”<sup>44</sup> It seemed to many in Chinatown that the dream of “planning with people” was finally becoming reality.

This community planning process, however, would not be without problems. As the Chinatown Community Plan was just getting underway, the first Neighborhood Council election in 1988 was marred by allegations of voting fraud when a polling staff of eight, anticipating 500 voters, was overwhelmed by an unexpectedly large voter turnout of 2,300. Observers complained of a disorganized and chaotic scene, noting that

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<sup>43</sup> Samuel Wong, “Chinatown Plan Draws Broad Participation,” *Sampan*, December 2, 1987, 1, 3.

<sup>44</sup> O’Malley, “Voters Ratify Draft Master Plan,” 3.



“candidates and campaigners filled out ballots for voters, people voted without proper identification, and control over ballot distribution was lost.” Some called on the city to discard the ballots before they were counted and to hold a new election. However, the outgoing council members voted 12-8 to uphold the election results, and the city sustained this decision. Witnesses charged that the neighborhood’s traditional power brokers had violated voting procedures in order to get their slate elected and that they had waged a campaign to expel the council’s more progressive members. “They don’t want certain people to be part of this council,” charged Marilyn Lee-Tom. In protest, three of the more progressive members of the Council who had just been re-elected resigned their positions, including executive director Tarry Hum. “By upholding an illegitimate election,” Hum and 26 others declared in a public letter, “the CNC majority has undermined the organization’s credibility. . . . The CNC’s role as the community’s voice on development issues [is] no longer legitimate or representative.” They lamented that the council, which two years earlier held the promise of meaningful community participation in urban governance, seemed poised to become yet another institution with which the Chinatown community would have to contend.<sup>45</sup>

Meanwhile, T-NEMC prepared a legal challenge to the BRA’s 1987 designation of the Quincy School Community Council as developer of 28-36 Oak Street. In June 1988, one month after the contentious CNC election, T-NEMC sued the BRA in Suffolk Superior Court, charging that the medical institution had first rights to the land as

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<sup>45</sup> Peter Bagley, “Community Will Be Voting in Spring Election for CNC Seats,” *Sampan*, February 3, 1988, C1, C4; Robert O’Malley, “Allegations Mar First Chinatown Election,” *Sampan*, May 4, 1988, 1, 6; “Letters to the Editor: Community Addresses Election Issues,” *Sampan*, June 1, 1988, 6; Robert O’Malley, “Three Resign from New Council to Protest Flawed Voting Process,” *Sampan*, May 18, 1988, 1, 6; “Council Election Results Released,” *Sampan*, May 18, 1988, 1, 6; Robert O’Malley, “Task Force Celebrates 10th Anniversary: Vows to Take Stronger Stand on Issues,” *Sampan*, August 3, 1988, 3; Lai, Leong, and Wu, “Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle,” 19; Liu, “Chinatown’s Neighborhood Mobilization,” 104-105.



outlined in the 1965 South Cove Urban Renewal Plan and agreed upon by both parties in a 1966 Cooperation Agreement. According to the lawsuit, the 1966 Agreement provided “that the BRA ‘shall sell’ and the ‘Medical Center shall acquire and develop those parcels that are marked P-2 through P-11 in accordance with the [1965] plan.” In late June, the court granted a temporary injunction, which prevented the BRA from transferring the title of the Oak Street buildings to the Council.<sup>46</sup>

Defending the Community Council’s right to the Oak Street site, Stephen Coyle and Raymond Flynn argued that circumstances had changed since 1965, and that all remaining BRA-owned land in Chinatown should be preserved for housing and community use, and both men vowed to fight T-NEMC’s efforts to gain control of the site. Their position partly reflected their populist orientation, but it also reflected a massive downtown building boom during the 1980s that set the city’s leadership into a stance of “managing growth” rather than simply stimulating it. Coyle dismissed the 1966 Cooperation Agreement as legally unenforceable and simply an “agreement to agree.” In making his pitch to the BRA board, Coyle ticked off facts illustrating the pressures on Chinatown land: “Chinatown is six times more densely populated than the city as a whole, with more than 110 people per acre, and has the lowest ratio of open space to population than anywhere in the city; the vacancy rate is less than 3 percent; only 5 percent of the residents own their homes; just 39 units of housing have been built since 1980; 60 percent of the households are families, yet 90 percent of the housing is one-bedroom units, and more than 20 percent of its residents have incomes below the federal poverty line.” “The real fight,” Coyle averred, “is over institutional expansion, and it’s a fight we intend to win.” In a letter to the BRA, Flynn concurred, “I will not accept

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<sup>46</sup> Appendix 1 of Lui, “Boston Chinatown”; O’Malley, “NEMC Files Suit to Take Oak Street Building,” 1.

NEMC's attempt to interfere with the transfer of this land to the community, and my administration will not be intimidated by NEMC's lawsuit. The BRA must aggressively pursue the community's rights to this land, which is needed for affordable housing and community services. . . . It is here, on this small lot on Oak Street, that we must draw the line and take a stand with the neighborhood against institutional expansion."<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, neighborhood residents and activists staged a demonstration outside the hospital, placing Chinatown's residential community on visible display. On July 7, 1988, demonstrators—many of them neighborhood preschoolers—marched in a circle outside the hospital carrying protest signs and singing the civil rights anthem, "We Shall Overcome." "If the hospital keeps taking up more land, they're going to swallow up Chinatown," said Ann Faris, a teacher at the Josiah Quincy School who participated in the demonstration.<sup>48</sup>

In December, Suffolk Superior Court ruled in favor of the BRA and the Quincy School Community Council and rejected T-NEMC's bid for a permanent injunction.<sup>49</sup> T-NEMC appealed the decision, but the appeal was rejected, and the Community Council received final designation in 1988. Afterwards, T-NEMC and the BRA negotiated resolution to the long-standing conflict over space in Chinatown. As part of the agreement, T-NEMC agreed to relinquish its land holdings within the block bounded by Nassau Street, Ash Street, Oak Street, and Harrison Street in order to allow the BRA to

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<sup>47</sup> O'Malley, "NEMC Files Suit to Take Oak Street Building," 1; Hanafin, "BRA Will Take Steps to Halt Medical Center in Chinatown," 61; Pantridge, "Medical Center, BRA Face Off in Chinatown," *Boston Herald*, June 30, 1988; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 11, n. 54; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 4.

<sup>48</sup> David Grady, "Chinatown Community, Hospital in Bitter Land Fight; Residents Take Dispute to Center's Front Door," *Boston Globe*, July, 8, 1988, 14; *Oak Street Demonstration*, produced by Andrew Leong (Boston, July 7, 1988), VHS, private collection of Andrew Leong.

<sup>49</sup> "In Court: Quincy Council Wins, NEMC appeals," *Sampan*, December 7, 1988, 3; "Court Supports QSCC Claim to Oak Street Site," *Sampan*, December 21, 1988, 1, 6.

assemble these properties together with urban renewal parcel P-3 into a 24,000 square foot Parcel C, which would be turned over to the community for the development of a community center. In exchange, the BRA transferred the rights of adjacent urban parcels P-4/P-4a—which faced Washington Street, a major artery—to the medical institution. Here, T-NEMC would develop two eight-story hospital facilities totaling over 370,000 gross square feet. The BRA also divided nearby urban renewal parcels R-3/R-3a, which stretched from Oak Street to the Turnpike along Washington Street, into Parcel A and Parcel B, about 42,000 square feet each, for the development of about 500 units of housing. The BRA designated the recently formed Asian Community Development Corporation as developer of Parcel A and the Chinese Economic Development Corporation as developer of Parcel B.<sup>50</sup>

The BRA worked with both T-NEMC and the CNC to accommodate one another's development visions into their respective ten-year master plans, and it approved both plans on the same day, March 29, 1990. Although the disputed 1988 CNC election had resulted in bitterness and mistrust within Chinatown, the master planning process did involve the full range of Chinatown's diverse constituents, including those who had resigned their CNC appointments in protest. The involvement of BRA staff helped to ensure a degree of transparency and broad community involvement in the master planning process, and those constituents of Chinatown who felt they had been

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<sup>50</sup> New England Medical Center Master Planning Committee, *Master Plan, 1990-2000* (Boston: New England Medical Center, 1990), BRA 4430, 68; "Final Project Impact Report, Final Environmental Impact Report for New England Medical Center Hospitals, Inc., 1-C Project Phase I" (July 1992) EOE #7966; Robert O'Malley, "Two Developers to Build Housing," *Sampan*, October 5, 1988, 1-2; Lydia Lowe, "Center Commitments Should Be Honored," *Sampan*, March 19, 1993; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 11, n. 54; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 4.

gerrymandered out of the CNC made certain to participate in and to monitor the process closely.<sup>51</sup>

The resulting Chinatown Community Plan outlined goals for developing affordable housing, community services, and businesses, and it established new zoning restrictions, which protected certain areas of the neighborhood for residential and community use. The T-NEMC plan called for new emergency room facilities, expanded ambulatory care, inpatient care facilities, additional research space, and parking. A total of over 700,000 square feet of new space would be created, of which 450,000 would be used for clinical services. Both master plans designated Parcel C for a community center and articulated commitments to a renewed cooperative effort that would facilitate institutional growth “without infringing upon or undermining the stability and the quality of life of the residential and commercial neighborhood of Chinatown.” As part of the master planning process, the BRA implemented new zoning regulations that delineated institutional, commercial, and residential areas in Chinatown and that prohibited institutional development on Parcel C. The BRA also helped six neighborhood organizations incorporate as Chinatown Community Center, Inc. (CCC) in order to plan the community center on Parcel C and supplied a \$15,000 technical assistance grant. The organizations represented in the Center were the Chinese American Civic Association, Chinese Progressive Association, South Cove Community Health Center, South Cove YMCA, Quincy School Community Council, and Asian American Resource Workshop.

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<sup>51</sup> See *Promotion of the Chinatown Community Plan*, directed by Kay Lien Tsou (Boston: Boston University College of Communication, 1989), VHS.

The Center ran a design competition and selected a design that envisioned a 90,000 square foot community center.<sup>52</sup>

### **The Struggle for Parcel C, 1993-1994**

The economic downturn of the early 1990s stalled the development of the community center. The BRA had intended for the real estate boom of the 1980s to fund the Chinatown Community Center via the city's "linkage" program, which required downtown developers to contribute a percentage of their investment towards the development of housing in Boston's low income neighborhoods, including Chinatown. With the economy in recession, financing a community center proved to be difficult. In response, the Chinatown Community Center scaled back its plans from a 90,000 square foot project to a 50,000 square foot project.<sup>53</sup>

Facing economic decline and a multimillion deficit, Stephen Coyle left the BRA in 1992 to work for the AFL-CIO Housing Investment Trust in Washington, DC. Raymond Flynn left shortly thereafter, in 1993, to accept an appointment as ambassador to the Vatican. When Thomas Menino was elected Mayor in 1993, he reduced the size of the BRA by half and appointed Paul Barrett to replace Coyle as the director of the BRA. As Coyle had done, Barrett focused on growing the city's medicine, biotechnology, and higher education industries. The healthcare industry had grown continuously since the late 1960s, at a quicker pace than the state economy overall. By the 1990s, the health

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<sup>52</sup> CNC, *Chinatown Community Plan*, 62, 132-133; NEMC Master Planning Committee, *Master Plan 1990-2000*, 1-4, 68; Lowe, "Center Commitments Should Be Honored"; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 11; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 4-5; Liu, "Chinatown's Neighborhood Mobilization," 91-92.

<sup>53</sup> Lowe, "Center Commitments Should Be Honored"; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 11; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 5.

industry was the state's top employer, and urban planners and elected officials championed the healthcare industry as a driver of the urban economy.<sup>54</sup>

Under economic pressure and under new leadership, the BRA retreated from its prior commitment to support the development of a community center on Parcel C, and it approached T-NEMC to negotiate a new arrangement for the parcel. T-NEMC planners offered the BRA \$2 million for the right to build an 8-story, 455-car garage on Parcel C for the hospital's patients and staff. To appease the Chinatown community, it offered to construct either a smaller 10,000 square foot community center as part of the garage project, or to pay a sum of \$1.8 million to the community. Remarkably, less than three years after the BRA had approved the T-NEMC Master Plan and the Chinatown Master Plan, both of which designated Parcel C for community use, the NEMC proposed and the BRA supported a proposal to acquire Parcel C for a parking garage.<sup>55</sup>

Chinatown Community Center members were divided in their responses to the proposal. Representatives of the Asian American Resource Workshop, Quincy School Community Council, South Cove Community Health Center, and Chinese Progressive Association opposed the medical institution's proposal and argued that the commitments outlined in the Chinatown Community Plan and the 1990 T-NEMC Master Plan should be upheld. In light of difficulties with financing the community center, however, representatives from the Asian American Civic Association and the YMCA expressed

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<sup>54</sup> Adrian Walker, "Flynn Allies May Face Layoffs," *Boston Globe*, March 31, 1994, 32; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 5; Liu, "Chinatown's Neighborhood Mobilization," 113.

<sup>55</sup> Tentative Designation of New England Medical Center Hospitals, Inc. (NEMCH) as Developer of Parcel C Bounded Generally by Oak Street, Ash Street, Nassau Street and May Place, South Cove Urban Renewal Area (1993), BRA 670; NEMC Real Estate, Inc., "New England Medical Center Hospital, Inc. Project Notification Form Parcel C Garage Project" (July 1993), BRA 1821; "Garage Issue Returns," *Sampan*, February 19, 1993, 1-2; Betsy Q.M. Tong, "Chinatown Neighborhood Council Approves Controversial Garage Plan," *Boston Globe*, May 23, 1993, 1; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 5; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 11.

support for the proposal and convinced the other Center members to attempt to negotiate with T-NEMC for greater community benefits and to make the case that a broader community review process was needed. In March 1993, the Chinatown Community Center proposed that T-NEMC increased its community benefits to a 30,000 square foot community center or \$3.5 million. T-NEMC refused to change its terms and asked the Chinatown Neighborhood Council to put the matter up for a vote at its next meeting.<sup>56</sup>

On May 17, 1993, with the BRA's support and assistance, T-NEMC formally presented its garage proposal for approval to the CNC. Several Council members who supported the project argued for its expediency. It would assure the construction of a much-desired community center at a time of economic uncertainty, even if the center would be only one tenth the size initially envisioned. Over one hundred people appeared at the meeting to speak against the garage proposal, including Oak Street homeowners; residents of Quincy Tower, Tai Tung Village, and other Chinatown residents; representatives of numerous Chinatown organizations; parents whose children attended the Quincy School or received care at the Acorn Child Care Center; and students of adult education programs. Many spoke of the health and safety hazards that would be amplified by a garage, reiterating concerns that community members had been raising for the past decade. Moreover, for many who opposed the project, accepting T-NEMC's proposal meant surrendering a piece of Chinatown's future for short-term monetary gain. As David Moy, a former resident and executive director of the Quincy School Community Council, put it, "Our operating budget is \$1.8 million. That's gone in a year. So we're

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<sup>56</sup> Lowe, "Center Commitments Should Be Honored"; "Hospital Rejects Chinatown Proposal," *Sampan*, May 7, 1993, 1-2; Liu, "Chinatown's Neighborhood Mobilization," 124-125. The Chinese American Civic Association changed its name to the Asian American Civic Association in 1992 to better reflect its wider mission to serve all Asian Americans.

looking at getting a community benefits package that would last potentially, 2, 3, 4, 5 years, but after that we face 50 years of a garage and the impact that has on the community. We don't think it warrants our support." Over two hours of public comment, not a single person spoke in favor of the hospital's proposal. Yet despite this show of community opposition, the CNC voted to approve the NEMC proposal that night in a 12-2 vote with 3 abstaining.<sup>57</sup>

It should be noted here that amid the economic downturn, the city had ceased its financial support of the CNC, and T-NEMC had begun funding the salary of the CNC's director. T-NEMC had also hired one of the moderators of the CNC, Bill Moy, as its neighborhood liaison, and Moy would continue to serve in both capacities simultaneously for the next decade. Since the charges of election fraud in 1988, and in light of these relationships with T-NEMC, the CNC had lost much of its credibility as a legitimate political body within Chinatown. However, because the city continued to recognize the CNC as representative of the community, many found it necessary to participate in the council's process. For many, the CNC's decision to support the NEMC proposal in spite of tremendous community opposition underscored its illegitimacy, and some accused the group of being "puppets" of T-NEMC.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Tong, "Chinatown Neighborhood Council Approves Controversial Garage Plan"; Betsy Q.M. Tong, "N.E. Medical Garage Still on Table: Despite Protest, Officials Say Approval of Plan Probable," *Boston Globe*, June 13, 1993, 10; "Council Approves Garage/Center Plan," *Sampan* May 21, 1993, 1-2; Lydia Lowe, "Six Agencies, the People, and Parcel C," *Sampan*, May 21, 1993, 3; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 11-12; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 5; *Channel 4 Eyewitness News* (Boston: WBZ-TV, ca. June 6, 1993) VHS, private collection of Andrew Leong.

<sup>58</sup> Robert O'Malley, "What Is the Community, and Who Represents It?" *Sampan*, June 4, 1993, 1-2; Betsy Q.M. Tong, "Chinatown Garage Plan Highlights Political Strife," *Boston Globe*, June 20, 1993, 30; Peter Gelzimis, "Turf War in Chinatown Reveals the Soul of City," *Boston Herald*, Sept. 12, 1993, 4; Liu, "Chinatown's Neighborhood Mobilization," 117; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 5; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 19, n. 99.



Frustrated by the actions of the BRA and the CNC, community activists led by the Chinese Progressive Association, the Asian American Resource Workshop, and the Quincy School Community Council formed the Coalition to Protect Parcel C for Chinatown. This broad coalition would grow to include 21 community organizations and several hundred individuals over the next year and a half, and it brought Chinatown's traditional elites—the CCBA and the Merchants Association—together with the newer, more progressive organizations as well as family associations, student groups, and social organizations.<sup>59</sup> At the first meeting of the Coalition, residents and activists voiced their concerns over the impacts of a large parking garage. In particular, elderly women and teenagers expressed fears that increased traffic would raise the likelihood of automobile accidents. Three residents had died in recent years after being struck by cars near the Parcel C site, and the Boston Transportation Department had identified one of the streets near Parcel C—Washington Street—as one of the most dangerous locations for pedestrian fatalities in the City of Boston. A 1993 study conducted by Massachusetts Turnpike Authority affirmed that Chinatown streets were overloaded, producing high rates of pedestrian accidents and fatalities.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Robert O'Malley, "Coalition Formed to Oppose Garage," *Sampan*, June 4, 1993; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 12; Correspondence between the Coalition to Protect Parcel C and the Chinatown/South Cove Neighborhood Council concerning the September 1993 referendum, CPA, NEU, Box 6, Folder 30. Members of the Coalition to Protect Parcel C for Chinatown included the Asian American Corporation, Asian American Resource Workshop, Charlestown High School Asian Students Club, Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, Chinese Merchants Association, Chinese Progressive Association, Chinese Women's Club, Eastern US Kung-Fu Federation/NE, Fung Luen Association, Hoi Kew Association, Kew Sing Music Club, Law Offices of Thomas Chan, Esq., Massachusetts Indochinese American Association, Moy Family Association, National Chinese Welfare Council, Oak Street and Johnny Court Residents, Quincy School Community Council, Shanghai Printing Company, South Cove Community Health Center, Tai Tung Tenants' Association, and Wong Family Association.

<sup>60</sup> Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, *Air Rights Study* (Boston: Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, 1993), 52; Boston Transportation Department, *Pedestrian Safety Task Force, Report on Pedestrian Safety* (Boston: Boston Transportation Department, 1992), 9; Gavin Daly, "Girl, 4, Killed Under Wheel of Crane in Boston," *Boston Globe*, June 7, 1985, 29; Robert O'Malley, "Child Dies in Tyler St. Accident," *Sampan*, May 3, 1989, 3; "Woman Killed Crossing Chinatown Street," *Sampan*, August 3, 1990, 1, 3; "The Real

Indeed, Parcel C was squarely in what remained of Chinatown's residential area, and many viewed it to be a particularly dangerous site for a parking garage. Across the street from Parcel C was a group of brick row houses occupied by a number of families. Next to the row houses was Oak Terrace, a housing development under construction. Though only 30 feet wide, Oak Street, which abutted Parcel C, was a key pedestrian footpath that connected the western and eastern sections of Chinatown's residential neighborhood. Located within 100 feet of Parcel C were the Quincy School Community Council, the Josiah Quincy Elementary School, the South Cove Community Health Center, Boston Asian Youth Essential Services, Quincy Tower, and the Golden Age Center, an organization serving Asian elderly. Daily, residents of Tai Tung Village used the narrow passage along Oak Street to reach these and other service agencies.<sup>61</sup>

Residents also expressed concern over environmental impacts on their health. The Central Artery and the Massachusetts Turnpike extension had not only created chronic traffic congestion in Chinatown; they also worsened air quality to the point of violating national carbon monoxide safety standards. As early as 1974, the Boston Redevelopment Authority found the tens of thousands of cars which traveled along the highways through Chinatown generated dangerous levels of air pollution, prompting the Environmental Protection Agency to raise questions about the habitability of new housing then being planned.<sup>62</sup> In 1987, carbon monoxide levels measured at the Kneeland Street entrance to

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Problem with Parcel C, *Boston Globe* June 3, 1993; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 7; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 7.

<sup>61</sup> New England Medical Center Hospital, Inc., "Draft Environmental Impact Report for New England Medical Center Parcel C Garage," (February 28, 1994) EOE #9536, 1-4, CPA, NEU, Box 7, Folder 2; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 3-4; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 10; Liu, "Chinatown's Neighborhood Mobilization," 121.

<sup>62</sup> BRA, *Neighborhood Profile, Chinatown/South Cove*; Massachusetts Department of Public Works, "Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report for Central Artery (I-93)/Tunnel (I-90) Project, Part 1, Book 2" (1990), 4-6, table 4.11; Doug Brugge, *An Analysis of the Impact of Traffic on Air Pollution and Safety in*

the Dewey Square Tunnel, adjacent to Chinatown, were found to be among the highest in the city of Boston. At five out of eight air testing locations in Chinatown, modeled projections of carbon monoxide levels exceeded the eight-hour limit established by the EPA. Again, in the early 1990s, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's monitor for carbon monoxide at Essex Street in Chinatown showed several violations of limits set by the Environmental Protection Agency. To many, \$1.8 million dollars was not worth escalating these environmental ills.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, Chinatown already had one of the highest concentrations of parking lots in Boston: 1,573 off-street parking spaces in 1990, occupying a total of nine acres of land or more than 20% of the neighborhood. Chinatown had an average of 34 parking spaces per acre, whereas the South End had only 4.6 and the city of Boston as a whole only 1.7. Furthermore, much of this parking space in Chinatown was reserved for T-NEMC employees, clients, and patients rather than Chinatown residents, 70% of whom did not own cars.<sup>64</sup>

On June 9, 1993, one day before the BRA would hold its public hearing to determine whether it would give preliminary approval to the hospital's garage proposal, over 250 people demonstrated in front of T-NEMC. At the June 10 hearing, residents and activists again voiced their outrage and delivered a petition with over 2,500 signatures opposing the garage to the board of the BRA. Still, the BRA granted T-NEMC tentative designation as the developer of Parcel C. Moreover, BRA director Paul Barrett and T-

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*Boston Chinatown* (Boston: The Coalition to Protect Chinatown, 1998), 15-30; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 7; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 7.

<sup>63</sup> Massachusetts Department of Public Works, "Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report for Central Artery (I-93)/Tunnel (I-90) Project, Part 1, Book 2" (1990), 4-6, table 4.11; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 3, 7; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 8.

<sup>64</sup> CNC, *Chinatown Community Plan*, 64-65, 114; The Chinatown Coalition, "The Chinatown Community Assessment Report" (Boston: The Chinatown Coalition, 1994), 26, accessed May 12, 2014, <http://tccboston.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/chinatowncommunityassessment1994.pdf>; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 7.

NEMC General Counsel Larry Smith insisted that the plan had Chinatown's support, citing the CNC vote as evidence of community approval and reproducing a now familiar dynamic of urban planning.<sup>65</sup>

In the environmental notification form that T-NEMC filed with the Massachusetts Secretary of Environmental Affairs in August 1993, the medical institution claimed that the environmental impacts of the garage project on Parcel C were minimal and that a full environmental impact report for the project was unnecessary. The Coalition's legal committee, led by Chinese American attorneys Zenobia Lai, Andrew Leong, and Chi Chi Wu, rejected these conclusions and demanded a full environmental review, and it enlisted the Sierra Club and the American Lung Association to submit letters of support.<sup>66</sup> On August 31, 1992, the Office of Environmental Affairs held a public hearing on the matter. For over three hours, Chinatown residents and advocates spoke of their concerns over health, safety, and traffic, and they framed Chinatown's history of uneven geographical development as a matter of environmental racism. Speakers included Oak Street residents that lived across the street from Parcel C, staff at the South Cove Community Health Center and the executive director of the Quincy School Community Council as well as public health and environmental advocates from Healthcare for All, the Sierra Club, Environmental Diversity Forum, and the American Lung Association. Challenging the findings in T-NEMC's environmental notification form, the Coalition presented the results of its own ad hoc traffic study conducted by neighborhood youth, which alleged that T-NEMC underreported rush hour traffic by at least half. The Massachusetts

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<sup>65</sup> Robert O'Malley, "BRA Supports NEMC Garage on Oak Street," *Sampan*, June 18, 1993, 1-2; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 5-6.

<sup>66</sup> New England Medical Center, Inc., "Project Notification Form for the Parcel C Garage Project" (July 1993); Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 16-17; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 10.

Executive Office of Environmental Affairs thus ordered T-NEMC to conduct a full environmental impact review of its garage project and ordered the hospital to focus on areas of community concern, in particular the impacts on air pollution, traffic, open space, and recreation.<sup>67</sup>

Following the public hearing, the Coalition organized a community referendum on the garage proposal as a challenge to the legitimacy of the CNC's vote of support and to test the sincerity of T-NEMC's oft-stated pledge to withdraw the garage proposal if the community truly opposed it. The Coalition enlisted the American Friends Service Committee to oversee the referendum as a neutral third party, and on September 12 and 13, 1993, the Chinatown community was asked to vote yes or no to the following question:

New England Medical Center (NEMC) has proposed to build a 455-car parking garage on Parcel C (next to the Acorn Day Care Center and playground on Oak Street) for their new ambulatory facility. This will affect Chinatown residents such as those on Oak Street, Johnny Court, in Quincy Towers elderly housing, Tai Tung Village, and Mass Pike Towers, as well as the Acorn Day Care Center, Quincy School, and other community groups. NEMC is offering the community 55 out of the 455 parking spaces for the future housing developments across the street and \$1.97 million to be allocated by the Chinatown Neighborhood Council. In exchange, the Chinatown community would give up its rights to develop the land or build a community center as previously recognized in the Chinatown Master Plan. Do you accept NEMC's proposal for Parcel C?<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Marla Van Schuyver, "State Hears Opposition to Chinatown Garage Plan," *Boston Globe*, September 1, 1993, 64; Marie Gendron, "Chinatown Residents Decry Garage," *Boston Herald*, September 1, 1993, 28; Doug Brugge, Zenobia Lai, Christina Hill, and William Rand, "Traffic Injury Data, Policy, and Public Health: Lessons from Boston Chinatown," *Journal of Urban Health* 79, no. 1 (March 2002), 88; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 10-11; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 17, n. 86.

<sup>68</sup> Chinatown Community Referendum (September 1994), CPA, NEU, Box 6, Folder 30.

Over 1,700 people cast ballots, with 1692 voting no and 42 voting yes. The referendum results thus provided another indication of community opposition, which cast further doubt on the claim that the garage proposal had community support.<sup>69</sup>

When T-NEMC released its full Draft Environmental Impact Report on February 28, 1994, the Coalition's legal committee followed an environmental justice strategy suggested to them by attorney Luke Cole, who had helped Latino residents of Kettleman City, California in the San Joaquin Valley defeat a proposed toxic waste incinerator project in 1990 by pointing out that the environmental impact report had not been translated into Spanish, the primary language of over half of the town's residents. The Coalition thus demanded that T-NEMC translate its environmental impact report into Chinese, arguing that "public comment," which was required under the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act, needed to allow for the participation of non-English speaking Chinatown residents who would be affected by the proposed project. T-NEMC complied by producing a seven-page Chinese summary of a 920-page document. Although it fell far short of a full translation, it was the first version of the Environmental Impact Report that many residents were able to read, and it also set a precedent as the first public environmental document in Massachusetts to be translated into Chinese.<sup>70</sup>

In its comment to the Draft Environmental Impact Report, the Coalition's legal committee placed the garage proposal into the historical context of Chinatown's development, highlighting highway construction and urban renewal. In addition to

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<sup>69</sup> Statement of Willie Brown III, Clerk of the Executive Committee of the New England Regional Office of the American Friends Service Committee and Members of the Board of Directors of the American Friends Service Committee (September 14, 1993), CPA, NEU, Box 6, Folder 30; Marie Gendron, "Chinatown Vote Says No to Garage," *Boston Herald*, September 15, 1993, 35; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 18-19.

<sup>70</sup> Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 20; Leong, "The Struggle over Parcel C," 10-12.

pointing out deficiencies in the hospital's study of traffic, air pollution, and geotechnical impacts, it also criticized the racist assumptions in the hospital's misrepresentation of Chinatown as neighborhood. For example, to justify the demolition of the buildings on Oak Street, the hospital's report described the site as inconspicuous to the public. The legal committee pointed out that this description assumed a public comprised of T-NEMC staff and visitors while excluding Chinatown's residents for whom these sites were key neighborhood resources. The hospital also argued that the buildings were of little value for historical preservation because they were isolated from the rest of the historic district, and parts of the original landscape had been destroyed. The legal committee explained that the destruction of the historic landscape had itself been caused by T-NEMC expansion, and they pointed out that T-NEMC's argument was a circular one: "NEMC should not be allowed to rely on the vicious cycle of its own expansion as a rationale for the demolition of the Nassau Street Buildings." The committee also offered an alternative proposal for a community center on Parcel C, along with architectural schematics and a construction budget projection, which the Coalition had produced with the assistance of architect Chia-Ming Sze. In response, the Secretary of Environmental Affairs, Trudy Coxe, ordered T-NEMC to translate meaningful portions of any subsequent environmental impact report and suggested that the two groups meet to negotiate a solution.<sup>71</sup>

Frustrated by the city's indifference, the Coalition considered occupying Parcel C for a weekend, turning it into a "Tent City," as black activists led by Mel King had done

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<sup>71</sup> Coalition to Protect Parcel C, "Comment on NEMC DEIR for Proposed Parcel C Garage," 46-49; CPA, NEU, Box 6, Folder 35; Robert O'Malley, "State Rejects NEMC Environmental Report," *Sampan*, May 20, 1994, 1; Lai, Leong, and Wu, "Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle," 21.



Figure 6.3. “Family Fun Day” on Parcel C, August 20, 1994, Wen-ti Tsen private collection.

on a South End parking lot in 1968 as a demonstration against urban renewal.<sup>72</sup> While some Chinatown activists were excited about the idea, others were concerned about asking community members to put themselves in harm’s way. For those who were not U.S. citizens, an arrest could endanger naturalization prospects or lead to deportation. Instead of a “Tent City” occupation, the Coalition opted for a “Family Fun Day,” which would dramatize the possibilities of Parcel C as a recreation space for Chinatown’s residential community. On August 20, 1994, Coalition volunteers arranged games, activities, and performances for youth, adults, and elderly on the Oak Street lot in full view of the Unity/Community mural. Banners were strung across the Oak Street

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<sup>72</sup> King, *Chain of Change*, 111-18; Lai, Leong, and Wu, “Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle,” 21.



buildings that read “No Garage on Oak Street” and “Community Center on Parcel C” in English and Chinese, and performers staged a mock dedication ceremony, complete with a ribbon cutting and firecrackers, to celebrate the community center and recreation area that the Coalition envisioned for Parcel C.<sup>73</sup> As Coalition member Terri Oshiro said, “We wanted the community to see what a recreational and community center would be used for if we win the struggle. We want the city to know if they won’t help us, the community will take ownership of the issue.”<sup>74</sup> The event stimulated the community’s imagination, and it showed the city at large an alternative vision for Parcel C rooted in fundamentally different assumptions about place than what the garage represented.

The Boston Redevelopment Authority continued to remain silent in the fall, and prepared to escalate its legal strategy by filing a civil rights lawsuit against the city that would identify the city’s support of the Parcel C garage proposal as the latest in a series of discriminatory public policies. Plaintiffs included the Chinese Progressive Association, the Asian American Resource Workshop, two residents, and a former Chinatown resident who had been displaced by highway construction in the 1960s.<sup>75</sup> The Coalition’s legal committee informed the city’s legal counsel of its intent to file the lawsuit one day after a planned community rally. A few days later, on October 21, 1994, a *Boston Herald* reporter informed the Coalition that the Mayor’s office had made a deal with the medical center, terminating the garage proposal and transferring the control of Parcel C to the CCBA in an agreement that would preserve Parcel C for housing and forbid institutional use on the land. Neither the mayor nor the BRA nor the medical center had

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<sup>73</sup> Family Fun Day on Oak Street flyer, CPA, NEU, Box 6, Folder 26; Map of recreation day activities, CPA, NEU, Box 6, Folder 29; Lai, Leong, and Wu, “Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle,” 22, 38-39.

<sup>74</sup> Traci Grant, “Chinatown Residents Rally for Parcel C,” *Boston Globe*, August 21, 1994, M34.

<sup>75</sup> Lai, Leong, and Wu, “Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle,” 22.

communicated this decision to the Coalition, but a representative of T-NEMC admitted to a reporter that, “The Coalition to Protect Parcel C for Chinatown effectively killed the garage with a skillfully orchestrated media campaign and a series of high-profile events that painted the plan as a sellout of the community.” Larry Smith, T-NEMC’s general counsel, told a reporter, “We have had the full cooperation of the Chinatown Neighborhood Council and the BRA. It’s been this grass-roots neighborhood group that stopped us.” Questions remained as to the transfer of the parcel to the CCBA rather than the CCC or the Coalition as well as the mayor’s commitment to housing rather than a community center. Nevertheless, the Coalition viewed the withdrawal of the garage proposal as a victory. The civil rights lawsuit went unfiled, and rather than staging another protest, the community celebrated the end of an 18-month battle with a parade down Oak Street that included a dragon dance and a banquet dinner.<sup>76</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The struggle over the small plot of land called Parcel C was a major event in Chinatown’s development trajectory. Over a year and a half, activists coordinated a large and complex campaign that successfully prevented T-NEMC and the BRA from building a large garage in Chinatown and that reclaimed the land for community use. Disputes over Parcel C would continue after 1994 as the city had displaced the conflict onto a different terrain as various factions in the neighborhood struggled with the CCBA and with each other to define a common vision for its development. One decade later,

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<sup>76</sup> Marie Gendron, “Menino: Developer Puts the Brakes on Chinatown Garage,” *Boston Herald*, October 22, 1994, 20; Adrian Walker, “Chinese Community Group Wins Say on Development of Parcel,” *Boston Globe*, Oct. 22, 1994, M17; Dowdy, “Chinatown Group Lauds Garage Defeat,” M20; “CCBA Uses Community Housing Money to Cover Its Own Expenses,” *Sampan*, March 18, 1994; Leong, “The Struggle over Parcel C,” 12; Lai, Leong, and Wu, “Lessons of the Parcel C Struggle,” 23.

however, a 23-story mixed-use development opened its doors on Parcel C. The development, called the Metropolitan—known in Chinese as 信義大廈 or “honorable building”—contained 251 rental and homeownership units, 115 of which were affordable to low and moderate income families. Four community organizations found their homes in the building’s street level spaces: Chinese Progressive Association; Asian Community Development Corporation, Boston Asian Youth Essential Services, and Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center, which was the new name that the Quincy School Community Council gave itself in 1997 to better reflect its mission, programming, and location. Finally, the building housed an underground parking lot for 283 cars.

Parcel C meant more than the immediate possibility of reclaiming a vacant parking lot for a community center. The struggle for Parcel C articulated a profound critique of unequal power relations, and it pointed to the ways in which multiple forms of domination joined together to create and maintain a system of racial, spatial, and environmental inequality in Chinatown.<sup>77</sup> By focusing on environmental racism, Chinatown activists called attention to the ways in which government policy worked in concert with private development to produce, sanction, and maintain inequitable land use patterns that systematically harmed a racialized community. The eighteen-month struggle in 1993 and 1994 thus expressed the culmination of four decades of highway construction, urban renewal, and institutional expansion and over a century of radically uneven development in Chinatown. Suzanne Lee reflected that Parcel C represented thirty years of her life: “After all those years they’ve taken our land away, we’re finally getting something back for the community.”<sup>78</sup> By narrating Parcel C’s past and imagining

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<sup>77</sup> Huang, “Place- and Race-Based Activism,” 71-74.

<sup>78</sup> Suzanne Lee, interview with author.

its future, by inscribing it with alternative histories, memories, and meanings, activists transformed it from an empty parking lot into a sacred symbol of community and made it into a site from which to refuse and refute the dominant regime of land as property in favor of a community's right to place.

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