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## Urban Renewal in Boston: Municipal Entrepreneurs and Urban Elites

Jack Tager

Urban historians generally agree that the post World War II suburbanization of the nation signaled the demise of central city dominance and generated an "urban crisis." A flood tide of middle-class whites escaped urban congestion for more pastoral suburban climes, drastically rearranging the political, economic, and social fabric of metropolitan life. According to this view, the concomitant arrival of poorer migrants to the central cities -- Black, Hispanic, and those from the Third World -- increased the degeneration of the nation's urban cores. In the late 1950s and the 1960s, the infusion of federal funds halted momentarily the full effects of this urban calamity. Considerable local aid payments, generated through what was called "urban renewal" and the "war on poverty," became the instruments for a so-called urban "renaissance." By the 1980s, federal funds for the cities had evaporated. The precipitous end of this federal largesse was due to the inflation brought on by the Vietnam War, the recession of the mid-70s, the rising deficit, and presidential policies. The gloomy images of extensive neighborhood dilapidation and the development of Black or Hispanic ghettos now typify a major part of the cityscape. One critic suggested that America's cities are "dying a slow death."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Michael C. D. MacDonald, America's Cities: A Report on the Myth of Urban Renaissance (New York, 1984), p. 11. One of the best short summaries recounting the urban crisis is that by Jon C. Teaford, The Twentieth-Century American City: Problems, Promise, and Reality (Baltimore, 1986); especially see his last three chapters.

The only bright spots remaining are in those areas where urban renewal was successful -- the rejuvenated central business districts, and selected residential communities which have been refurbished into upper-middle-class neighborhoods. Although committed to neighborhood rehabilitation as well as downtown revitalization, few urban renewal programs that included lower- and moderate-income housing prospered. Only the commercial centers, with their resplendent skyscrapers, posh hotels, condominiums, and elegant boutiques and waterfront areas remain as visible legacies of this once venerated federal program. Historian Jon C. Teaford wrote that achieving an urban renaissance for American cities proved to be an elusive and impractical goal. Serious pitfalls emerged in many urban renewal programs, resulting in a very "rough road" to maneuver.<sup>2</sup>

The central cities began their downward slide because of the wholesale migration of the middle-classes to the suburbs. The federal government stimulated this massive demographic change through its beneficial loan policies and substantial highway programs. This population outmigration intensified because of the decentralization of manufacturing, the rise of suburban high-technology parks, the decline of downtown commercial enterprises, and the falling valuations that resulted in tax losses and the eroding of public services. Baltimore, Buffalo, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Minneapolis, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Boston -- cities with over one-half million -- declined in population from 1950 to 1980.

In 1950, Boston's population of over 801,000, was at the highest point in its history. Thereafter, the Hub suffered severe losses in each decade. The 1960 population was 697,197, and by 1980 it had fallen to 562,994. The suburbs, with their housing developments and industrial parks, grew prodigiously. By 1980, the "metropolitan ring" was twenty-five miles beyond the center of Boston, a fourfold increase in urbanized space. Small towns underwent phenomenal growth. Burlington, for example, grew from 3,500 in 1950 to 23,486 by 1980. Framingham, on the fringe of the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), went from 28,086 to

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2. Jon C. Teaford, The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985 (Baltimore, 1990). For a recounting of the "downward spiral" of cities, see MacDonal, America's Cities, p. 384; Bernard J. Freiden and Lynne Sagalyn, Downtown Inc: How America Rebuilds Cities (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), pp. 26, 49, and 288; Zane Miller and Patricia M. Melvin, The Urbanization of Modern America (New York, 1987), especially the last chapter, "The Demise of the 'City.'"

65,113, making it one of the largest towns in the nation. Yet, the entire Boston metropolitan region increased only slightly in population, from 2.2 million in 1950 to 2.9 million in 1980. The clear dynamic of population change was the torrent of people leaving the central cities to follow the American dream of home-ownership in the suburbs.<sup>3</sup>

Boston's severe population loss was only one of the city's many problems. Over the years, the city had lost many of its prime manufacturing and transportation jobs. The median income for families in 1949 was the lowest of the nation's nine largest cities. By 1950, the downtown vacancy rate stood at twenty-five percent. The Hub's real estate valuations had fallen from \$1,980 million in 1930 to \$1,490 million in 1945, and it had one of the highest property tax rates in the nation.<sup>4</sup> Boston also had many nontaxable property holders (hospitals, government agencies, universities, and churches). The escalation of land prices, the removal of retail stores to suburban malls, and the decline of public services heightened the Hub's deterioration. No new building construction took place in Boston's downtown between 1929 and 1950. The *Boston Globe* lamented: "Boston is a dead city, living in the past. If you want to be successful in any business, get out of Boston." Economic prospects were bleak, and future mayor John Collins later recalled there was a "malaise of spirit." "We were all kind of ashamed."<sup>5</sup> Boston's political life also played a decisive role in determining its economic vitality.

For almost half a century, bedazzling politicians like James Michael Curley secured power by constructing a fragile alliance of the city's poorer ethnics, in opposition to the Yankee elite. Irish-American political bosses had kept the municipal government oriented to providing jobs and public services to the working classes. And as that occurred, Brahmin financial brokers

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3. U. S. Census of Population, 1980, Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas and Standard Consolidated Statistical Areas (1980); Matthew Edel et al, Shaky Palaces: Home Ownership and Social Mobility in Boston's Suburbanization (New York, 1984), pp. 67-71; U. S. Census of Population, 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980; Center for Massachusetts Data, Massachusetts Population and Housing Characteristics: 1980 Completed Count Data (Amherst, Mass., 1982).

4. Teaford, Rough Road, p. 75; Edward Banfield and Martha Derthick, eds., A Report on the Politics of Boston (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p. 13.

5. Boston Globe, May 7, 1950; Thomas O'Connor, South Boston: My Home Town (Boston, 1988), p. 195.

were reluctant to invest in a city they thought was a "sinkhole of corruption." To their chagrin, Curley again won the mayoralty in 1945, while he was under federal indictment for mail fraud. In recalling those years, the *Globe* wrote that "the negative attitudes of the Yankee-dominated insurance industry was so fervent that no mortgages on buildings in Irish-dominated Boston were granted."<sup>6</sup>

The old style of machine politics, however, was no longer popular with assimilated, middle-class, third- and fourth-generation ethnics. They demanded a new brand of politics. As Teaford wrote:

During the late 1940s and the 1950s, a new breed of urban leaders did, in fact, seize power, proving popular at the polls and building a broad political following. In Philadelphia, St. Louis, Boston and most of the other older cities, mayors dedicated to change and renewal took over city hall and sought to create a new urban politics. Though downtown business interests and the metropolitan newspapers generally were their most vocal and influential backers, the postwar mayors won landslide victories at the polls largely owing to the support of thousands of voters in the outer ring of central-city residential neighborhoods . . . . Like the downtown real estate interests, these home-owning taxpayers favored honest, efficient government that would not waste property tax dollars on salaries for corrupt political cronies.<sup>7</sup>

Symbolic of the "new Boston" after 1948 was the emergence of a different breed of Democratic politician, cast more in the sophisticated mold of newly-elected Congressman John F. Kennedy. In Boston, these new-line Democratic mayors believed that the city's economic prospects necessitated a close working relationship with the business community. The resulting coalition of public "municipal entrepreneurs" and corporate elites was to be the force that would lure federal urban renewal funds to the city.

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6. *Boston Globe*, March 19, 1973.

7. Teaford, *Rough Road*, p. 55.

These federal funds helped to revamp Boston into the New England region's governmental, financial, commercial, legal, health, and educational center.

Among historians, there is no consensus as to which groups were the prime molders of urban renewal programs.

There are those who believe that "local growth elites," a mobilized group of downtown business leaders, were able to dominate local decision-making and establish the political agenda.<sup>8</sup> Others focus attention on "municipal or public entrepreneurs" -- mayors or bureaucrats who are "the linchpin" that "mobilizes the dispersed resources of the community for the ends of renewal."<sup>9</sup> The most widely-held notion is that there were a series of "public/private partnerships" between urban business elites and pro-development mayors and renewal administrators, that was responsible for urban renewal successes.<sup>10</sup> Finally, a thesis that should not be ignored is that urban policy-making is "idiosyncratic" to each community. According to this view, "A basic fact of life in urban America today is that few urban centers are affected by exactly the same institutional and political forces. Thus blanket generalizations should be avoided, and strategies must be tailored to the unique circumstances that exist in a community."<sup>11</sup>

The 1949 Housing Act, under Title I, authorized federal loans and grants to communities for slum clearance and redevelopment. In 1954, redevelopment became "renewal," and programs could now include renewal of commercial and industrial areas. Local renewal agencies now had the power to condemn

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8. See Harvey Molotch, "Strategies and Constraints of Growth Elites," in Scott Cummings, ed., Business Elites and Urban Development: Case Studies and Critical Perspectives (Albany, New York, 1988), pp. 25-58; Margo Stage, ed., Who Rules Boston? A Citizen's Guide to Reclaiming the City (Boston, 1984), p. 6.
9. See Jewel Bellush and Murray Hausknecht, "Entrepreneurs and Urban Renewal: The New Men of Power," in Bellush and Hausknecht, eds., Urban Renewal: People, Politics, and Planning (New York, 1967), pp. 209-224.
10. See Teaford, Rough Road, pp. 26 and 45; John H. Mollenkopf, The Contested City (Princeton, N.J., 1983), pp. 158-159; Marc V. Levine, "The Politics of Partnership: Urban Redevelopment Since 1945," in Gregory Squires, ed., Unequal Partnership: The Political Economy of Urban Redevelopment in Postwar America (New Brunswick, N.J., 1989), pp. 12-34.
11. See David Caputo, Urban America: The Policy Alternatives (San Francisco, 1976), p. 113.

private property for resale to private developers, as well as for public uses. The federal government would pay the difference between buying and clearing the land and the lower cost paid by the private developer. In addition, there was a new emphasis on "rehabilitation" of houses and "conservation" of neighborhoods. A "workable program" required a plan for relocating those who were to be displaced, a minimal housing code, and a program for citizen participation. The issues of citizen participation and conservation of neighborhoods were to raise serious questions about the feasibility of implementation, and would eventually result in political turmoil. Nonresidential projects could receive thirty percent of federal funds, which was a major change from the 1949 act. The nation's urban elites now riveted their attention toward the renewal of the cities' moribund central business districts.

The alliance of mayors John Hynes (1950-1960) and John Collins (1960-1967) with influential business public service groups -- the Citizen Seminar, the prestigious Boston Coordinating committee (known as the "Vault") -- focused upon publicly-funded construction of major downtown commercial projects.<sup>12</sup> Mayor Hynes, who coined the term "the new Boston," began the process by working with the Eisenhower administration in Washington. Hynes set in motion the transfiguration of the city, with the wholesale clearance of the sixteen acre "New York streets" community in the South End, and the massive demolition of an entire neighborhood, the West End. When the developers took title to the sixteen acre South End tract, Hynes termed the event the "beginning of the new Boston."<sup>13</sup> Hynes followed with plans for converting the seedy downtown Scollay Square area into a new government center, and for building a major convention center (which was later to be named the Hynes Auditorium).

Hynes, or "Whispering Johnny" as his admirers called him, was a career bureaucrat who had distanced himself from politicians like Curley. Passing a civil service exam in 1920, he

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12. Another such group was the New Boston Committee (NBC), which was established in 1950 to promote the causes of business-oriented public officials. Its principal backer was prominent Republican Henry Shattuck. The NBC sponsored studies, radio programs, and public forums to fight "Curlyism," and to help reelect Hynes in 1951. It dissolved in 1954, due to internal problems.

13. Boston Globe, September 13, 1957. See also Michael Conzen and George K. Lewis, Boston: A Geographical Portrait (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 101-103.

started his career as a clerk in the Boston Health Department. After World War II, the City Council appointed him as City Clerk of Boston. All the while, he kept himself apart from machine politics and maintained a non-partisan reputation. During Hynes's term in 1947, Mayor Curley went to prison for mail fraud. Ignoring the Boston City Council President, the Republican state legislature appointed the more acceptable Hynes as interim mayor, with full powers. After his pardon by President Truman, Curley returned and dismissed Hynes in an ignominious fashion. Curley said: "I've done more here today than had been done in five months." The angered Hynes took Curley on in the special mayoral election of 1949, and won an upset victory.

Hynes, with his soft-spoken manner, appealed to the middle-class voters. He was admired for his rejection of Curley and the ward bosses, and for his integrity and honesty. His public announcements related to curbing corruption and promoting a business revival for the city. In his 1950 inaugural address, he stated: "At this point may I stress most emphatically that corruption in any form will not be countenanced while I am Mayor. At the first indication of it, swift and decisive action will be taken."<sup>14</sup>

Using Pittsburgh's pro-growth mayor David Lawrence as a model, Hynes worked with the local business community to revitalize the city. At a meeting of over 200 of Boston's business, industrial, and labor leaders, he stressed the need for renewal. "Boston is an old, old city and has a serious problem of decay," he said. "Unless we attack it, then our city is in for much more trouble than it is at the present time."<sup>15</sup> It was clear that this pro-business mayor was not seeking renewal money to bolster the

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14. Reprinted in part, in the Boston Globe, December 31, 1983. The John Hynes Papers are on deposit at the Boston Public Library, but since they are not processed they are not available to scholars. Material on Hynes' life is from the following sources: Thomas H. O'Connor, Bibles, Brahmins, and Bosses: A Short History of Boston (third revised ed., Boston, 1991), pp. 200-206; Melvin G. Holli and Peter d'A. Jones, eds., Biographical Dictionary of American Mayors (Westport, Conn., 1981), pp. 176-177; obituary in Boston Globe, January 7, 1970; and John T. Calvin, "Boston's Mayors: The Last 50 Years," in Boston Globe, November 12, 1983.

15. Boston Globe, February 9, 1955.



city's deteriorating low-income housing stock. He stated: "We have all the low-rental projects we need."<sup>16</sup>

Besides the renewal of the New York streets area and the West End, Hynes established the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA). He set up commissions to study the creation of a new government center in Boston's downtown. The mayor initiated urban renewal in the South End, and the building of a large public housing project at Columbia Point. With a more middle-class electorate and the support of the business elite, Hynes won re-election in 1951, again against James Michael Curley. He was victorious once more in 1955, running against the state senate president, John C. Powers.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, by his final term Boston's business leaders were not pleased with the Hynes administration. From their perspective, Hynes had not done enough to bolster the city's economic prospects. To their dismay, Mayor Hynes had announced an inevitable rise in the tax rate: "In short, the picture is this, expenses are up and income is down."<sup>18</sup> Faced with the highest real estate tax in the nation, with 42 percent of properties tax exempt, it appeared to the business elite that Mayor Hynes' clearance programs were not working. The editors of the *Architectural Forum* took note of the disaffection of the business community:

True some urban renewal was begun in Boston in the 1950s by a previous mayor, but it displayed the same shallow opportunism common to many cities' earlier essays into renewal: basically it was real estate speculation -- which did not help the economic fever Boston was running, but merely added physical wounds.<sup>19</sup>

Corporate elites exhibited their discontent at a meeting of the Boston College Citizen Seminar in 1956. Dr. Cyril C.

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16. *Ibid.*, May 12, 1955.

17. *Boston Herald*, September 26 and November 7, 1951, and September 28 and November 9, 1955; *Boston Globe*, September 28 and November 9, 1955.

18. *Boston Globe*, May 10, 1956.

19. "Boston," special issue of *Architectural Forum*, CXX (June, 1964): 63-124.

Herrmann, director of area development for Arthur D. Little, the Cambridge industrial research firm, stated that "Boston must take the initiative in planning for its urban redevelopment."<sup>20</sup> Created in 1954 by a grant from the Ford Foundation, the Citizen Seminar brought together members of the area's corporate elite, along with academics and political leaders in brainstorming sessions. The Reverend Joseph Maxwell, president of Boston College, explained that the purpose of the Seminar was to "provide a forum and public discussion of important and often new and challenging ideas and programs for the advancement of the welfare of our community."<sup>21</sup>

The Citizen Seminars symbolized the new alliance of business leaders and assimilated Irish politicians (many of whom were Boston College graduates). Ralph D. Lowell (of the Brahmin Lowells), chairman of the Boston Safe Deposit and Trust Company, was often the chairman of Seminar meetings. He and his fellow Yankee, Lloyd D. Brace, president of the First National Bank of Boston, became members of the board of advisers of Boston College's Business Administration school. The Seminar became a public vehicle for corporate leaders to spearhead the economic recovery of Boston as the new center for metropolitan progress.<sup>22</sup>

By 1957, these members of the influential urban business elite were using Seminar meetings to voice their impatience with the slow progress of urban revitalization. Robert Ryan of Cabot, Cabot, and Forbes (real estate) said: "Gentlemen, we are marked men, Bostonians at mid-century! The most significant idea which has come out of these seminars is that Boston is crying for leadership . . . . Boston has reached the point where private funds cannot be invested in Boston in any amount equal to filling the need until those funds can be assured in a return on investment." The Brahmin president of Raytheon, Charles Francis Adams, Jr., echoed Ryan's complaints in 1957: "We have been living beyond

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20. Boston Globe, November 14, 1956.

21. *Ibid.*, April 3, 1956.

22. For an example of the activities of the Boston College Seminar, see "New Face for Hub by 1960 Proposed," in Boston Globe, January 12, 1955. Present at the Seminar were representatives of Gillette, the First National Bank of Boston, New England Mutual Life, and Filene's. Seminar members were also very much interested in some form of comprehensive metropolitan area planning. See Boston Globe, March 9 and April 6, 1955, and November 14, 1956.

our means. Our social legislation outstrips the rest of the nation, while our economic structure each year groans more audibly under the additional burdens imposed on it." He called for limiting the growth of the public sector and for cutting the tax burden for business.<sup>23</sup> Members of the business elite demanded new leadership that would open the coffers of the federal government to promote the revival of the Hub.

A catalyst in the creation of the "new Boston" was the coming together in 1959 of a new organization made up of an exclusive group of prominent Yankee bankers, lawyers, and businessmen. They forged an informal and semi-secret association called the Coordinating Committee, or the Vault. They first met in a boardroom near the vault of Ralph Lowell's Boston Safe Deposit and Trust Company, hence the nickname. Formed to exert behind the scenes pressure upon the political establishment, their purpose was to stimulate downtown revival through urban renewal. Among the original fourteen corporate leaders were Ralph Lowell, Charles Coolidge of Ropes and Gray (law), Paul Clark, chairman of John Hancock Insurance, Erskine White, president of New England Telephone, Stanley Teele, dean of the Harvard Business School, and Gerald Blakely of Cabot, Cabot and Forbes. Included were the chief executive officers of the regions' four largest banks, two largest retailers, two major industrial firms, a leading law firm, the city's public utility firm, and the area's third largest insurance company.<sup>24</sup> Lowell characterized his group as "men interested in the welfare of Boston."<sup>25</sup>

Information about the Vault is clouded in obscurity. Not until the 1980s did the Vault "come out of the closet," taking a more public stance on issues.<sup>26</sup> It was still largely male and white and made up of the major corporate and civic leaders of the metropolitan area. A profile of the thirty Vault members of 1984 showcases a segment of the corporate elite who shared a web of interlocking directorates and mutual civic and social affiliations.

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23. Boston Globe, January 16, 1957; Stage, Who Rules Boston?, pp. 13-14.

24. Boston Globe, November 11, 1986; Stage, Who Rules Boston?, pp. 14 and 36-37; John Mollenkopf, The Contested City, pp. 158-159.

25. Boston Globe, December 25, 1959.

26. Peter Dreier, "The Vault Comes Out of the Darkness," in Boston Business Journal, III (October 10-16, 1983): 1 and 18-20.

Twelve had degrees from Harvard; only four lived in Boston; their average age was 55; seventeen were members of either of the exclusive Somerset or Algonquin clubs; twelve were directors of the Greater Boston Real Estate Board; and eight were directors of the Municipal Research Bureau; additionally, they sat as board members of the United Way, Northeastern University, Boston College, Boston University, the Museum of Science, the New England Aquarium, the Boston Symphony, and Massachusetts General Hospital, to name only a few.

It is difficult to pinpoint the actions or influence of this informal group. They did not record minutes of their meetings, and they made many decisions on the telephone. One Vault member explained: "It's always a little mysterious how decisions get made. People talk on the telephone. A decision ends up being memorialized at a meeting. But it has in effect been made before that."<sup>27</sup> Jeremiah Sullivan, chairman of Filene's (one of Boston's major department stores), gave a hint as to how the Vault operated:

We decided to give money to [support the performance of] Nutcracker. I didn't call anyone to do that, or check anyone to do that. I think if you're talking about reasonable categories, sums of money, there's no checking with anybody . . . . If it's \$10,000, the members [of the Vault] could commit that without checking. If somebody wants \$20 million, that's major league stuff, and you wouldn't get it through. But I think there is nothing that could come before the Vault that the people sitting there couldn't do.<sup>28</sup>

A more recent example demonstrating the Vault's influence was the turmoil generated over School Committee reform. The mayor of Boston, Raymond Flynn, moved to abolish the elected Boston School Committee, and to replace it with an appointed body which would be responsible to the mayor. Early on, Flynn had received crucial support from the Vault. In September of 1989, Flynn appointed the Vault chairman,

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27. Stage, Who Rules Boston?, p. 37.

28. Boston Globe, December 27, 1988.

Ferdinand Colloredo-Mansfeld, of Cabot, Cabot, and Forbes, to a special committee supporting a non-binding referendum on the School Board issue. The Vault then donated \$150,000 to Flynn's referendum campaign. This amount accounted for nearly 98 percent of all donations in support of the referendum abolishing the School Committee.<sup>29</sup> The referendum passed in a close election. In 1991, it was an important factor in persuading the legislature to take the unusual step of eliminating an elected school committee for the state's largest city. Thus, for over three decades it was as power brokers working behind the scenes that the Vault would exercise influence over the destiny of Boston.

In 1959, the Vault was to become the major electoral backer of the little-known Suffolk County Register of Probate, John Collins. The actions of the Hynes administration had not satisfied the expectations of the original Vault members. The "business climate" had not improved significantly, taxes on business property remained very high, downtown construction was still lagging, and the mayor had "not cleaned out corruption." Collins was seeking the mayoralty of Boston against the powerful president of the Massachusetts Senate, John E. Powers. Powers, closely identified with machine politics, appeared to be a heavy favorite.

The newly-created Vault invited Senator Powers and Register Collins to speak to them at a meeting at the Copley Plaza Hotel. The Vault asked the candidates to prepare answers to thirty questions. One Vault member commented: "None of us knew Collins. But he seemed brilliant. He came in all by himself. His answers were tough. He even criticized the business community for letting the city slide." Powers arrived surrounded by advisors, including academics from Harvard and M.I.T. He avoided direct answers, was evasive, and was "unimpressive."<sup>30</sup> Collins handily won the Vault's financial support.

John Hynes began the process, but it was John Collins who was to make the "new Boston" a reality. Collins was a third-generation Irish-American Catholic who was born in Roxbury in 1919. A lawyer and World War II veteran, he won a seat in the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1948. In 1949, he upset the political establishment by supporting John Hynes against

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29. *Ibid.*, October 24 and December 8, 1989.

30. Stage, *Who Rules Boston?*, p. 37.

Roxbury's favorite, James Michael Curley. Elected to the state senate in 1950, with a reputation as a "maverick," Collins served two terms. In 1955, while running for the Boston City Council, Collins became seriously ill with polio. He survived and won office, but had to use crutches or a wheelchair for the remainder of his life. His illness was to serve his political interest, since it demonstrated his courage, and because it reminded voters of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In 1957, Collins became Suffolk County Register of Probate. This position was a political plum and a life-time sinecure. It was a shock to the political establishment in 1959, when Collins threw his hat into the race for the mayoralty, against the well-entrenched president of the State Senate.

As the underdog, Collins played to the electorate's rising anger at "politics as usual." In the preliminary election, Powers placed first, but with only thirty-four percent of the vote. Collins came in second, campaigning against "power politics" and in favor of urban renewal, winning twenty-two percent. With only thirty-nine percent of the city's registered voters going to the polls, the Collins camp saw the chance of an upset victory in the upcoming regular election. Collins dubbed Powers "a little Napoleon," while he portrayed himself as the non-political servant of the middle-class. Collins lambasted Powers as Boston's "greatest peril." He asked his opponent if he would "maintain your tyrannical rule in two domains at once." The Suffolk County Register promised tooust the corrupt politicians, and bring good government and prosperity to Boston. Appearing on television with his wife and children, Collins condemned gambling and juvenile delinquency, and he insisted on the need to have men of "good character" in government. "My opponent is backed by the professional politicians," he declared, "while I am backed by the plain people of Boston."<sup>31</sup>

A well-publicized election eve "bookie raid" by federal agents of a saloon with Powers banners draped everywhere

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31. For biographical material on Collins, and for reporting on the primary and mayoral election campaigns, see the Boston Globe, March 2, July 21, September 10, 17, 21, 23, October 26, and November 3 and 4, 1959. See also O'Connor, Bibles, Brahmins, and Bosses, p. 207; Holli, Biographical Dictionary of American Mayors, pp. 72-73. The full story of urban renewal in Boston cannot be told without analysis of the mayoral papers of John Collins, on deposit at the Boston Public Library. The Collins papers have been processed, but can only be used with his permission. Unfortunately, this researcher was refused permission.

aroused public ire, and helped give John Collins a stunning upset victory.<sup>32</sup> He won by over 24,000 votes, carrying all but four wards. Powers conceded by 9 p.m., the earliest concession ever made in Boston's mayoral elections. The triumphant Collins announced: "There's a lot do do. We're going to make Boston the city we want."<sup>33</sup> Historian Thomas O'Connor made the case that since both candidates were white, Irish-Catholic Democrats, "one can only assume that the Boston electorate continued to favor an essentially 'non-political' candidate who had no visible attachments to any machine organization, as opposed to a clearly 'political' candidate whose candidacy smacked too much of the old Curley regime."<sup>34</sup>

Once elected, John Collins delivered on his promises to the business community. He cut the city budget by thirteen million dollars, and instituted a "no hire, no fire policy" that cut 700 workers from the city payroll by the end of the year. Agency and commission heads lost their chauffeurs, and to save money Collins closed three fire stations and some branch libraries. The mayor went to the legislature and succeeded in getting a reduction in the Boston tax rate, along with a special tax abatement for the developers of the Prudential Center.<sup>35</sup> Collins was a frequent visitor at Coordinating Committee meetings, and he worked hard to maintain cooperation with business leaders.

As mayor-elect, he had characterized the Vault members as "dedicated, knowledgeable men, who play vital roles in the future of our city."<sup>36</sup> During his campaign, he had joined Vault members in their opposition to a proposed state income tax, agreeing to promote their proposal for a sales tax. "A sales tax," he said, "or some other source of revenue is the only alternative to

32. Murray Levin, ed, The Alienated Voter: Politics in Boston (New York, 1965), pp. 28-75; Boston Globe, November 4, 1959.

33. Boston Globe, November 4, 1959.

34. O'Connor, Bibles, Brahmins, and Bosses, p. 208.

35. Banfield and Derthick, eds., A Report on the Politics of Boston, pp. 36-37; Daniel Pool, "Politics in the New Boston, 1960-1970: A Study of Mayoral Policy Making," Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1974, p. 68; Boston Herald, May 9, 1961; Mollenkopf, Contested City, p. 164.

36. Boston Globe, December 25, 1959.

a higher tax rate."<sup>37</sup> Ralph Lowell, known as "Boston's first citizen," usually presided over Vault meetings. Lowell reported that at one meeting the mayor gave a talk "on the prospects of keeping the tax rate down. He will make a list of things he thinks the State should pay for and will submit it to us in the near future."<sup>38</sup> A primary goal for the Vault was the redevelopment of downtown Boston. This approach became the linchpin of the John Collins administration.

Collins faced a "disjointed" and faltering clearance program which originally had been initiated by Mayor Hynes. The new mayor decided that a massive infusion of federal urban renewal funds was the way to curb Boston's economic decline.

There is only one program now available or even on the horizon by which Boston can begin to cope with all its major areas of slum and blight. This program is federally aided urban renewal. Broadly conceived and vigorously administered it can turn the corner. Boston can afford a large scale federally aided urban renewal program. There is no other comprehensive solution available and a patchwork solution is not good enough.<sup>39</sup>

Urban renewal would bring together the Yankee business community and the newly-assimilated Irish political power structure, and it would lay the foundation for Collins' political future.<sup>40</sup> As early as January of 1960, Collins pledged to take immediate action in areas of redevelopment. He set to work getting approval for a new federal building in the fifty-acre West End project that would eventually become the Government

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37. Ibid., October 6, 1959.

38. Ralph Lowell Diaries, January 22, and December 17, 1963, and the Charlotte Loring Lowell Papers, 1961-1964 folder, in Massachusetts Historical Society.

39. John F. Collins, "Rebuilding an Old City," Journal of the Boston Society of Civil Engineers, XLVIII (January, 1961), pp. 1-24.

40. Langley C. Keyes, Jr., The Rehabilitation Planning Game: A Study in the Diversity of Neighborhood (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), p. 27. Daniel Pool argues that Collins focussed on urban renewal because he had already decided to run for higher office, and he needed to "select policies that would appeal to a suburban electorate." See Pool, "Politics in the New Boston," p. 59.



Center. In addition, he requested that the federal government enlarge the original Washington Park project in Roxbury. The energetic new mayor proclaimed that "New towers of steel and glass, offices and apartments are rising around us. And this is just the beginning."<sup>41</sup>

It took time, however, for Collins to make any immediate headway. A survey of business executives in the metropolitan area in 1960 found profound dissatisfaction with Boston politics, because it was stagnant and "corrupt to the point of inhibiting growth."<sup>42</sup> An impatient *Vault* prodded the mayor to take action. Lowell wrote in his diary: "The day started with a breakfast of the Coordinating group over which I presided. We felt the Mayor is dragging his feet . . . . [We] are going to try and bring him back on the rails when we tell him we are financing a study of the building code and the Building Department."<sup>43</sup> But Collins needed little pushing. It was during John Collins' tenure in office that Boston was to receive a massive face-lift that changed its image forever.

Collins announced a program for urban renewal, which he called "A 90 million Dollar Development Program for Boston." City officials selected ten renewal areas, covering twenty-five percent of the city's land area. (Eventually, programs went into effect for nine urban renewal areas, involving 3,200 acres). It was during the Collins administration that the federal government approved *all* the major downtown commercial projects, and the large-scale neighborhood projects that transformed the city. This included the Government Center, 60.5 acres in the heart of the central business district, approved in 1961 for government buildings, an office building, parking, and a shopping plaza; Washington Park, 502 acres, (approved in 1963) for new and rehabilitated low- and moderate-income housing, and for community and shopping uses; Waterfront, Faneuil Hall, 102 acres, (approved in 1964) for new and rehabilitated middle- and upper-income housing, public parks, an aquarium, and for commercial and offices uses; the South End, 606 acres, (approved in 1965) for new and rehabilitated low- and moderate-income housing, industry, community facilities, and institutional expansion;

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41. *Boston Globe*, January 12 and 22, and February 28, 1960.

42. Pool, "Politics in the New Boston," pp. 64-65.

43. Ralph Lowell Diaries, November 2, 1960.

Charlestown, 520 acres, (approved in 1965) for new and rehabilitated low- and moderate-income housing, community facilities, shopping, relocation of the MBTA elevated, and a new community college; the Fenway, 507 acres, (approved in 1967) for a new Christian Science Church Center, a hotel, and new and rehabilitated low- and moderate-income housing; and South Station, 82.2 acres, (approved in 1966) for a new transportation center, retail and office space, and parking. To pay for all of this urban renewal, approximately two billion dollars in public and private investment came to Boston during the Collins administration.<sup>44</sup>

Collins was the driving public force behind the idea of redevelopment. Skillfully using the media, this municipal entrepreneur launched a colorful campaign to bolster his program. "Pile drivers, rivet guns and cement mixers are the sounds echoing through Boston. Boston is a city with its sleeves rolled up, a city on the move."<sup>45</sup> Eminently successful in winning public and federal and state legislative support for urban renewal, Mayor Collins nonetheless recognized the need for an expert administrator to bring to realization his ambitious goals for rebuilding the city. Collins accelerated Boston's urban renewal process by bringing in New Haven's city planner, Edward J. Logue, to head the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA).

Originally set up as a department under the Boston Housing Authority, in 1957 the BRA became an autonomous agency. The mayor appointed four board members, and the governor appointed one. Its first project during the Hynes administration was the clearance of the New York streets area, and then it went on to control the West End demolition project.<sup>46</sup> Under Boston's strong mayor and weak council system, the executive branch has considerable powers, including the power to create the budget and to veto decisions of the council. For his plans to work, however, Collins wanted more control over both the BRA and the City Planning Commission. A merger of these

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44. Edward J. Logue, Seven Years of Progress: A Final Report by Edward J. Logue to the Boston City Council, August 4, 1967 (Boston, 1967), p. 7; John Stainton, Urban Renewal and Planning in Boston (Boston, 1972), pp. 10-11.

45. Boston Globe, March 9, 1962.

46. Rabinowitz, NonPlanning and Redevelopment in Boston, pp. 10-11; Stainton, Urban Renewal and Planning in Boston, p. 8.

two agencies, headed by an administrator appointed by the mayor, would centralize all authority and guarantee that the people who made the plans would be able to carry out the plans. "The [proposed] development administrator would serve in the dual capacity of head of the Authority staff and head of a proposed office of development responsible to the Mayor."<sup>47</sup>

Under a temporary proposal in the fall of 1960, Logue became development administrator, with authority over the BRA's executive secretary, Kane Simonian. This created a furor on the BRA board, which argued that Logue and Simonian should share the authority. A bitter stalemate ensued, so the mayor called out the big guns. In January of 1961, a group of Boston's top business and civic leaders, headed by Ralph Lowell, signed a petition supporting Collins' position. The corporate elite, representing eleven businesses and seven civic organizations, warned that Boston's fiscal and physical recovery hinged on Logue's appointment. Under severe pressure, the BRA board voted three to two to give Logue full power, and they promised not to press the issue any further. Breaking ranks, Simonian brought the matter to court. He sought a court order requiring Logue to "cease and desist from including himself in that office." Collins did not budge, advising Logue: "If I were the development director I would go ahead with the program as though there was no litigation." At that point, Collins' enemy, State Senate President John Powers entered the fray. He accused Collins of paying Logue too high a salary (\$30,000, while the mayor received only \$20,000). Again in March, the business community spoke out, warning that the internal bickering and criticism of Logue "could sabotage Boston renewal." By May of 1961, the Supreme Judicial Court dismissed Simonian's suit, declaring that Logue was the "best available man" to head the authority.<sup>48</sup>

Collins then finalized his "unity of approach" idea. He pushed through the state legislature a bill combining the BRA and a revamped Office of Development, with Logue as permanent head. The quick granting of this enabling legislation was due to a previous court decision. In their zeal to promote downtown development, the city and the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority

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47. Collins, "Rebuilding an Old City," pp. 18-19.

48. *Boston Globe*, September 22 and October 7, 1960, January 24, 26, February 4, 17, March 7, 10, and May 5, 1961; Nancy Arnone, "Redevelopment in Boston," Ph.D. dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1965, pp. 52-56.

had granted significant tax abatements for the privately-funded Prudential Center project. This project was to be a mix of public and private development in the South End area of Boston. The Supreme Judicial Court found this action to be unconstitutional, because it was difficult to determine the "public purpose of the plan." In response, the Prudential investors threatened to reconsider their plans and to withdraw from the city. The possibility of losing this large-scale private investment spurred the passage of a revised plan by Collins, one that included "reasonable taxation" and "proper delegation of authority" by "continuing public regulation." To satisfy the court on the matter of public regulation, state legislators granted the city new prerogatives, which were to be carried out by a powerful municipal agency. Chapter 121A gave the emboldened BRA the right to provide limited dividend corporations with major tax concessions, and the ability to grant variances from zoning and building codes. The court upheld the validity of the revised plan in *Dodge v. The Prudential Insurance Company of America*, on December 20, 1961. A legal commentator wrote: "The Prudential decision firmly establishes the constitutional validity of reasonable tax concessions to chapter 121A corporations."<sup>49</sup> Thus Logue received from Collins "the most massively centralized planning and renewal powers that any large city has ever voted to one man (other than New York's Robert Moses)."<sup>50</sup>

As Logue put it, the "BRA was a uniquely powerful instrument." The BRA under Logue went from a staff of seventeen and a budget of \$250,000 in the early 1960s, to an organization of 700 with a budget of twenty-five million dollars by the time Logue left in 1968. Logue wrote: "Our Boston Development Program proposed simultaneous large-scale planning, development, and renewal efforts for the entire downtown area and for most of the city's older neighborhoods. Rehabilitation was to be emphasized rather than reliance exclusively on the bulldozer. It was the largest urban renewal program seriously put forward anywhere up to that time." Collins worked with Logue on the funding aspects of urban renewal. We went to the "Feds," said

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49. *Boston Globe*, February 4, March 1, and December 21, 1961, and March 7, 1962; Pool, "Politics in the New Boston," ppo. 85-87; Lewis H. Weinstein, "Urban Renewal in Massachusetts," *Massachusetts Law Quarterly*, XLVII (March, 1962): 5-27.

50. "Boston," in *Architectural Forum* CXX (June, 1964), p. 82.

Logue, and the "mayor came home with the bacon."<sup>51</sup> The BRA further generated over half a billion dollars in private office building investments. Charles Coolidge of Ropes and Gray (called by the *Architectural Forum* a "hardworking Brahmin") was ecstatic over Logue's progress: "We're in some things here in Boston that have never been attempted before. We're not sure we can pull it off, but we'll try." Called the "Bold Boston Gladiator," Logue, working with a coalition of the Boston business elite, university experts, and federal officials, "manhattanized" the city.<sup>52</sup>

By the early 1970s, Boston had the fourth largest amount of central business district office space in the country, with the highest construction rates. Urban renewal affected 3,223 acres and over fifty percent of Boston's population. Federal grants amounted to nearly three hundred million dollars, ranking Boston behind only New York and Philadelphia in the size of its urban renewal programs in 1970. Its per capita funding rate, however, made the Hub the number one urban renewal city in the nation.<sup>53</sup> The passage of remedial state legislation, in the form of tax abatements and tax exemptions, furthered the building boom among private investors. The skyscrapers went up at a breakneck pace even after urban renewal funding slowed. Although people in the business community welcomed the turnaround that made Boston a profitable investment center, others did not.

Urban renewal in Boston, as elsewhere, had staggering negative effects upon the poor and the working classes. As noted, the wholesale clearance of so-called "blighted neighborhoods," which began under the Hynes administration, generated widespread publicity and opposition to urban renewal in general. In the West End, condemned land paid for by federal funds cost \$7.40 per square foot. Then it was revalued at \$1.40 per square foot, and a syndicate headed by a former political supporter of Hynes leased the land for redevelopment. Wiped out between

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51. Edward J. Logue, "Boston, 1960-1967 -- Seven Years of Plenty," Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, LXXXIV (1972): 82-96.

52. "Boston," in Architectural Forum CXX (June, 1964), p. 83; McQuade, "Urban Renewal in Boston," p. 277; "Bold Boston Gladiator -- Ed Logue," Life Magazine, December 24, 1965, pp. 126-134. See also Conzen and Lewis, Boston, pp. 67 and 120-123. William Muir Whitehill, Boston: A Topographical History (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. 200-219.

53. Stainton, Urban Renewal and Planning in Boston, pp. 2, 8, and 10; Mollenkopf, Contested City, pp. 164-166; Stage, Who Rules Boston?, pp. 15-20.

1958 and 1960 were thirty-eight blocks, forty-one acres, and homes for nine thousand people. Many people were angered by the impact of urban renewal upon the poor. Brahmin Joseph Lee strongly condemned the loss of his "beloved" West End: "The entire concept is based on the Sermon on the Mount in reverse. Blasted be the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of nothing. Blasted be they that mourn, for they shall be discomfited. Blasted be the meek, for they shall be kicked off the earth."<sup>54</sup>

Several studies demonstrated that most West End residents suffered either financially or psychologically because of relocation. As sociologist Herbert Gans proclaimed, the West End "was not a slum" but a viable, working-class community with decent and affordable housing. This vibrant "urban village" vanished so developers could put up profitable high-rise luxury apartments. Another critic of urban renewal, Martin Anderson, made the case that the West End clearance was economically unsound. It would not provide the city with a decent return on the investment, for at least twenty years.<sup>55</sup>

Both Collins and Logue were aware of the negative political impact of clearance, thus they stressed rehabilitation and community involvement. Collins said that "Rehabilitation is the key to the kind of urban renewal program Boston requires. Considerable clearance will still be needed but rehabilitation should be the major emphasis." Logue called his efforts "planning with people. It marks a shift away from the clearance project to the renewal rehabilitation project aimed at preserving an entire neighborhood."<sup>56</sup> After the destruction of the West End, and because of the magnitude of the renewal projects in Boston, the Collins regime constantly smarted under attacks by those who

54. Obituary of Joseph Lee, Boston Globe, November 8, 1991.

55. Herbert Gans, The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian Americans (New York, 1962 and 1982), pp. x and 308-317; Herbert Gans, "The Failure of Urban Renewal," Commentary, XXXIX (April, 1965): 29-37. See also Marc Fried, The World of the Urban Working Class: Boston's West End (Cambridge, Mass., 1973); Chester Hartman, "The Housing of Relocated Families," and Marc Fried, "Grieving for a Lost Home: Psychological Costs of Relocation," in Wilson, Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy, pp. 293-335 and 359-379; Edward J. Ryan, "Personal Identity in an Urban Slum," in Leonard J. Duhl, ed., The Urban Condition: People and Policy in the Metropolis (New York, 1963), pp. 135-149; Martin Anderson, The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), pp. 170-172.

56. Collins, "Rebuilding an Old City," p. 4; Pool, "Politics in the New Boston," p. 95.

raised the issue of loss of housing without replacement. City Councilor Gabriel Piemonte, a political rival of Collins, led an attack challenging the BRA for its lack of concern regarding displaced residents: "We are tearing down homes without replacing housing for this same economic group. We have moved thousands of families with no thought, no interest in providing suitable housing replacements. Progress doesn't give us the right to trample over human beings."<sup>57</sup>

Logue's energy and arrogant style created antagonism in some neighborhoods, and brought him into constant conflict with the Boston City Council and even with his own BRA board. Logue refused to apologize after calling one councilor a "two-bit politician." City Councilor William J. Foley, Jr., lashed out at Logue's high-handedness. "He's crazy. He's a megalomaniac," "a gray-flannel Irishman," and a "Washington influence peddler," Foley declared. A Boston municipal court judge accused Logue of "tipping the city upside down." Logue responded to his critics by urging them to "come into urban renewal with both feet while you still have time."<sup>58</sup>

Urban renewal tore some neighborhoods apart, as in Charlestown. A well-organized "tribal" group of "townies" opposed urban renewal and worked against the BRA's surrogate neighborhood organization, the Charlestown Federation. Federal guidelines required the BRA to get substantial community approval at a public meeting before work could begin. At a January 7, 1963, public hearing held to rubber stamp the BRA plans, eighty-five percent of those who were present voted against the project. Although not recognized as the official neighborhood organization, the "townies" were vituperative in their opposition. One resident testified: "I don't represent any organization here today. I just represent my family clan, which is ten sisters and brothers and their husbands and wives, 103 grandchildren and sixty great-grandchildren. This adds up to 185 that want to be recorded as against urban renewal." After some delay, at a March 14, 1965, meeting, there was pandemonium. During the uproar,

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57. *Boston Globe*, January 30, 1962.

58. *Ibid.*, April 15 and 16, 1962, September 23 and October 4, 1963; McQuade, "Urban Renewal in Boston," p. 269; and Arnone, "Redevelopment in Boston," pp. 45 and 49.

an alleged vote count in favor of renewal won the day for the BRA<sup>59</sup>

Logue dismissed as insignificant this clearly divided neighborhood response. "The well-publicized, acrimonious hearings reflected strong and even bitter dissent by a highly-vocal minority and have led many people outside Charlestown to have a false idea of community feeling toward the urban renewal program. Anyone who knows Charlestown well knows that a majority of the people support the renewal program as the best answer for a community urgently needing help."<sup>60</sup> In an interview, Logue was forthright about his methods: "In this business you've got to take some group by the throat and say, 'Look, do this or I'll break your neck.' And they've got to believe you'll do it."<sup>61</sup>

At the same time, Logue worked assiduously to maintain good relations with the business community. The revitalization of the central business district became the central focus of Logue's redevelopment program. "We decided to make the creation of Government Center our highest priority," he later wrote, "without sacrificing the other goals of the Boston Development Program. This was not only because of the urgency of space needs but because of the jobs in downtown Boston it would create and because of the catalytic effect [sic] it could have not only on the Boston Development Program as proposed but on the whole attitude of Boston about itself." An aide reported that Logue went to great lengths to keep in contact with prominent developers and financiers. He played squash with them, and he joined several of Boston's prestigious men's clubs. The Development Administrator proudly cited the "meaningful community participation" he had with business groups which privately funded planning studies in the Back Bay and the central business district.<sup>62</sup> In a 1964 report, the Boston Chamber of Commerce happily speculated that urban

59. Keyes, The Rehabilitation Planning Game, pp. 93-94. A 1965 NBC documentary, "The Challenge of Urban Renewal," provides ample visual evidence of the chaos at the meeting, and the impossibility of gauging the community response.

60. Logue, Seven Years of Progress, p. 30.

61. "Boston's Powerful Model for Builders," Business Week (November 26, 1966), pp. 152-154.

62. Logue, "Boston, 1960-1967 -- Seven Years of Plenty," p. 92; Pool, "Politics in the New Boston," p. 93; Logue, Seven Years of Progress, pp. 8-9.



renewal would bring in over 900 million dollars in private, public, and institutional investment for the city. Frank S. Christian, senior vice president of New England Merchants National Bank, said in 1966: "Logue came here with the support of businessmen, and he still has it."<sup>63</sup>

A public alliance with the business elite and growing disaffection in the neighborhoods resulted in serious political repercussions for the Collins regime. Ralph Lowell wrote in his diary: "Apparently John Collins who is doing such an excellent job as mayor, seems to be losing much of his backers . . . and has lost the common touch. He is aware of this and will wage a vigorous campaign for his re-election this fall, meanwhile we will play down our backing of him, and especially will not visit him in City Hall except if some crisis should arrive."<sup>64</sup> Seeking reelection in 1963, it was apparent that the mayor's close working relationship with Logue and Yankee business leaders had alienated residents of the neighborhoods and might cost him dearly.

Collins's political rival, Senate President John E. Powers, was thinking of running for mayor again. Fear of a Collins defeat worried Ralph Lowell and other Vault members. Lowell wrote in his diary: "We had a meeting of the Co-coordinating group. It was rather a gloomy meeting. Senator Powers seems to have 'dug in' the hatchet and is after Mayor Collins' scalp in the coming elections. The slogan against Collins seems to be that Ed Logue is the greatest destroyer in the annals of the City, and [that] many people have been displaced with no provision for them . . . . It would be a tragedy if Collins were defeated for Mayor!"<sup>65</sup> Lowell and his friends sighed with relief when Collins won easily over the lackluster Gabriel Piemonte. "We had a Co-coordinating group meeting and will ask the Mayor to the next one and see where we go from there. It may be our usefulness is now over though the City still has many problems."<sup>66</sup>

Collins' close ties with the Vault caused him irreparable political damage among the Hub's voters. For example, residents

63. Arnone, "Redevelopment in Boston," pp. 58-59; "Boston's Powerful Model for Builders," p. 154.

64. Ralph Lowell Diaries, March 18, 1963.

65. *Ibid.*, June 18, 1963.

66. *Ibid.*, November 26, 1963.

of North Harvard Street, a proposed renewal site, rented a large billboard addressed to the Mayor, which declared: "To Hell with Urban Renewal." Collins smarted under the growing barrage of criticism: "The mayor gets blamed for everything. God knows you have to have courageous mayors in this day and age."<sup>67</sup> In 1966, Collins sought the Democratic party nomination for the United States Senate, but he lost in the primary to former governor Endicott Peabody. To make matters worse, Peabody embarrassed Collins by defeating him in Boston. A *Boston Globe* survey of those who were opposed to Collins showed immense dissatisfaction with urban renewal, dislike of Collins' too-close relationship with the business community, and complaints of the decline of public services in the neighborhoods.<sup>68</sup>

As the mayoral election of 1967 approached, the anger of the neighborhoods became evident by the appearance of a populist champion, Louise Day Hicks. The chairperson of the Boston School Committee and staunch opponent of racial desegregation, Hicks launched a direct attack against Collins: "My chapeau is in the ring," she declared. "I urge those citizens who want a cleaner, safer, happier and prouder city -- a city that puts service to Bostonians ahead of service to contractors, nonpaying institutions and special interests -- to join me in this campaign."<sup>69</sup> By the fall of 1966, the plight of the decaying neighborhoods had become the subject for articles in the *Boston Globe* that underscored Collins' myopic stance towards urban revitalization. The titles of those articles were "Southie -- Decay Is Setting In," "Depopulation of Dorchester," "Mess in Eastie," "Charlestown Showing Age," and "Blighted Areas Scar Mark of New Boston."<sup>70</sup> Hicks summed up the feeling of the residents of the neglected neighborhoods: "What the people wanted was to be heard by City Hall, but they found that the mayor belonged to big business and special interests."<sup>71</sup>

Collins reluctantly decided not to seek reelection as mayor, and he announced his retirement on June 7, 1967. The

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67. *Boston Globe*, August 17, 1966; "Boston's Powerful Model for Builders," p. 152.

68. *Boston Globe*, September 14 and 15, and October 6, 1966.

69. *Ibid.*, May 2, 1967.

70. *Ibid.*, November 28 to December 1, 1966.

71. *Ibid.*, September 15, 1967.

political world of John Collins collapsed when it became clear that his focus on urban renewal had benefited only a few of the residents of the city. Further evidence of the anti-urban renewal climate surfaced when Edward Logue made a bid for the mayoralty in 1967. For many Bostonians, Logue was a tainted candidate. His close relationship with Collins, his ties with the business community, and his reputation as a neighborhood "buster," made Logue a pariah in the city's more populous wards. Even with strong backing from Collins, the Vault, and the *Boston Globe*, Logue ran fourth in the preliminary election.<sup>72</sup>

In response to urban renewal horrors in Boston, neighborhood activists established new political alliances that succeeded in halting many BRA projects.<sup>73</sup>

The 1967 mayoral victory of Kevin White signalled a time of compromise for all groups. White's victory, over the more insular South Boston favorite, Louise Day Hicks, came because of his stance as a conciliator between the troubled neighborhoods and the downtown business interests. In campaigning for White, Senator Edward M. (Ted) Kennedy raised the divisive issue of Hicks' racism, and of her failure to reach out to the business interests of the city. "Boston needs a mayor who can command respect," Kennedy declared, "from its sister cities in this state, from the leaders of commerce and industry who made the decisions on whether to bring jobs here or move out."<sup>74</sup>

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72. *Ibid.*, June 7 and 21, 1967, and September 27, 1967; See also Alec Barbrook, God Save the Commonwealth: An Electoral History of Massachusetts (Amherst, 1973), pp. 148-150; J. Anthony Lukas, Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families (New York, 1985), pp. 36 and 596.

73. Neighborhood response to urban renewal varied. For studies of Washington Park (in middle Dorchester), the South End, and Charlestown, see Keyes, The Rehabilitation Planning Game, and James Q. Wilson, "Planning and Politics: Citizen Participation in Urban Renewal," Journal of American Institute of Planners, XXIX (November, 1963), pp. 242-249. For an examination of urban renewal attempts at rent-supplement rehabilitation and the neighborhood turmoil generated in Roxbury, see Langley C. Keyes, Jr., The Boston Rehabilitation Program: An Independent Analysis (Cambridge, Mass., 1970). For other examples of neighborhood activism, see Dorothy Nelkin, Jetport: The Boston Airport Controversy (New Brunswick N.J., 1974); Gordon Fellman, The Deceived Majority: Politics and Protest in Middle America (New Brunswick, N.J., 1973); and Mel King, Chain of Change: Struggles for Black Community Development (Boston, 1981).

74. Boston Globe, September 24, 1967.

White worked to placate activist neighborhood groups by halting housing demolition and increasing the number of subsidized housing units. Mayor White gave local communities a voice and a means to air grievances, through his "little city halls" initiative. He worked to deflect racial tensions with his "summerthing" neighborhood programs. Between 1968 and 1975, the White administration spent over \$500 million on neighborhood capital improvements, a sum vastly greater than that spent by the Collins administration. At the same time, the new mayor championed the pro-growth desires of the business community. He worked to stimulate downtown development, while being careful that no existing housing units would be lost to commercial construction.<sup>75</sup>

The collaboration of contending groups managed by Kevin White fell apart with the economic recession of the early 1970s. Mayor White tried in vain to cope with problems beyond his control, by attempting in 1976 to increase his power through charter revision. "To understand my own desire to centralize power in the mayor's office," he declared, "you must understand how much the city needs to be held together. This city has been saved by a strong executive. When I was re-elected in 1975, I tried to galvanize the city against the forces that were hitting it from outside -- [from] the suburbs and the federal government . . . but what I didn't realize was how little psychological pressure there was for the city to hold together as a constituency against the forces that were killing it."<sup>76</sup>

By the mid-1980s, Bostonians paid the highest rents in the nation. In addition, people who lived outside the city held sixty percent of all the jobs in Boston. Manufacturing jobs in the city dwindled from 52,175 in 1960 to 17,320 in 1980. In 1979, the median family income in Boston was \$16,253, while it was \$22,813 for its suburbs; the poverty rate was 20 percent for

75. Martha W. Weinberg, "Boston's Kevin White: A Mayor Who Survives," Political Science Quarterly, LXLVI (Spring, 1981): 87-106; Mollenkopf, Contested City, pp. 191, 198-199, 207, and 210-212. See also Eric Nordlinger, Decentralizing the City: A Study of Boston's Little City Halls (Cambridge, Mass., 1972); Morton Rubin, Organized Citizen Participation in Boston (Boston, 1971).

76. Philip Heymann and Martha W. Weinberg, "The Paradox of Power: Mayoral Leadership on Charter Reform in Boston," in Walter Dean Burnham and Martha W. Weinberg, eds., American Politics and Public Policy (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), pp. 280-303.

Boston and 9.7 percent for the suburbs.<sup>77</sup> A critic of urban renewal included Boston when he wrote: "The ten cities that led the nation in downtown office development from 1950 through 1984 had higher unemployment in 1982 than in 1970 . . . . If downtown revitalization was a renaissance, it was still no protector of city people."<sup>78</sup> Bostonians were not alone in coping with the new economic order predicated upon suburban dominance. Cities such as Lynn, Lawrence, Lowell, Brockton, and New Bedford shared the predicaments of declining populations, the departure of industry, the flight of the middle class to the suburbs, the lowering of property values and rising property taxes, unemployment rates higher than average, and older ethnic groups in competition with newer arrivals. Urban renewal had not provided the solution to the urban crisis.<sup>79</sup>

An early evaluator of Boston's urban renewal argued that "the program has made a positive difference, but for a variety of reasons never reached its full potential."<sup>80</sup> Inflation, the drying up of federal funds, the rapid influx of minorities, and the fact that urban renewal diminished the stock of low rental housing for them, all added to the urban dilemma. During the 1960s, when Collins and Logue were transforming the Boston skyline, the city actually lost more dwelling units than it built. When Edward Logue was finished with the city, 9,718 low-rent housing units had disappeared from the Boston housing market. Of 3,504 new units constructed, only 982 were listed as low rentals.<sup>81</sup>

A 1972 study of urban renewal, commissioned by the Boston Redevelopment Authority and the Citizens Housing and Planning Association, reported a failure to achieve many program objectives. Several neighborhoods underwent rehabilitation, but few residents benefited. The construction of new housing and the rehabilitation of existing housing proved to be very expensive. New and rehabilitated units became attractive to upper- and

77. Boston Globe, January 5 and May 5, 1984; Mollenkopf, Contested City, p. 205; and Edel, Shaky Palaces, pp. 67-80.

78. Freiden and Sagalyn, Downtown Inc., p. 288.

79. Harvey Boulay, The Twilight Cities: Political Conflict, Development, and Decay in Five Communities (Port Washington, N.Y., 1983).

80. Stainton, Urban Renewal and Planning in Boston, p. 24.

81. Mollenkopf, Contested City, pp. 166-168; Boston Globe, January 1, 1984.

middle-income families, thus limiting the availability of reasonably-priced housing. Housing subsidies were grossly inadequate and overburdened with bureaucratic red tape. A major omission was the building of needed public facilities, such as schools. Private investors, attracted by tax shelters and fiscal incentives, showed little interest in the residents, and failed to properly maintain their properties. Finally, urban renewal intensified the concentration of Blacks in specific areas, thus increasing racial segregation and poverty. Areas in Dorchester, with lengthy periods of reconstruction and large-scale relocation, inevitably accelerated racial divisions. Overall, it was a small number of middle-income families who benefited from urban renewal; the large numbers of poor, who were forced to relocate in spite of a tight housing market, found that their situations grew worse.<sup>82</sup>

Because of high or fixed construction costs, rehabilitation usually resulted in higher rents. As early as 1962, the *Boston Globe* noted that under renewal "High Rents Replace Low." The paper reported that under redevelopment 3,203 families with average monthly incomes of \$254, were "ousted" from their homes to make way for 2,310 apartments that rented for an average of \$200 per month.<sup>83</sup> Since its inception, except for 1967, renewal eliminated more housing for low and moderate income families than it built. Ellis Ash, deputy director under Logue and head of the Boston Housing Authority, said: "And if we can't rehabilitate existing homes and still economically house low-income families, then we are really stymied."<sup>84</sup> Rehabilitation of low-cost housing failed because it required enormous federal subsidies that simply were not forthcoming.

By 1967, Logue had begun worrying about the drying up of federal funding. "It appears that in the current federal budget all domestic social welfare programs are being curtailed because of the war in Vietnam. I believe this is a dangerously short-sighted policy." Nonetheless, in his final report to the Boston City Council, summing up his past seven years, Logue remained quite optimistic. He speculated about the future Hub of 1975: "Boston's

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82. Stainton, Urban Renewal and Planning in Boston, pp. 3-5 and 14-20.

83. Boston Globe, February 13, 1962.

84. "Boston," in Architectural Forum CXX (June, 1964), p. 104; Keyes, The Boston Rehabilitation Program, pp. 10-12.

residential neighborhoods are renewed. Their schools and other public services have reached the quality level of the better suburbs and the exodus of families has halted . . . . The ghetto as a repressive force has disappeared. Massive job-training and development programs have given the inhabitants of the ghetto the skills to compete on equal terms. The demand for talented help is so great that racial discrimination has utterly disappeared."<sup>85</sup> This municipal entrepreneur convinced himself that progress was inevitable so long as the federal spigot flowed, and experts like himself were in charge. The preponderant decline of our cities today, however, bears little resemblance to the rose-colored version conjured up by Boston's development administrator.

It is true enough that Logue and his boss, Mayor John Collins, earnestly worked to recast the neighborhoods as well as the central business district. It was not entirely their fault that by and large they failed. Perhaps it was inevitable that they focused too much attention on the commercial resuscitation of the central business district and its adjacent areas, or "Boston proper" as Mayor Collins called it. The mayor and his development administrator envisioned the revitalization of Boston's business districts as the key to a sort of trickle-down prosperity for the neighborhoods. Logue maintained that psychologically the "dramatic and glamorous proof of new confidence" in the city would inspire substantial neighborhood improvement. Collins wrote of the significance of "Boston proper":

This area is the most important part of Boston and the primary reason for the existence of the other neighborhoods of the City in their present form. Here are located one of the major financial centers of the United States, the largest retail shopping center in New England, and the regional centers for a whole host of government, professional and commercial activities.

Here also are some of the worst slum and blighted areas of Boston. So large, so menacing, in fact, that they are pushing most new private development steadily out Boylston Street if not out of the City altogether . . . .

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85. Logue, Seven Years of Progress, pp. 12 and 71.

Here is Boston's greatest asset, its surest source of continued strength and greatness, if we can but renew the area before too many functions abandon it for the open country or for more efficient downtowns elsewhere.<sup>86</sup>

The public uproar over projects like the West End and Charlestown made commercial projects, such as the Government Center and the central business district, inherently easier to organize. Planning a rehabilitation and clearance project in a densely-populated low-income neighborhood could unleash furious local opposition. Commercial revitalization meant less family relocation, negligible neighborhood opposition, eager interest of developers, and the enthusiastic support of the business elite. The results were often more tangible and obvious -- commercial or governmental buildings that brought in both jobs and revenues, and at the same time were "monumental" and attractive.

The community's most powerful elites, including members of the Vault, aided and abetted Collins and Logue in their vision of rebuilding Boston's downtown. These business patricians worked for their own interests under the long-governing American principle that what was good for them would ultimately benefit others. There was not much difference between Ralph Lowell and his Vault counterparts, and their predecessors, the Boston Associates of the early nineteenth century. Francis Cabot Lowell and his Brahmin friends established textile mills in Waltham and Lowell in order to secure their investments. In the process they organized the first corporations, recruited a new labor supply, built factory towns, and virtually began the industrialization of the nation. It was therefore not unusual for the Boston business elite of the 1960s to participate actively in urban renewal.

Urban renewal in Boston could generate a startling transformation of the downtown, and could upgrade desirable residential areas, but it could not prevent the decline of the neighborhoods. Because of the after-shocks of urban renewal, there occurred an emotional outburst from the siege-minded neighborhoods that resulted in the racial conflicts of the mid-1970s. Like the war on poverty, urban renewal left behind a mixed legacy, largely benefiting the haves and ultimately creating

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86. *Ibid.*, p. 8; Collins, "Rebuilding an Old City," p. 5.



more problems for the have-nots. The story of urban renewal in Boston, with its municipal entrepreneurs and the urban elite in charge, might serve as a parable for what government can and cannot accomplish under our federal system of government.