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Review of *When Public Housing Was Paradise: Building Community in Chicago*. J. S. Fuerst. Reviewed by John Q. Hodges.

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Chapter Three, "Provider Sovereignty and Civil Rights," is especially worthy of attention: once again, as in her book *The Color of Welfare*, Quadagno may be at her best when tracking the effects of race, here powerfully demonstrating how Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, when leveraged with the economic incentives and enforcement power of Medicare, helped finally to desegregate hospitals in the south. And finally, while there is little attention here to Clinton's failure to enact universal health care, in the context of Quadagno's rich history, it is not a unique event but just another step in a long line of failed twentieth century attempts at reform.

Stephen Pimpare
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J. S. Fuerst, *When Public Housing Was Paradise Building Community in Chicago*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005. \$20.00 papercover.

In the aftermath of last year's hurricane disasters, the nation's attention is once again focused on many of its poor citizens living in substandard housing. Debates are raging on both sides of the political aisle as to the best solution for rebuilding and re-housing those in the most extreme poverty. Of course, argument about housing bring forth a contentious dialogue regarding race, poverty, class, "culture of poverty" and other current and historical views of poverty and social welfare programs in American society. Likewise, in recent years there has been a movement away from the large congregate high-rise model of public housing (sometimes referred to as "projects") to more scattered-site or dispersed models of public housing. However, there is much debate as to whether dispersed housing provides enough units for former congregate housing tenants. It is clear that the notion of public housing in its congregate form is considered outdated, dangerous, and unseemly. Many of these notorious high-rises (such as Chicago's Cabrini Green) have been razed and replaced with smaller projects or scattered site public housing.

Given this philosophical movement in public housing policy, as well as the current debate over poverty in the

devastated regions of the Gulf Coast, the timing is perfect for J.S. Fuerst's book *When Public Housing was Paradise: Building Community in Chicago*. Fuerst is quick to remind the reader that conditions in the large high-rise projects were not always grim. In fact, from the 1940's to the 1960's, these were well run, skillfully managed dwellings for impoverished but upwardly mobile tenants in Chicago. His book stresses that it is not the building structure that determines the success or failure of public housing, but rather, the quality of management and the careful screening of tenants.

Fuerst tells the story of successful public housing in Chicago via the first-person voices of those involved in these glory years of housing policy. He excerpts interviews from hundreds of former tenants who went on to live successful and accomplished lives, as well as key staff and leaders of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) from that period. Other chapters use interviews to reflect on themes such as race, segregation, integration, education, peer support, and sense of community among residents of Chicago public housing.

It is clear that Fuerst attributes much of the success of public housing in its first 20 years to Elizabeth Wood, the first executive director of the CHA. He describes her as passionate, crusading, caring, and yet strict. She understood what Fuerst feels most housing authorities today do not: That public housing is not housing of last resort. Residents must be carefully screened and held to high standards to ensure continued access to quality housing for the working poor.

It is against this historical background that Fuerst points public housing policy forward to the future. He argues convincingly that we must again return to these strategies, rather than treating public housing as a *right*. For example, inability to evict problematic tenants is a major cause for the downfall of many housing projects, and that this endangers the rest of the housing community. Like Elizabeth Wood, Fuerst is a strong advocate for those who can make the most of the public housing opportunity to better their lives; he also remains compassionate and insists that social services be made available for CHA tenants as well as for those tenants evicted.

The voices of CHA staff and current and former residents of Chicago public housing eloquently echo Fuerst's arguments.

They paint a picture of housing units where residents were held to firm rules, but also took great pride in their units and their complexes, planting flower gardens, tending one another's children, and feeling a true sense of a community bound together by the dream of a better life in America. For most of these tenants, their life in public housing was vastly superior to their dwellings prior to being approved by the CHA.

This is a compelling look at the lives of working-class Chicago residents, many of whom went on to great success, which they attribute in large part to the environment of public housing in the 1940s-60s. The book is quite moving by virtue of its use of interviews with residents. For a reader raised with the media image of big-city congregate public housing as a hotbed of drugs, gangs, and violence, these portrayals of an idyllic era are quite enlightening.

Fuerst offers an excellent and highly analytical look at the reasons for the failures and successes of Chicago public housing over the last half century; he points out current projects in other cities that still abide by careful tenant screening, skilled management, and community development activities that characterized the CHA in the past. This book strongly makes the point that poverty is an economic condition, not a statement of character or ability. We must remember this when our current public housing policy seems to be more focused on integrating the poor into other socioeconomic classes (another way of saying that we must separate them from one another due to a dysfunctional "culture") and abandoning any notion of staff and resident responsibility and accountability for their homes and their lives.

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Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, and Melissa Osborne, (Eds.),
Unequal Chances: Family Background and Economic Success. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
\$35.00 hardcover.

Bowles, Gintis and Osborne have recruited a strong array of economic scholars to compile an impressive book focused