

Sorry, Rachel. I was right about last week getting away from me. I will throw out a few thoughts and you can use them any way you like — as quotes, as paraphrases, or just for information.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Pruitt-Igoe story is how it is actively being forgotten. I often teach college courses with students predominately from St. Louis, but when I ask how many people have ever heard of Pruitt-Igoe only a hand or two will go up if any. So if there are lessons to be learned from Pruitt-Igoe, they need to be relearned.

I believe there are two important reasons that Pruitt-Igoe has faded from public memory. One is the status of St. Louis. Once the fourth biggest city in the nation, St. Louis is now the poster child for suburban abandonment. As St. Louis slipped in size and status, both academics and the general public paid it less attention. Second was how quickly Pruitt-Igoe was torn down. The demolition begins in 1972. The physical erasure was matched by an intellectual one. Public attention turned more toward high-rise public housing that still existed in cities such as Chicago and New York.

I don't want to overstate this forgetting of the Pruitt-Igoe story. It is, of course, still studied by urban scholars and is studied worldwide. In fact, international scholars often seem more interested in this story than American ones. Despite examples of academic interest, however, I would argue that the way the complex is forgotten is just as important as how it is remembered.

One way that Pruitt-Igoe is remembered is as a symbol. For some, it is a symbol of the death of modernism. For others, it is a symbol of the failure of high-rise public housing. For others, it is a symbol of an unequal society weighted against the poor and segregated. It is important to remember that symbols are simply representations and can't tell the whole story. The history of Pruitt-Igoe is complex but has too often been told as a simple story. Sometimes that simple story tried to place all the blame for its failure on design. Other times that simple story portrayed Pruitt-Igoe as a hell on earth devoid of joy or hope. These simple stories are misleading. I recently served as an advisor on a documentary called *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth*. In this documentary, the filmmakers included several interviews with residents. Those residents told a story of Pruitt-Igoe that was much more complex than many of the accounts told in academic histories. They described a place that was filled with caring neighbors and loving families even as they also described the tragedies they lived through. They described families who were told they could only live in the complex if there wasn't a man in the family, and they described fathers who cared so much about their families that they were willing to live somewhere else so that most of the family could live in this new housing complex. They also told stories of fathers who would sneak into the complex at night so they could be reunited with their families. They told stories about crimes that happened outside of Pruitt-Igoe being placed there by police and journalists. As you can see, these stories — stories that have often been missed by academics and journalists — offer a different view of the housing complex.

It is also important to put Pruitt-Igoe in the context of its time. It is built during America's urban crisis, a time when cities are radically changing thanks to housing policy and the newly built interstate highway system. It was often times much cheaper and more convenient for white residents to leave the city and build new homes in the suburbs. This is why arguments about Pruitt-Igoe's design issues are so misleading. Pruitt-Igoe was a piece of a much larger story about a changing urban America. Installing a new elevator system would not have changed the bigger societal shifts that were taking place.

OK, Rachel. I hope that helps in some way. Again, you can use these quotes in any way that you find useful.

Good luck on the project,
Jody