

FROM PLACE of HOPE to OUTCAST SPACE:
Territorial Regulation and Tenant Resistance
in Regent Park Housing Project,
1949-2001

by
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Abstract

From Place of Hope to Outcast Space examines the transformation of Toronto's Regent Park (RP), Canada's oldest and largest public housing project, from the ideal working-class community of the 1940s to the eye-catching space of crime and cultural depravity of the 1990s. RP was socially constructed as an *outcast* space of socio-economic marginalization through a powerful combination of socio-economic segregation, discriminatory state housing policies, and damaging external stigmatization of residents.

Engaging with a broad literature in history, geography and sociology on poverty, the welfare state, and citizenship, the thesis aims to make three chief contributions to the historiography of post-war Canada: 1) It joins a growing body of work that complicates accepted notions of post-war prosperity and the benefits of the welfare state for low-income earners in advanced capitalist countries, showing that public housing residents were subject to intense moral and socio-economic regulation and never enjoyed full citizenship rights in the liberal democratic state; 2) It extends the notion of the moral regulation of the poor employed in welfare state studies by developing a concept of *territorial regulation* which encompasses not only moral, but a broad range of socio-economic facets, including the gendered and racial aspects of state policy, all of which were constituted in and through space; 3) Perhaps most importantly, this study diverges from most histories of housing by exploring tenants' own use of space, their internal representations of their homes and neighbourhood and how they coped with, accommodated, resisted and escaped "project living." It draws extensively on oral and

written testimony and rare resident case files to demonstrate that RP residents were not ill-fated spectators of their own futures or empty recipients of the ideological messages conveyed by outside critics. In the 1960s and 1970s especially, a strong and representative tenants' political association battled to improve the image of the project, advanced and won some concrete economic and political demands and organized a successful network of social service and recreation facilities. Contrary to popular myth and academic neglect, therefore, tenants were always active players in forging a meaningful living space.

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