“We did it for the kids,” Housing Policies, Race, and Class: An Ethnographic Case Study of a Resident Council in a Public Housing Neighborhood

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ABSTRACT

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) emphasizes the word “community” for building economic development, citizen participations, and revitalization of facilities and services in urban and rural areas. Resident Councils are one way to develop and build community among residents of public housing. This is a study of a resident council’s role of community building. Despite HUD stressing community building in public housing and investing money and policies around it, there are some resident councils that are not fulfilling the expectations of HUD. The purpose of this research is to describe and explain the disjunctions between HUD’s expectations for the resident council as an active agent for community building and the actual practices of the resident council. This research shows seven disjunctions stand in the way of the desired relationship between the resident council and HUD officials: (1) emphasis on children, (2) leadership of the council, (3) perception that the resident council members are “snitches,” (4) responsibilities of the resident council and HUD officials, (5) manager/managerial styles, (6) meeting dynamic, and (7) HUD structure and priorities. Focusing on the Rivertown Resident Council and building on a two year ethnographic case study of the council, I use a conceptual framework that combines critical race theory with a Scholar Activist Methodology to understand how housing policies, race, class, and the lived experiences of the resident council are apart of the disjunctions between the Rivertown Resident Council and HUD officials and what task can be taken to eliminate those disjunctions.
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DEDICATION

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