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ABSTRACT

In both its historical Progressive Era roots and its contemporary manifestations, U.S. urban progressivism has evinced a contradictory tendency toward promoting the interests of capital and property while ostensibly protecting labor and tenants, thus producing policies that undermine its central claims. This article interrogates past and present appeals to urban progressive politics, particularly around housing and planning, and offers an in-depth case study of one of the most highly touted examples of the new urban progressivism: New York City's recently adopted Mandatory Inclusionary Housing program. This case serves to identify the ways in which progressive rhetoric can disguise neoliberal policies. The article concludes with a discussion of legally viable housing policy alternatives that would challenge inequalities without producing gentrification. Given neoprogressivism's ideological slipperiness, it is crucial for analysts, policymakers, and social movement actors to look beyond rhetorical claims to "progressive" politics and ask the questions: progress for whom, toward what?

Amidst rising levels of inequality and inequity, it is now common to characterize the United States as having entered a "new gilded age" (Bartels, 2009; Grusky & Kricheli-Katz, 2012; Milkman, 2013). Reflecting historical parallels to the late 19th century, however, many analysts also see an emerging "new progressive era," led primarily at the local level by liberal mayors and their governing coalitions (Dreier, 2008; Green, 2016; Greenberg, 2015). In New York City, Mayor Bill de Blasio was elected in a landslide victory as a self-identified progressive who highlighted the city's radical inequalities and pledged to end the "tale of two cities" that had characterized urban life and policy under his predecessor, the three-term billionaire technocrat Michael Bloomberg (Susser, 2014). De Blasio recently told *The Nation*, "I do believe this is the beginning of a new progressive era" (Murphy, 2017).

One of Mayor de Blasio's signature achievements is a sweeping new housing policy, Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH), which mandates the construction of affordable housing in areas where the city allows new and larger luxury development. De Blasio and his allies frequently refer to it as the country's most progressive housing program (de Blasio, 2016; Durkin, 2016b; Fermino, 2014), but activists have pilloried it as a gentrification plan in disguise (Real Affordability for All, 2016). As one of the most celebrated and contested progressive housing laws in the nation, MIH offers the opportunity to reinvestigate the contradictions of progressive urban politics, which have—in both their historical Progressive Era roots as well as their more recent manifestations—evinced contradictory tendencies that often promote the interests of capital and property while ostensibly protecting labor and tenants.

This raises serious questions about the new urban progressive agenda. During both the Progressive Era and today, what kinds of programs have New York City policymakers affixed the

label *progressive*, and what are the continuities between them? What are MIH's material implications for landlords, developers, and investors as well as for current and future tenants? For whom do such programs represent progress and toward what end? In order to answer these questions, this article offers a discussion of progressivism in both its historical and contemporary formulations and presents an in-depth case study of New York City's MIH initiative. Following this case study, I propose several legally viable policy alternatives that would create and preserve affordable housing in New York City without further gentrifying the city.

Inclusionary housing policies are increasingly popular around the world (Rose et al., 2013), but their ability to produce the promised results of affordable housing and integration remains contested (Bridge, Butler, & Lees, 2012). This study contributes to the scholarly and political debates around inclusionary zoning, neoliberal urban housing policy, and gentrification under self-described progressive leadership and encourages analysts to question for whom and toward what a given policy represents progress.

The progressive past

In order to analyze contemporary urban progressivism, we must first recall the Progressive movement's historical development, its legacy in New York City, and the contradictions that defined it. Progressivism was an elite-driven reform movement that lasted from end of the 19th century to the start of World War I (Hofstadter, 1963). Though it also held sway in many rural areas (Sherman & Theobald, 2001), the movement was based primarily in fast-growing urban centers like New York and Chicago. At a time of rapid urbanization (Abu-Lughod, 1999), mass migration (both international and intranational; Fox, 2012), and imperial expansion (Finegold, 1995), the Progressive movement aimed to reorder urban space toward both the changing needs of capital and the social reproduction of labor (Marston, 2004).

Near the end of the era, President Wilson (1913) framed Progressive politics as a third way that could triangulate between rising socialist and conservative movements. Summarizing decades of Progressive political thought, he contextualized progress as a distinctly modern concept, because it looked toward the future rather than the past for solutions to social problems, and it privileged Darwinian strategies of adaptation over Newtonian laws of nature. Even then, however, the substance of progress was murky. Wilson admitted that "all progress depends on how fast you are going, and where you are going, and I fear there has been too much of this thing of knowing neither how fast we were going or where we were going" (Wilson, 1913, p. 40).

The most famous Progressive projects included reorganizing city government and institutionalizing civil service systems (Anechiarico & Jacobs, 1994), creating settlement houses and health care institutions for working-class and poor migrants (Sze, 2006), and establishing social science institutes to study urban poverty (O'Connor, 2001). Historians have often characterized these endeavors as enlightened and benevolent policy, in which elites felt a bond with commoners and migrants were granted opportunities for self-improvement and community empowerment (Sealander, 1997). From Jacob Riis to Jane Addams, Progressives are commonly historicized as establishing institutions that clothed the naked, fed the poor, and challenged the status quo.

The urban Progressive movement, however, was always defined by both its ameliorative programs and its interest in protecting White, Protestant capitalist power. Progressives did so through a combination of physical reforms to the built environment (which ultimately benefited property owners at least as much as tenants; Marcuse, 1980), social programs for poor migrants (which aimed "to reconfigure a polyglot immigrant and working class society in a white middle class image"; Katz, 2001, p. 712), and "good governance" strategies (which tended to single out working-class, Catholic immigrant political movements for their anticorruption crusades; Golway, 2014). It was premised on the ideas that scientific techniques could manage the problem of poverty from above and that Christian moral cleansing was a necessary pathway toward respectability (Varga, 2013). Expressing what Veblen (1899) called "punctilios of upper-class propriety" (p. 223), elites also participated in

Progressive reform campaigns as proof of their upper-class status and a conspicuous way of showing both the quantity of their leisure time and the expansiveness of their magnanimity (Huyssen, 2014).

The Progressive Era was also the height of American obsessions with “racist science” (Gould, 1996, p. 383), which naturalized economic and political inequalities with racialized biology and environmental determinism. These were not just separate and coincidental conjunctions; as Leonard (2003) argues, to reformers “in the Progressive Era especially, eugenic treatment of those deemed biologically inferior was promoted *as a means* to the end of uplifting the industrial poor” (p. 688, emphasis in original). This manifested both in a patronizing and pejorative view of non-Protestant immigrants (especially the Irish) and the spaces they inhabited, as well new theories by Progressive social scientists of Black “inherent criminality,” which served as both “a universal tool to measure black fitness for citizenship” and “a tool to shield, to varying degrees, white Americans from the charge of racism” (Muhammad, 2011, p. 139). This helps explain how “Progressivism and Jim Crow arose as an interlocking system of benefit and exclusion” (Gilmore & Gilmore, 2016, p. 174).

When designing housing policy, Progressive New Yorkers looked for ways to simultaneously create safer conditions for some tenants while producing greater profits for landlords. Following reformist groups like the Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor, city legislators “viewed the tenement slum as a problem of social control” to be managed (Foglesong, 1986, p. 67) while simultaneously “provid[ing] for arrangements of land use that would enhance real estate values and accommodate the changing demands of business enterprises in the city” (Marcuse, 1980, p. 166). The solution to labor’s housing crisis, then, was not public housing or rent control but rather private development spurred by new building codes (Baics & Meisterlin, 2016). The Tenement House Acts of 1867, 1879, and 1901 altered the requirements for newer construction to allow for safer buildings, better ventilation, and increased light. In so doing, however, they also created more expensive buildings, which, in the absence of higher wages for poor tenants, meant either greater rent burdens or evictions (Mele, 2000).

What, then, was the material basis of “progress” during the Progressive Era? Who was progressing, and toward what? From the movement leaders’ perspective, it involved creating new systems of control that could contain crises and enlarge profits. Doing so necessitated acknowledging the plight of the poor while ennobling the rich as the remedy. Progress, then, meant modernizing and carefully consolidating capitalist power over urban governance and economy. For those most impacted by Progressive policies—the migrant working class—this program provided some with new tools for survival while condemning others to deeper misery. In the early 20th century, Progressive politics meant resolving social crises in ways that benefitted economic elites while reinforcing racial class hegemony.

The progressive present

What does progressive mean in the United States today? Often the word *progressive* is a two-pronged rhetorical device: on its right flank, progressive replaces the maligned *liberal* without altering its substance (as commonly practiced by center-left U.S. elected officials); on its left, progressive allows radicals to enter the mainstream without identifying as political outsiders (as in the tradition of the Progressive Citizens of America, one of the Communist Party’s popular front organizations). As Gage (2016) writes in relation to 2016 Democratic nominee Hilary Clinton’s self-described political orientation, “the label ‘progressive’ could mean almost anything. Most likely, it means nothing at all” (p. MM13).

Despite this ambiguity, there is an emergent logic behind the term. Progressive implies a set of normative values: addressing historical inequalities, privileging those most harmed by current economic and political conditions, and expanding the state’s role as a promoter of welfare. Pierre Clavel noted in a follow-up essay to his book *The Progressive City* (Clavel, 1986) that though the term can be “vague and undefined,” there exists a “working definition: progressives worry about inequality and advocate steps to reduce it; and they try to open up government to wider citizen participation” (Clavel, 2011). Susan Fainstein’s (2010) idea of “the just city,” in which residents affirm a common notion of justice and planners help guide city actions toward that direction,

assumes this kind of shared progressive sensibility. It is a framework many are currently organizing around, from the nonprofit Progressive States Network to the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

In New York City politics, progressivism is ascendant once again. The City Council Progressive Caucus was formed in 2009 and has since grown dramatically in both size and power. As of this writing, the caucus includes the city council speaker—one of the most influential positions in city government—as well as many key committee chairs. According to their mission statement,

The Progressive Caucus of the New York City Council is dedicated to creating a more just and equal New York City, combating all forms of discrimination, and advancing public policies that offer genuine opportunity to all New Yorkers, especially those who have been left out of our society's prosperity (Progressive Caucus of the New York City Council, 2010).

Their principles include “a fair budget”; “economic policy” that promotes “living-wage and prevailing-wage jobs,” “a diverse economy,” and “affirmative opportunities”; “safe, decent, affordable housing for all New Yorkers”; “high-quality public education”; a “sustainable and environmentally just city”; “strong, vibrant, diverse neighborhoods”; “prevention, alternatives-to-incarceration, partnership with communities, and police accountability”; “full civil rights for all New Yorkers”; “confidence and participation in government”; and “strengthening the practice of local democracy” (Progressive Caucus of the New York City Council, 2010).

Five years after the New York City Council Progressive Caucus was established, Bill de Blasio ran and was elected mayor as a self-identified progressive. He leads a city that is simultaneously diverse and segregated, wealthy and poor, planned and privatized, and is characterized by both neoliberal and social democratic tendencies. As a strategy to manage these contradictions while maintaining his initial appeal, de Blasio enshrines both the city's neoliberal and social democratic propensities under the progressive banner (Murphy, 2016). For example, he has claimed that both his support for mandatory paid sick leave and “broken windows policing” are emblematic of his progressivism (Grynbaum, 2014). In a campaign speech to business lobbyists, the future mayor confoundingly labeled himself a “progressive activist, fiscal conservative” (Katz, 2013).

What, then, is the material basis of contemporary progressive politics? Who is progressing, and toward what? These questions highlight the central problem with the word as operationalized in contemporary U.S. urban politics. According to the emergent definition of contemporary progressivism, the material basis for progress is movement by those most marginalized toward economic stability and self-representation. As practiced by many elected officials, however, progress usually entails policies that offer a modicum of protection to the working class while safeguarding the interests of capital and property. This suggests a deep continuity between contemporary and historical manifestations of urban progressivism.

In order to further assess the state of contemporary progressive urban politics, let us look closely at one of the most important recent changes in New York City housing policy: a citywide rezoning that Mayor de Blasio calls “the nation's most progressive affordable housing law” (de Blasio, 2016).

Case study: Mandatory Inclusionary Housing

One of Mayor de Blasio's central campaign promises was to address economic inequality through housing and reduce the cost of living in one of the most expensive cities in the country (Thompson, 2015). New York is a tenants' city, with 68.8% of residents renting their homes. By 2014, however, a majority of tenants were “rent burdened,” or paying more than 30% of their income in rent, and 70% of extremely low-income New Yorkers were paying more than 50%.¹ From 2005 to 2014, median rents rose 14.7% citywide, whereas renters' incomes rose just 1.7% (NYU Furman Center, 2015). As a result of this crisis, more New Yorkers than ever are experiencing homelessness, with over 60,000 individuals struggling through the city's sprawling shelter system and living on the streets (Coalition for the Homeless, 2017).

Once in office, the mayor presented what he called “the largest, fastest affordable housing plan ever attempted at a local level” (Fermino, 2014). *Housing New York: A Five-Borough, Ten-Year Plan* (City of New York, 2014) mobilizes four main strategies: continuing to subsidized nonprofit development; leveraging city power to preserve 120,000 existing units of affordable housing; tweaking the zoning code to allow slightly higher density in low-rise districts; and, most controversial, a new construction program that would build 80,000 income-targeted apartments through MIH.

MIH is the de Blasio administration’s particular take on “inclusionary zoning,” a policy that ties private market rate construction to new affordable development (Mukhija, Regus, Slovin, & Das, 2010). It has been taken up in hundreds of municipalities across the United States, as well as in many other countries (Calavita & Mallach, 2010). Most inclusionary zoning programs encourage developers to place their affordable apartments in the same building as their market rate units; in other versions, the affordable housing can be built off site; in yet other variations, the developer can simply pay into an affordable housing construction fund or hire a nonprofit developer to build the housing on its behalf. Often inclusionary zoning comes with an increase in development capacity, thus granting land owners a windfall profit while simultaneously imposing restrictions on new development. New York’s variant includes all of these elements (Stabrowski, 2015).

Mayor de Blasio is not the first to bring inclusionary zoning to New York. The program began in 1987 under “neo-corporatist” Democratic Mayor Ed Koch (Krinsky, 2011, p. 402) as a voluntary “density bonus,” or a program that allows developers to build more than the zoning would otherwise allow in exchange for some public benefit—in this case renting or selling 20% of their new apartments at below market rates. The program failed to create much affordable housing, however, because it competed directly with another density bonus: the city’s privately owned public spaces (POPS) program. Under that policy, developers could build beyond zoning limits if they produced a publicly accessible plaza or atrium (Kayden, 2000). The cost of permanent below-market rate housing was far greater than that of a POPS, so developers almost always selected that option. According to Norman Marcus, who had served as general counsel to the New York City Planning Department, the program was ineffective as a housing program but effective as an ideological construct:

At no point in the process did the City pretend that it would solve its serious affordable housing crisis. ... Inclusionary zoning did, however, help perpetuate the myth that all social problems are susceptible to a zoning solution, by adding a new, alternative entrée to the City’s zoning menu. (Marcus, 1991, p. 722)

Though the city’s next two mayors—Democrat David Dinkins and Republican Rudy Giuliani—kept the law on the books, it was Republican Michael Bloomberg who greatly expanded its reach (Larson, 2013). In over 100 separate neighborhood actions around the city, Bloomberg rezoned roughly one third of the city’s total landmass (Angotti & Morse, 2016). In most cases, these rezonings increased development capacity on wide avenues and offered an additional density bonus for residential developments that included below-market apartments (but not POPS). Critics of this approach highlighted two shortcomings. First, the voluntary program produced very few affordable apartments. According to a report by City Council Progressive Caucus member Brad Lander, just two neighborhoods saw most of the new inclusionary development, and the affordable housing that was created accounted for only 1.7% of total residential growth (Lander, Freedman-Schnapp, & Ullman, 2013). Second, these apartments were not affordable to most New Yorkers, let alone those with the greatest need. Most of the apartments went to households making 80% of the area median income (AMI), or \$66,400 as of 2013. AMI for the entire metropolitan area—suburbs included—is much higher than AMI for the city alone; 80% of city median income is just \$38,994 (Dulchin, Gates, & Williams, 2013). The few new “affordable” apartments were not actually affordable to most city residents. The program, then, was criticized for doing too little for the wrong people, thus progressing a small section of the middle class toward housing security.

De Blasio’s approach to inclusionary zoning touches on both of these concerns. To address the problem of quantity, MIH is mandatory—not voluntary—for new construction in neighborhoods

where the city increases zoning capacity. To address the issue of affordability, MIH provides a set of options for individual neighborhood rezonings, which the Department of City Planning can apply as they see fit. In option 1, 20% of units in new buildings must be affordable at 40% AMI (\$36,240 for a family of four); in option 2, 25% must be affordable at 60% AMI (\$54,360), of which 10% must be reserved for 40% AMI; in option 3, 30% must be affordable at 80% AMI (\$72,480); and in option 4, 30% must be affordable at 115% AMI (\$104,190).²

MIH therefore represents a major expansion of the prior system. It does not, however, constitute an overhaul. First, though MIH is a citywide policy, it only takes effect when neighborhoods are rezoned for greater residential density. The quantity of affordable apartments it creates is therefore dependent on the success of each future neighborhood upzoning. Second, though AMI levels stretch far lower than the previous policy, they also reach significantly higher; allowing 115% AMI means that even the “affordable” section of some new developments will be targeted toward people making more than the neighborhood, city, *and* metropolitan median incomes. Third, though affordability is deeper than in Bloomberg’s program, the AMI levels still do not match the city’s needs. The greatest unmet need in New York’s housing market is for the one third of city residents who make 30% of AMI (\$27,180) or less. This group—which includes the average working single mother, fixed-income senior, public housing waiting list enrollee, and minimum wage worker—is poorly served by the private market, where affordable rent-regulated apartments are rarely vacant. Unless further subsidies are added to particular projects, this population is also excluded from new MIH developments (Williams, 2016). Put together, this suggests that many of the same critiques of Bloomberg’s conservative housing program can be applied to the new progressive version of inclusionary zoning.

Beyond the number and cost of affordable apartments, however, lies the deeper issue of inclusionary zoning’s fundamental logic, which exemplifies the central contradictions of progressive urban politics. Under MIH, the production of new affordable apartments is always linked to an expansion of the luxury market (Zukin, 2016). Because MIH is only triggered in cases of residential upzonings, it only produces affordable housing if it increases the number of market rate units a developer can build on a given lot. In so doing, the city creates the opportunity for more high-rent-producing apartments on a given parcel and thus dramatically raises the value of rezoned land (Angotti & Morse, 2016).

The expected rise in land values then encourages speculation, as investors buy up land and property at relatively low costs in the hopes that it will be upzoned. In Brooklyn’s East New York, during the 2 years between the rezoning’s announcement and its passage, speculators bought and sold land with such frequency that prices jumped 63% from an average of \$480,000 to \$1.4 million (Savich-Lew, 2016). The immediate result of this speculation is rising rents, as new landlords seek to cover their increased debt service and old landlords capitalize on the hype from new development. In East New York in 2015, median rents rose 16% to \$1,850 (Stringer, 2015). According to U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development guidelines, this would be affordable for a household earning \$74,000; median neighborhood income, however, was just \$32,000. Assuming continued wage stagnation and high rent burdens, such increases will result in displacement.

Displacement takes many forms, all of which are likely outcomes: direct displacement, in which tenants are kicked out of their homes because the land owner either raises rents beyond tenants’ capacity or tears down and replaces their building; indirect displacement, in which the impacts of new development ripple out to the prices of neighboring apartments; exclusionary displacement, in which residents looking for housing can no longer afford to move to neighborhoods that would have previously been open to them; and, finally, displacement pressure, from which tenants suffer when they can somehow remain (because of rent control, public housing, or some other secure form of tenure) but everything around them—including their social networks and the stores and services on which they rely—is pushed out (Madden & Marcuse, 2016).

Ultimately, if all of these forms of displacement are counted, MIH could displace more working-class residents than would ever be housed in the new inclusionary developments. New Yorkers of color will be particularly hard hit, as even the lowest income targets for new apartments are well

beyond the median incomes for 43% of Black, Latino, and Asian New Yorkers (Durkin, 2016a). According to a report by the city comptroller, the plan puts 55% of current East New York residents, the vast majority of whom are Black or Latino, at risk of displacement (Stringer, 2015). At the same time, MIH could induce the owners of relatively small, low-rent buildings to sell their properties to speculative developers, who would tear down the existing structures and replace them with much bigger inclusionary buildings. In such a case, the result would be a net loss in affordable dwellings. For example, in Manhattan's Chinatown—a neighborhood now under discussion for future rezoning—the typical residential structure is a rent-regulated five-story tenement building containing 20 low-cost apartments. If the neighborhood were upzoned for 10-story inclusionary housing, only 8 to 12 new “affordable” units would be produced and, in all likelihood, all would be more expensive than the 20 existing affordable rent regulated units. In the meantime, an additional 32 to 28 new luxury units would be added to the lot.

Though MIH is a citywide policy, it is only triggered when a particular location is upzoned. So far every area that has been selected is either a working-class stronghold—like Brooklyn's East New York (a predominantly Black neighborhood with a median income of \$31,986) and the Bronx's Jerome Avenue (an industrial immigrant neighborhood with a median income of \$25,834)—or an area that is currently undergoing gentrification, like Queens' Long Island City (a post-industrial waterfront district with a growing wealthy White population) or Manhattan's Inwood (the northern tip of Manhattan, where working-class Caribbean immigrants are being replaced by higher income Whites; Gates, 2015). The only wealthy neighborhood scheduled for upzoning is Midtown East, and that action will not trigger MIH because it only applies to commercial buildings.

In light of this siting, MIH appears to be less of an affordable housing plan than a “spatial fix” (Harvey, 2006, p. 108–109) or a geographical strategy for capital accumulation in a city with relatively few remaining working-class residential districts in which to invest and turn an outsized profit. What MIH accomplishes is to identify those areas of the city that have not yet experienced gentrification and, through public policy, create “rent gaps”—the space between current and potential ground rents whose presence is the causal precursor to gentrification (Smith, 1996)—on lots currently used for relatively low-cost housing, retail, and manufacturing. Rather than cooling the city's overheated land market, it raises the value of land by increasing the overall number of new market rate units a developer can build. This in no way solves the affordable housing crisis but instead deepens the uneven geographical development that characterizes capitalist urbanization in general and the New York metropolitan area in particular (Smith, 2002).

According to the mayor, however, this plan constitutes the “most progressive affordable housing polic[y] in the nation” (Durkin, 2016b). What kind of progress might this be? It does not match the contemporary normative values set out earlier in this article—addressing historical inequalities, privileging the most harmed, and expanding the welfare state. Instead, the plan accelerates gentrification in the name of halting it (Krinsky, 2015). Rather than putting housing in the public domain, it enshrines private landlords as the primary and rightful providers of shelter (Angotti & Morse, 2016). Meanwhile, it raises land values and encourages speculation, further moving housing away from the realm of “use values”—or shelter—and toward “exchange values”—or accumulation vehicles (Logan & Molotch, 1987).

Nor does MIH fit with the City Council Progressive Caucus's (Fainstein, 2010) definition of progress: the plan does not “offer genuine opportunity to all New Yorkers, especially those who have been left out of our society's prosperity.” In fact, it does the opposite—it constrains opportunity for many affected New Yorkers, whose rent burdens may rise and who may be displaced from their homes without access to the new apartments being built. It also fails to “[combat] all forms of discrimination” (Progressive Caucus of the New York City Council, 2010) as it raises rents generally while creating new housing that is too expensive for 57% of Black and 62% of Latino New Yorkers (Durkin, 2016a). Despite these conflicts with their mission statement, however, just one Progressive Caucus member voted against MIH (Trangle, 2016).

Ultimately MIH is a neoliberal housing policy because it places responsibility for the provision of affordable housing with the market, not the state. Instead of creating public housing or limiting landlord profits through rent controls, it gives away a coveted public asset—public airspace—in return for a severely limited public benefit (Graham, 2016). The value generated for developers greatly overshadows the value recaptured for the public. Ava Farkas (2016) of the Metropolitan Council on Housing highlighted the disjuncture between these realities and the program’s rhetoric by calling MIH “‘progressive’ gentrification,” a notion in line with Nancy Fraser’s (2016) “progressive neoliberalism” (p. 281).

For whom, then, does MIH represent progress, and toward what end? Though supporters claim that it progresses the working and middle classes toward housing affordability, the program will in fact do the opposite: progress land speculators and rentiers toward greater profits in a larger portion of the city. The way in which MIH represents progress, then, is reminiscent of the Progressive Era. Like the Tenement House Acts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, MIH identifies a real crisis of social reproduction for labor and responds by using state power to encourage private developers to fix it while reaping a larger profit. This benefits real estate capitalists without fixing the underlying problems for the working class and in so doing displaces those who suffered most under prior conditions. Like its Progressive antecedents, MIH raises property values in areas where migrants and people of color congregate; it focuses on building new structures rather than addressing the underlying economic and political mechanisms responsible for skyrocketing rents; and it decreases working-class immigrants’ and African Americans’ abilities to lay claim to particular urban spaces.

Progress for tenants toward housing security

New York City’s MIH policy must be situated in the long shadow of the historical Progressive Era as a housing policy that furthers developers’ interests over those of tenants. Though this reflects the continuities between contemporary and historical progressive politics, it does mean that any housing policy under current conditions would result in these same outcomes.

There are two longstanding, proven methods for providing affordable housing that would be far more effective than MIH at progressing tenants toward physical and economic security: public housing and rent regulation. The vast majority of funding for public housing, however, comes from the federal government, which maintains a Nixon-era moratorium on public housing construction and is committed to deconcentration and privatization (Goetz, 2013). The prospects are grim for federal public housing expansion, or even federal assistance for housing generally, under the Trump administration. Rent regulations can and should be safeguarded and expanded, but control over such actions was seized by New York State legislators following the 1975 New York City fiscal crisis and, since then, state government has done far more to winnow the city’s rent stabilization and rent control policies than to strengthen and expand them (Gurian, 2003). Both of these structural limitations must be confronted by city leaders and by social movements. In the meantime, however, there are other ways in which New York City can promote transformative housing strategies without relying on federal or state action.

If city government wishes to continue to use inclusionary zoning, despite its severe limitations as an affordable housing policy, there are ways to do so that challenge, rather than reinforce, longstanding economic and social inequities (even if they continue to enshrine housing in the private domain). First, inclusionary zoning could be spread over the entire city, rather than imposed only in particular neighborhoods, and decoupled from increased zoning capacity. Under this scenario, any new residential construction (other than single-family homes) would contain below-market rate housing, and its arrival would not be accompanied by a generalized increase in luxury units. Though the result would not be enough to undo the city’s historic housing crisis, it would significantly alter the dynamics of development and segregation. Though landlords would likely protest such a move as an illegal taking, such threats are often made but rarely successfully litigated (Rusk, 2006).

Alternatively, MIH could be imposed only on the city’s wealthiest enclaves. In these high-income areas, increased zoning capacity would not produce working-class displacement, and new affordable

construction could challenge economic and racial segregation. According to Moses Gates, more than a dozen New York City neighborhoods—excluding historic and special use districts, industrial zones, and already high-density areas—have median household incomes over \$50,000, top-quality elementary schools, and a train stop within 1 km (Gates, 2015). Of these areas, however, only one—Long Island City, which still includes working-class subdistricts—is currently under consideration for an inclusionary upzoning. Instead, all of the city’s target areas are either on the cusp of gentrification or are places that have remained affordable (in part because of their current zoning) even as the rest of the city has not. Reversing this pattern would constitute an attack on “*concentrated affluence* and the dysfunctional behavior of residents utterly insulated from the dignified daily struggles endured by those their actions and decisions affect” (Slater, 2013, p. 389, emphasis in original).

In addition to zoning, the city should look to tax and foreclosure policy as means toward both housing preservation and development. When homeowners’ or landlords’ tax or water bills are delinquent, the city places a lien on their properties and then sells packages of tax liens to a for-profit trust at a discount; the trust then sells shares to investors, who are rewarded through interest rates that range from 9%—compounded daily—on smaller properties to 18%—compounded daily—for multifamily buildings (Kahrl, 2015). The result is a deeply predatory process in which homeowners are dispossessed and housing is turned over to speculators *en masse*. If, instead, the city transferred such properties over to a scatter-site community land trust (Saegert, 2015), the city could immediately and permanently preserve more than 4,000 buildings per year as affordable and nonspeculative housing, without displacing anyone or adding a single unit of luxury housing (Krinsky, 2016). Such a proposal is currently being developed by a coalition of grassroots housing organizations known as the New York City Land Initiative and the office of the Public Advocate.

These paths, each possible under current legal strictures, are progressive in a very clear sense: rather than fixing the neoliberal system’s roughest patches while strengthening its core, they progress working-class tenants toward greater housing affordability without reproducing gentrification. Scholars, critics, and activists must demand such precision from any policy, plan, or proposal labeled progressive. If the answer to the questions “progress for whom?” and “progress toward what?” are not clear, the signifier progressive will remain empty (Offe, 2009).

Notes

1. *Extremely low income* is defined as those making less than 30% of the federally defined area median income for the New York City metropolitan area. Because most public housing residents pay 30% of their income in rent, we can presume that the 70% of extremely low-income households who are facing extreme rent burdens live in the city’s private housing stock.
2. There are additional mechanisms available for deeper affordability, financed through tax abatements and bond issues. These tools, however, are not built into the zoning code and tend to expire after a period of time—usually 15 to 30 years.

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