

The popular belief,  
the protesting  
residents are

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The 1949 Housing Act was passed in an effort to spur urban redevelopment in the fifties and sixties. Public housing has long been considered a failed attempt at helping low income individuals who require affordable rents, yet there has been dispute over who is to blame for this lack of success. One of these housing facilities, Pruitt-Igoe, represent one of the most well-known examples of how this governmental effort has failed to fulfill its original purpose and has in fact led to the first resident protest in the history of public housing. "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth" by Chad Friedrichs discusses the true reason public housing has failed and that, against popular belief, the protesting residents are not to blame but rather their unfair social and economic conditions and the unforeseen impact of such efforts that led them to revolt in the first place.

The myth behind Pruitt-Igoe is one based upon the belief that poor citizens are involved in violence, crime, and drugs, and that they could not adapt to a certain standard of living. This is because of the propaganda including pictures of vandalized hallways and broken windows that are juxtaposed with the hopeful and idealistic images of what Pruitt-Igoe was supposed to be like. Moreover, this made people believe that the impoverished individuals refused to take advantage of what was given to them and could not transcend their so called "culture of poverty," as described by Oscar Lewis. Yet these people are disillusioned, because they ignored the many structural issues that perpetuate poverty and believed that this housing alone could solve the long-standing and deeply-rooted problem of class division.

This documentary is interesting in that it puts names to those who were victims of this discriminatory system, providing both sides of the public housing story and further elucidating who is actually to blame. One factor that was not accounted for by those who blamed the poor residents was the decline of urban areas already taking place. The 1949 Housing Act was intended to help in urban renewal, but actually stimulated suburbanization and emptied cities and the resources they once had. Therefore, these residents did not have the means to climb the social ladder even if they did have housing. Additionally, public housing was inherently a form of racial segregation, as the individuals who were left behind were victims of white flight and were oppressed by the culture of uniformity in neighborhood composition and domestic life.

Moreover, those who inhabited the Pruitt homes were minorities while those who resided in the Igoe homes were only white. Those who blamed the poor residents also did not account for the failing public governmental policies and the profit-driven focus of the housing authority. An issue that was discussed in the film that is unknown to the general citizen is that the main purpose of the housing act was not to provide affordable housing but to improve slum clearance, construction, and overall economic stimulation. This is, arguably, one of the greatest contributors to the failing of public housing legislation. Resources were not being put into maintaining and supervising these buildings in the long term which allowed vandalism and crime to prevail in these facilities.

This is why the pipes burst, the incinerators weren't working, and a mother was even forced to put her son's stomach back inside his body after he was

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hit by a chainsaw. On top of the unfair welfare requirements and conditions that the residents had to abide by, the deterioration of their homes caused by a lack of resources and the failure of the government to make changes led to the revolts and represent the true reasons why public housing failed. Overall, the Pruitt-Igoe myth that blames poor residents for the failure of public housing is an inaccurate demonstration of reality that does not account for structural issues such as discrimination and the government's non-involvement in improving these buildings. This failure is representative of not only the failure of public housing, but the welfare system as a whole and any effort to help the impoverished.

"The Pruitt-Igoe Myth" helps viewers understand the true reasons policies have failed to make a positive difference, and why these reasons need to be acknowledged for any valuable change to be made.