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**Insuring the City:
The Prudential Center and the Reshaping of Boston**

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Insuring the City:
The Prudential Center and the Reshaping of Boston

by

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B.A. (Yale University) 1999
M.C.P. (University of California, Berkeley) 2004

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Committee in charge:

Professor Paul Groth, Chair
Professor Richard Walker
Professor C. Greig Crysler

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by Elihu James Rubin

Abstract

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Elihu James Rubin

Doctor of Philosophy in Architecture

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Paul Groth, Chair

Insuring the City examines the development of the Prudential Center in Boston as a case study of the organizational, financial, and spatial forces that large insurance companies wielded in shaping the postwar American city. The Prudential Center was one of seven Regional Home Offices (RHOs) planned by Prudential in the 1950s to decentralize its management. What began as an effort to reinvigorate the company's bureaucratic makeup evolved into a prominent building program and urban planning phenomenon, promoting the economic prospects of each RHO city and reshaping the geography of the business district. Examples from Los Angeles, Houston, and Chicago show each RHO as a calculated real estate investment. The RHOs were also expressions of the insurance company's self-image as a benevolent force in American cities and social life.

Boston—the location of Prudential's Northeastern Home Office—was, like other American cities, preoccupied with urban obsolescence and erected a political and legal structure to facilitate redevelopment. Navigating its way through these structures, Prudential became an “urban redevelopment corporation” in its own right. The Pru's

intended site was a rail yard on the outskirts of the central business district, a site that was also pivotal to the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority's plans to construct an urban extension. Prudential navigated a triangular relationship with the Pike and the Boston Redevelopment Authority to gain recognition—and favored tax status—as a quasi-public actor in the legislatively sanctioned fight against urban blight. The Pru, dedicated in 1965, hastened the expansion of Boston's central business district into a second midtown area that was a self-contained enclave organized around the car.

Together, the Pike and the Pru planned a massive highway interchange in Boston's Back Bay district. Prudential's design choices began with the selection of a “businessman” architect, Charles Luckman, and this study examines Luckman's bureaucratic design process. Though never been loved by architectural critics, the overall plan of the Prudential Center achieved many of its sponsor's goals and, in several senses, insured Boston's future. It instilled the city with new financial confidence and thousands of jobs, protected against physical obsolescence, and invested in the city's public realm.

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Note on Sources

I have adopted the following shorthand to cite archival materials:

PA: Prudential Insurance Company of America archives, Newark, N.J. (followed by box number and folder name).

BRA: Official documents and publications of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, held in Government Documents at the Boston Public Library (followed by document number when possible).

CLP: The Papers of Charles Luckman (followed by folder name when possible).

MTAA: The Massachusetts Turnpike Authority Archives, Weston, Mass. (followed by box number).

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Introduction:

Prudential and the American City

As the sinuous ribbon of the Massachusetts Turnpike crests some 15 miles outside of Boston, you can begin to see it from your car: the dull, grey tower that heralds the Prudential Center (fig. I.1). A moment later, the image splits and the view from the road reveals a taller, shimmering slab: the John Hancock, a 1976 tower designed to outshine the drab and indifferent Prudential. Never the critics' darling, the "Pru" is yet the awfully great symbol of Boston: a square-plan tower with illuminated antenna-spire, the letters of the corporation that built it affixed at the top like a typographical cornice line. From a distance, the Pru is a modern campanile, a civic icon in the skyline (fig. I.2). The Hancock—slyly insubstantial, an iridescent mirage—is perhaps best known for the initial tendency of its mirrored glass panels to dislodge and crash to the ground. But it is considered by many critics to be the more elegant and distinguished of the two insurance towers.

Setting aside aesthetic judgments, there they stand: dueling emblems for life insurance companies and physical affirmations of their intangible products, financial security. They are also somewhat quaint, local talismans of an anonymous, even bewildering, global financial culture in an age when the local commitments of large corporations are nebulous and hard to perceive. It was not always this way. American insurance companies between 1870 and 1970 were not anonymous enterprises; they were social institutions. Ordinary businesses heedlessly pursued profit for its own sake. But insurance companies carried a greater responsibility: they managed the public's social

welfare and self-consciously cultivated a civic posture. In the milieu of postwar urban redevelopment, the Prudential Center in Boston is material evidence of one company's efforts to assert such a posture—to insure the city.

The literature of postwar urban redevelopment has focused on the consolidation of political power, the changing economic functions and social composition of cities, and the local impact of federal policies. But the physical landscapes produced in this period, the material traces of urban restructuring, are typically regarded as secondary to the political and economic analyses. The buildings and landscapes themselves—the highways, garages, corporate towers, plazas, and commercial spaces that are common elements of American cities—are relegated to footnotes by political historians and are viewed as too undistinguished to attract much attention from architectural historians. Only a few redevelopment projects or corporate buildings have been introduced into the canon of postwar design, and the Prudential Center in Boston is not one of these. It is not my intention to revive the Pru's reputation as "good architecture," but to engage the Prudential as an ordinary landscape that exemplifies the production of postwar space. My method is to cut an interdisciplinary cross-section through this ordinary landscape, a vast corporate estate stretching 31-acres across a former railroad yard in Boston's Back Bay district.

The Prudential: “The Rock” and the Urban Landscape

Olivier Zunz has written about how American society was reshaped by the rise of corporate structures.¹ This statement applies not only to the social organization of everyday life but also to the spatial configuration and built environment of American cities. I see the landscapes of Prudential’s Regional Home Offices (RHOs) as extensions of “corporate culture,” governed by a set of internally coherent principles that were applied to different local situations. In becoming a national company, executives at Prudential created a national space. They followed a set of urban and architectural principles that reflected their best guesses about the changing form of the American city—and, at the same time, had a major impact on that form. The spatial language of the Regional Home Offices introduced a compelling model for the modern office landscape, one that turned its back on the central business district (CBD) and created new corporate estates at the far edges of the American downtown. In Chicago and Boston, Prudential formed large sites outside the established CBD over former railroad facilities.

In the spirit of its famous “Rock of Gibraltar” slogan, the Prudential established massive promontories that both dominated and shaped their urban landscapes (fig. I.3). Starting with the Western Home Office on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles, 1948, Prudential consciously eschewed cities that housed Federal Reserve branches, like San Francisco, a strategy that accentuated Prudential’s self-identification as a counterbalance

¹ Olivier Zunz, *Making America Corporate, 1870–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

to the federal government.² Like the politicians who led the federal government, Prudential's decision-makers were planners and policy-makers of national scope. Like the federal government, which supplied many billions of dollars to American cities to adopt urban renewal plans, Prudential implemented national policies that shaped the practices of local actors. In Boston, Prudential's insistence on tax clemency hastened the amendment of urban redevelopment law in Massachusetts. The Prudential Center was ultimately built under the guiding hand of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, which approved the project, but Prudential did not answer to the BRA. In a sense, the Prudential had a stronger association with state highway planners. The Pru's agreements with the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority provided the political cover for a joint project that subverted the state's master highway plan. Instead of the "Inner Belt" that the state's planners had envisioned, the Pru and the Pike collaborated to shape a single, piercing Turnpike extension that connected Route 128 to the Central Artery (fig. I.4).

By dramatically reshaping access to Boston, the Prudential Insurance Company both transformed and, in a sense, "insured" the city. The new city map created by the Prudential—with its collaborator in urban development, the Pike—"insured" the city in two ways. From an economic standpoint, it expanded the commercial center of the city to a new center city area—the Back Bay—rather than either adding to the mass of the Central Business District or hastening migration to the suburbs. From the standpoint of transportation, the Pru/Pike combination insured that people and their vehicles could flow

² "Memorandum for Mr. C.W. Shanks, Executive Vice President," Prudential Archives (hereafter cited as PA) 10-20, Correspondence/Memorandum 1945-1959, 1.

smoothly into and out of the city. In a broadest sense, the Prudential viewed itself as insuring not only the residents of America's cities, but also the city itself.

Through its development of the Prudential Center, the Pru aligned itself with the public interest and strengthened its posture as a civic institution. Prudential won over the concerns of Boston's established interests who were threatened by the Prudential Center and aligned its project—socially and legally—with the public interest. The turnpike's battle to assert its own plans in the public's interest, this time for roads, and the tight connection between the Pike and the Pru that was first forged by the shared legacy of nineteenth century railroad investments. As a spatial expression of the corporate principles that shaped it, the Prudential Center was designed as an insulated, self-contained place.

In this dissertation, I sometimes speak of "Prudential" or a place-name, like "Chicago," as the subject of a sentence. It is not my intention to duck the question of institutional agency. "Prudential" or "Chicago" are stand-ins for a group of individuals working together in an organization; they are the vice-presidents, attorneys, and consulting engineers that represented the corporation; they are the politicians, city planners, and municipal staff who represented the local state. My argument places "Prudential" in the same legal-institutional framework of "Chicago" or "Boston." These latter two entities were place-based institutions with explicit geographical borders. Prudential was a national corporation managing many billions of dollars of assets. But Prudential was as influential as municipal government in its effort to redevelop the postwar American city—in fact, I argue that Prudential *led* local government.

From the *Octopus* to the *Mighty Pump*

The Prudential Center rose over the ashes of an obsolete rail yard—a dark, dismal, and underperforming asset belonging to the Boston & Albany Railroad, a subsidiary of the New York Central. It was an uninviting trench that stretched across nearly 30 acres, a grimy site of railroad operation, a dreary bastion of steam-based pollution, characteristics represented in a 1939 oil painting by C. Ray Morse (fig. I.5). Prudential Insurance Company executives envisioned for this site a gleaming new city designed for automobiles and office workers, with commercial pavilions and middle-class apartments marketed as a modern, urbane lifestyle choice.

In his 1901 novel, Frank Norris characterized the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad (a fictitious stand-in for California's Southern Pacific Railroad) as *The Octopus*, its tentacles intertwined in every feature of the nineteenth century economy, social life, and built environment. Railroads like the Southern Pacific were both providers of transportation infrastructure and land companies. The federal government helped incentivize the proliferation of railroads across the United States by offering immense land grants to the trailblazing railroad companies, and many railroad companies explicitly formed land companies to manage their diverse holdings. The Pacific Railroad Act of 1862 delivered not only the right-of-ways to the railroads free of charge, but also offered ten square miles of land for every mile of track built. The federal government perceived a public interest in subsidizing the private development of railroad lines as a way to unify the nation, to inhabit its spaces, and spur its economic growth.

In the fast-growing industrial cities of the East, too, railroads became important landowners beginning in the early nineteenth century. In many large cities, the railroad was part and parcel to the process of urbanization; not only as one of the engines that fueled other forms of economic growth, but also physically, as land-makers. This was the case in Boston, where the railroads approaching the city from the west and the south shaped the character of the city's physical growth. The Boston & Worcester Railroad (later it became the Boston & Albany) charged across the Back Bay marshlands on a graded viaduct; and the Boston & Providence Railroad also crossed the Back Bay from the southwest. The two intersecting lines that Walter Muir Whitehill said "formed a great St. Andrew's cross of railway lines through the Back Bay which not only jeopardized the flowage of water for mill purposes but eventually led to the filling of the entire area."³

The "octopus" of the twentieth century was the insurance industry. In 1964, *Fortune Magazine* reported that two of the three largest private companies in the world were insurance companies: the Prudential and Metropolitan Life.⁴ It was not only the insurance industry's sheer size but also its peculiar nature that made it such an important actor in mid-twentieth century American society. Life insurance advertising gently reminded all American breadwinners of their mortality, and exploited their wholesome desire to provide for the family after death. Founded in 1875 in Newark, New Jersey, Prudential was among the first American firms to offer "industrial insurance," collecting small premiums each week from working class people in order to save for funeral

³ Walter Muir Whitehill and Lawrence Kennedy, *Boston: A Topographical History*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 102.

⁴ Robert Sheehan, "The Mighty Pump, Prudential," *Fortune* (January 1964). The first largest company in the world was AT&T (American Telephone and Telegraph).

expenses and some measure of financial security to the bereft families. Prudential agents went door-to-door each week collecting the small sums from the homemaker, who saved her pennies for the purpose (fig. I.6).⁵ From the start, Prudential was a business enterprise with a physical, public presence, with agents pounding the pavement of America's growing industrial cities. Like the tentacles of an octopus, Prudential insinuated itself into the social fabric of the city on a door-to-door basis.

Many parallels can be drawn between the railroads of the nineteenth century and the insurance companies of the twentieth. As large railroad companies bundled together smaller systems and administered far-flung networks, they developed complicated bureaucratic structures to operate their facilities and manage their services.⁶ Railroads were innovators in the field of corporate administration, and so were insurance companies. Prudential was organized as a multi-divisional corporation, with many executive vice-presidents reporting to the top man. Prudential's Regional Home Office program was the physical result of a corporate decentralization policy. Like railroad companies, insurance companies were landowners and real estate developers at a vast scale. Prudential's policies established to govern its real estate investments—mortgage loan policies as well as direct investments in real estate—were to have vast impacts on

⁵ Prudential's 1975 centennial corporate biography was called *From Three Cents a Week* to celebrate the early days of the company when agents would collect modest weekly premiums. William H. A. Carr, *From Three Cents a Week: The Story of the Prudential Insurance Company of America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1975).

⁶ See Alfred DuPont Chandler Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1993) and *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1994).

the American landscape.⁷ One small but vital part of Prudential's impact on the built environment concerned the office buildings constructed to house the firm's own operations.

In *The Octopus*, Norris pitted the railroad trust's institutional desire for planning and predictability against the rough-hewn individualism of miners, ranchers, and farmers in frontier-era California. The railroad did not tolerate irregularity, nor did it adapt to local conditions; local conditions adapted to the railroad. The same was true of the insurance company, which became a "mighty pump" of economic growth in America's cities, both by insuring people's lives and—especially in the case of the Prudential—by insuring the solidity of the cities in which those people lived and worked.⁸ When one looked down from an airplane heading toward Logan Airport on the Pru, the Pike, and the city in the 1960s, one saw a pattern of access and dominance that paralleled that of the railroads a century earlier (fig. I.7).

Towers and Islands

As noted above, the civic pretensions of insurance companies came with architectural implications. More conventional companies were satisfied by mere *commercial* architecture, buildings that were principally utilitarian and attractive enough. But

⁷ See Thomas Hanchett, "Financing Suburbia: Prudential Insurance and the Post-World War II Transformation of the American City," *Journal of Urban History* 26, no. 3 (2000) and Roberta Moudry, "Architecture as Cultural Design: The Architecture and Urbanism of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1995).

⁸ Sheehan, "The Mighty Pump, Prudential."

insurance companies aspired to the majesty and scale of *institutional* architecture, and thus sought to join the ranks of ecclesiastical, academic, cultural, or government buildings.⁹ Distinguished architecture, defined by elaborate surface treatment, gracious interior spaces, rich materials, or sheer height, was a form of conspicuous consumption for insurance companies like Prudential. Thorstein Veblen understood in 1902 that what applied to individuals also applied to businesses: the patronage of good architecture was part of a process by which businesses engaged in “the specialized consumption of goods as an evidence of pecuniary strength.”¹⁰

From the 1870s forward, American insurance companies were frequent patrons of noteworthy architecture. They were not the only business enterprises with the aspirations of a civic institution, a group that included newspapers and leading national firms like Singer (manufacturer of sewing machines) or Woolworth (five and dime stores.) American businesses commissioned leading architects to design prominent buildings that would be viewed—by the press, by other business leaders, by ordinary people—as credits to their host cities. These buildings were more than just functional containers of economic activities; they were jewels in a crown of collective urban achievement.

But the Prudential Center in Boston, opened for business in 1965, and Prudential’s other Regional Home Offices constructed between 1948 and 1955 were not widely considered to be distinguished pieces of architecture. In a review of the building program in 1955, writers for *Architectural Forum* remarked that none of the RHOs were

⁹ Kenneth Turney Gibbs, *Business Architectural Imagery in America, 1870–1930* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), 119.

¹⁰ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; repr. New York: Viking Press, 1953), 60.

“likely to win any really first-rank architectural awards.”¹¹ *Fortune* characterized the architecture as “modern Prudential style.”¹² Nonetheless, Prudential used architecture to assert its civic values by the sheer force of urban redevelopment in an uncertain economic climate. Prudential had the wherewithal to take on an expensive, long-term project with serious political implications, and thus turned private urban development into a civic undertaking.

The Prudential Center exemplified the transition between the centralized nineteenth century city—organized tightly around rail-based transport and a centralized business district—to the regional, highway-based city. The postwar city was multi-nodal, organized around highways and easy parking. The Prudential Center was an urban response to developments in the suburbs, and was designed along the same social and spatial model. Physically, it was a massive highway interchange in the city. The urban extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike ran through the site below-grade. It was surrounded and covered by a cocoon of parking garages; capped by a plinth, above-grade; and surrounded by a “ring road” that circulated cars from surrounding urban streets to the insulated spaces of the Center. The plinth created a *tabula rasa* building site where Prudential’s multi-faceted program could take shape: the iconic central office tower, low-slung commercial esplanades, residential towers planted in landscaped concrete, and a 500-room (later doubled) hotel, all organized around “public” plazas that included a skating rink. Rounding out the program, the City of Boston built a municipal auditorium

¹¹ “The Pru Decentralizes: A Building Program for an Office Staff of 6,200,” *Architectural Forum* 102 (1955), 143.

¹² Sheehan, “The Mighty Pump, Prudential,” 102.

at the northwest corner of the site. For the entire complex, great caissons, penetrating the shallow water table and sunk to the bedrock, supported this hovering urban spacecraft.

The Prudential Center model echoed and in some ways capped a model of RHOs that the Prudential brought to cities across America. In the 1940s, economic geographers and city planners set out to delimit the central business district and to reveal its internal structure based on land use, land values, and a visual survey.¹³ But the rules that governed the formation, expansion, and delimitation of the CBD were rewritten in the 1950s and 60s. The basic rules of urban development—individual projects on discreet urban lots within identifiable districts—gave way to different organizational principles: the superhighway and the superblock, where large-scale planning promised the efficient and profitable development of modern business, shopping, and residential districts. The result was a new urban form composed by fortified enclaves that suppressed the spatial connectivity of the nineteenth century walking city or streetcar metropolis in favor of large, self-enclosed, and internally integrated islands of urban activity. The Prudential RHOs, to be examined in Chapter 2, allow a rare opportunity to examine the principles that governed the postwar decentralization of the office district, and the ways these principles were connected to the economic structure and corporate culture of the insurance industry.

¹³ Raymond E. Murphy and J. E. Vance Jr., “Delimiting the CBD,” *Economic Geography* 30 (July 1954): 189–222; Raymond E. Murphy, J. E. Vance Jr., and Bart J. Epstein, “Internal Structure of the CBD,” *Economic Geography* 31 (January 1955): 21–46; Raymond E. Murphy, J. E. Vance Jr., and Bart J. Epstein, *Central Business District Studies* (Worcester, Mass.: Clark University, 1955).

Urban Renewal, the Expansion of Downtown, and the Pru

Scholars of post-World War II urban restructuring have focused on the formation of locally constituted “pro-growth coalitions.” In political terms, these coalitions paired progressive Democratic mayors with reform-minded Republican business leaders. Businessmen coalesced around “Citizen Action Committees” of one variety or another, sometimes organized with the encouragement of local academic institutions. Simultaneously, municipal governments formed Redevelopment Authorities in compliance with the 1949 and 1954 Federal Housing Acts. These authorities applied for and administered federal grants under the rubric of “Urban Renewal,” brandishing the powers of eminent domain and working under the ideological cover of the *public interest* to rid the city of *blight*. But what began as a federal program intended to ameliorate housing conditions for the urban poor became the basis for an extensive rebuilding of downtown landscapes around urban highways, parking lots, civic centers, shopping centers, and middle-class apartment housing.¹⁴ The public agenda, articulated by the political establishment and eventually backed by the courts, was defined as “growth,” despite the fact that the beneficiaries of that growth were not evenly distributed. The results of urban renewal were often even worse than merely inequitable. In some cases, vital and socially coherent neighborhoods were misunderstood as “blighted,” “decadent,”

¹⁴ See Marc A. Weiss, “The Origins and Legacy of Urban Renewal,” *Urban and Regional Planning in an Age of Austerity*, eds. Pierre Clavel, John Forester, and William M. Goldsmith (New York: Pergamon Press, 1980), 53–80.

or “sub-standard” areas, and replaced with highways or high-rises intended for very different users than those being displaced.¹⁵

The Urban Renewal moment in American urbanism was a feat of political reorganization, and the literature on the subject has reflected this perspective. Academic debates regarding “growth coalitions” or “regime politics” were rooted in the pioneering work of Yale political scientist Robert Dahl and his study of renewal politics in New Haven. In *Who Governs?*, Dahl explained how an ambitious mayor, a product of the city’s Democratic machine, Richard C. Lee, cultivated the support of business interests and recruited the expertise of talented young bureaucrats. Dahl examined how public opinion was produced through the Citizen Action Committee (CAC), which represented the shared conviction among prominent urban elites that the city should implement a bold renewal agenda.¹⁶ In his study of renewal in postwar San Francisco, Chester Hartmann restated this point: “The private investment community thus comes to be seen as performing functions in the public interest.”¹⁷ In this framework, government (the supposed trustee of the public interest) served to legitimate the uneven accumulation of

¹⁵ See John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); John H. Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983); Jon Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); David Schuyler, *A City Transformed* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Martin Anderson, *Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal, 1949–1962* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967); Weiss, “The Origins and Legacy of Urban Renewal”; and Herbert Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans* (New York: Free Press, 1962).

¹⁶ This was not to say that the city’s leading business interests who constituted the CAC were merely the mayor’s stooges, or vice versa. But these leaders of industry, finance, commerce, academe, and trade unionism all believed in redevelopment goals for their own reasons. Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961; repr., 2005).

¹⁷ Chester Hartmann, *City for Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 393.

capital by certain private interests. Hartmann indicated that it was government's job to "manage conflict;" or, to provide political cover for the operations of capital.¹⁸

For Boston and many other rustbelt cities, urban renewal was viewed as the only way to break the cycle of disinvestment and the social decline it implied. In postwar Boston, there was little rebuilding and expansion. New industries built their factories on the periphery of the city, and some old industries moved out to the suburbs as well.¹⁹ Prudential's announcement in 1957 that they would build a \$100-million group of buildings in the Back Bay thus gave a great boost to the spirits of Boston businessmen. Ralph Lowell, president of the Boston Safe Deposit & Trust Company told *Fortune*: "I feel like a doctor who knows the worst is over, the turn for the better has come. Things are beginning to boil in Boston."²⁰ Many Boston business leaders were coming around to the idea that an outside firm like Prudential could be welcomed as a positive sign of health for the city.

But Prudential's plans for the Back Bay also threatened established property interests in Boston. Prudential's new structure, designed with a large amount of rental space, would immediately make every other office building in the city obsolete in terms of light, space, and amenities. Moreover, Prudential had cut such a desirable tax deal with the city that other property owners were at a competitive disadvantage. The Prudential Center threatened the spatial integrity of the established downtown business district or CBD. It marked the emergence of a "mid-town" district, punctuating the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Is Boston 'Beginning to Boil?'" *Fortune* (June 1957): 286.

²⁰ Ibid.

gradual movement of insurance companies like the John Hancock and New England Mutual to the Back Bay. It also alarmed proprietors of the city's leading department stores by creating a new retail district outside of downtown that was more accessible to suburban shoppers. Prudential's plans rebelled against the established logic of the central business district. As it built its RHOs, Prudential was large enough, and self-sufficient enough, to create its own center of gravity, its own "City of Insurance."

From the standpoint of the Prudential executives, however, they were building their new RHOs—in Boston and elsewhere—in the city. Indeed, the Prudential planners emphasized the advantages of nurturing a business district: the proximity of mass transit, the ease of conducting business meetings, and the tradition of social prominence. But staying within city limits was not the same as adhering to the central business district that had coalesced in so many cities by the 1920s. The Prudential planners had a very different vision of the city than the one held by many downtown businessmen and politicians. Prudential possessed a national vision that transcended intra-urban infighting and petty rivalries. Prudential executives saw the Back Bay as very much a part of the downtown Boston scene, and took a more global view that their investment in Boston would aid in Boston's competition with other cities for development and growth. The story of the Prudential Center thus provides a case study of urban renewal that highlights two of its central tensions: the tension between the politicians and the businessmen, and the tension between the defenders of the traditional central downtown and the apostles of redefining "downtown" to include a broader swath of the city.

Plan of the Dissertation and a Statement on Methods

This dissertation will develop the themes outlined in this introduction through a detailed study of the context and the planning of Boston's Prudential Center. Chapter 1 ("Prudential's Urban Policy for the American City") tells the story of the Prudential Insurance Company and its ambitious plans to establish Regional Home Offices in cities across America. The Prudential's RHOs were far more than divisions on an organizational chart. They were physical headquarters that had profound effects on the landscapes of the cities where they were built.

Chapter 2 (" 'I Hate Boston' ") provides a selective history of the economy and landscape of Boston, from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1960s, when the Prudential Center was built. Here is the rich milieu—the local order—that Prudential encountered and influenced by its presence.

Chapter 3 (" 'We Believe in Boston': The Politics of the Prudential Center") focuses on the political history of the Prudential Center, and Pru's bid to redevelop the Back Bay rail yards with a gleaming commercial complex. It analyzes the interconnected political and legal events that gained for an insurance company the favored tax treatment that had been reserved for organizations whose primary purpose was to fight urban blight.

Chapter 4 ("A Closed Loop: The Pike and the Pru") probes the history of the Prudential's partner in the transformation of Boston, the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, and their joint project to extend the turnpike from the suburbs into the city and to construct a complex of buildings on the old rail yard. The Pru-Pike partnership set the

course for many aspects of the physical plan of the Prudential Center and its surrounding area.

When the deals between the Pru, the Pike, and the city were signed and sealed, an anxious Boston awaited the physical results: the new buildings and their surrounds. Chapter 5 (“Building the Center: The Architecture of Business”) focuses on the architecture of the Pru. I pay special attention to the architect, Charles Luckman, a former captain of industry who brought his own uniquely industrial approach to the art and profession of architecture.

The method of this study, like its substance, combines business and urban history with architectural history. I draw from a variety of contemporary accounts of Boston in the 1940s and 50s from periodicals, newspapers, and nonfiction books to evoke the city on the eve of Prudential’s critical investment. I make extensive use of the Prudential Company archives, located in Newark, New Jersey. These archives, including planning documents and public statements by Prudential executives, tell the story for the most part from the Pru’s own perspective. Thus, they needed to be checked and balanced by documents from other sources, including the statements and appraisals of other interested groups. For this purpose, I used newspapers accounts of the 1950s and 60s as well as the reports, correspondence, and records of public hearings found in the archives of the Boston Redevelopment Authority. Several key rulings of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court not only set the rules for the public-private partnership that led to the Prudential Center, but also reflected and discussed the underlying value conflicts. Technical documents and correspondence from the ill-managed records of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority revealed the political and planning instincts of the

state's powerful highway agency. And the Charles Luckman archives, including many previously unexamined papers that were kindly provided to me by Charles Luckman's son, James Luckman, contain a set of project memoranda that followed the construction of the Prudential Center. The Luckman papers contain a marvelous collection of his public speeches on a variety of topics within architecture, business, and public affairs. The material from the architect and his firm, Charles Luckman Associates, offers a perspective on the professional culture of postwar firms and the diffusion of design ideas, including those that influenced the form of Prudential Center.

Chapter One:

Prudential's Urban Policy for the American City

Between 1948 and 1965, the Prudential Insurance Company of America, one of the largest corporations in the world, launched an expansive program of administrative decentralization. Wary of over-concentrating their operations in Newark, New Jersey, Prudential's corporate planners opened semi-autonomous Regional Home Offices (RHOs) in seven cities across North America. What began as an effort to reinvigorate Prudential's bureaucratic makeup evolved into a prominent building program and urban planning phenomenon. Prudential's organizational innovation had important economic and spatial ramifications in each of the seven home office cities. The new RHOs stimulated a languid market for commercial real estate, promoted the economic prospects of each city, and reshaped the geography of each city's business district.

In this chapter, I argue that Prudential's decentralization program embodied a deliberate urban policy. As a rule, Prudential planners favored large parcels at the fringes of established business districts where they constructed gleaming office complexes with ample parking. In each instance, Prudential was a lead actor in metropolitan restructuring: first in Los Angeles, along Wilshire Boulevard, and then Houston, Jacksonville, Chicago, Toronto, Minneapolis, and finally Boston, where the vast Prudential Center was built in coordination with the Massachusetts Turnpike over derelict railyards.

Drawing principally on the archives of the Prudential Insurance Company—including speeches, correspondence, memoranda, images, press and promotional

materials—this chapter explores the sources and consequences of Prudential’s urban strategy. Prudential executives believed that the RHOs, each a self-assured investment in urban real estate, amplified the company’s local prestige, national presence, and public posture as a *civic institution*. This civic self-consciousness appealed to Cold War-era executives who believed that the insurance industry could embody the public interest both as a facilitator of urban renewal and as a national guarantor of social welfare. This chapter discusses the Prudential approach and the way it was applied in Los Angeles, Houston, and Chicago. The next chapter will turn to the application of the approach in Boston.

That Mighty Pump, Prudential

In 1957, Prudential surpassed Metropolitan Life as the nation’s most prolific seller of life insurance policies.¹ In 1964, Robert Sheehan began a feature article on Prudential for *Fortune Magazine* with an evocative metaphor:

It’s a kind of universal power plant, vast of maw and spout, breathing in and breathing out. Its function is the collection and redistribution of the people’s savings. As the giant mechanism pumps away, there are few U.S. businesses—or few U.S. citizens, in fact—that escape the effect of either its updraft or its downdraft.

The image is immense: a heaving leviathan, suffusing every aspect of American economy and society. Sheehan highlighted the dual nature of Prudential as both underwriter and investor:

¹ “Chip off the Old Rock,” *Time*, March 18, 1957, 92.

Prudential is, in reality, two distinct but complementary businesses. One is Prudential the life underwriter and salesman of financial security. The other is Prudential the investor.

The article included an illustrated chart of the polished new Regional Home Offices, significant real estate assets and also the most visible signs of Prudential's fiscal confidence and national ambitions (fig. 1.1). But the RHO buildings were only one small piece of the company's larger investment portfolio. In 1964, Sheehan reported, Prudential was the third-largest private company in the world and insured the lives of one in five Americans. Prudential was the nation's largest financier of home and farm ownership, executed by a national network of mortgage-loan offices. Prudential wore multiple hats in the American social economy: salesman, banker, and guarantor of social security. Moreover, Prudential's financial mission was couched in explicitly moral terms:

This aggregate view of Prudential as an economic mechanism does not, of course, do complete justice to the company's character, motivation, and deep-down purpose. Life insurance was a belief before it was a business; it is a missionary effort, largely, that propels the 'pump.'"²

That belief was that life insurance was a private solution to a public need: collective financial security. From its inception, Prudential cultivated a public image and internal self-consciousness as a company with broad social responsibilities, not an ordinary business enterprise.

Corporate purification. The lore of Prudential's social mission is rooted in the story of its founder, John F. Dryden, the "frayed young dreamer from Maine," who made

² Robert Sheehan, "The Mighty Pump, Prudential." *Fortune* (January 1964): 98.

it his personal mission to bring “industrial insurance” to the United States.³ The oldest American life insurance companies, such as the Equitable, New York Life, and Mutual Life, were organized in the 1840s and 50s as stock companies that sold “ordinary” life insurance policies to middle- and upper- class people who could afford them. John Dryden envisioned a “poor-man’s insurance” that would provide some modicum of security for working families. After dropping out from Yale, Dryden worked as an agent for Aetna and other large insurance companies before coming to Newark to found the Widows and Orphans Friendly Society, which served as a collection agency for its members. The Friendly Society was the model of a nineteenth century social welfare institution that filled the breach in an urban-industrial society where traditional forms of social welfare, including the extended family, had begun to dissolve. But it was not a profitable business enterprise and was being run essentially as a charity. Dryden sought to join the concept of the Friendly Society with an innovative British concept of “industrial insurance,” pioneered by the Prudential Assurance Company of London. Dryden promised his early investors that his concept of insurance for the working classes was not a charity but “a sound business—a business of providing help for others in time of need.”⁴ There were two key elements to such an enterprise: the collection of modest weekly premiums and the application of actuarial science to draw up life-expectancy tables that established premiums and managed the company’s risk. Newark’s conservative financiers were reluctant to invest in the relatively untested concept. But Dryden’s persistence eventually won over a small cadre of progressive backers. In 1875,

³ Earl Chapin May and Will Oursler, *The Prudential: A Story of Human Security* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1950), 18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

Dryden altered the charter of the Newark Widows and Orphans Friendly Society and founded the Prudential Insurance Company of America, selling policies to working Newarkers for as little as three cents a week.⁵

Collecting premiums was only the first half of the insurance equation. The money had to be reinvested, and insurance companies like Prudential balanced their dual roles as public service corporations and financiers by establishing conservative investment policies. Dryden was an outspoken proponent of measured investing, declaring in 1884: “Our investments have been confined exclusively to Government bonds and first mortgages secured by improved real estate worth at least twice the amount loaned . . . We make security the first consideration, the rates of interest secondary.”⁶ Insurance companies needed to earn enough to cover policy claims, but not very much more. In his study of the life insurance enterprise between 1885 and 1910, the historian Morton Keller explained: “The traditional yardstick of satisfactory insurance investment—that the market value of the company’s assets should equal the policy reserve—did not require highly productive fund placement.”⁷ Insurance companies underwrote the functions of government by funneling money to municipal, state, and federal bonds. By investing heavily in mortgage loans, Prudential and its competitors also established a persistent link between insurance and housing. In the 1880s, insurance companies, which were regulated by states and not the federal government, were allowed to purchase railroad securities. The companies did not pursue industrial stocks or bonds, which they

⁵ William H. A. Carr, *From Three Cents a Week: The Story of the Prudential Insurance Company of America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975).

⁶ Dryden to W. H. Wells, September 1884, quoted in “Atkinson’s *History*,” 6, quoted in Morton Keller, *The Life Insurance Enterprise, 1885–1910* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1963), 128.

⁷ Keller, *The Life Insurance Enterprise*, 128.

considered too vulnerable to economic fluctuations and thus inappropriate for a public-interest institution that held the public's money in trust.

However, the large insurers were not beyond public reproach. In 1905, Charles Evans Hughes—later the governor of New York and the Chief Justice of the United States—led an investigation commissioned by Senator William W. Armstrong of New York into the business practices of large insurance companies. The results damaged the industry's reputation for benevolence. Hughes exposed a litany of infractions: corporate nepotism, inflated salaries, self-perpetuating directorships, costly marketing techniques, political meddling, dubious investment activities, and “executives who thought of themselves more as financiers than as insurance men.”⁸ Some insurance companies responded by reorganizing their corporate charters. In 1915, Prudential became a “mutual” company, whereby ownership was transferred from stockholders to the policyholders themselves. Keller called this a “ceremony of corporate purification.”⁹ The Armstrong investigation publicized the fact that insurance companies were important conduits of capital flow throughout the national economy, and sparked the proliferation of state regulations to guarantee the regional recirculation of locally collected savings. Prudential internalized this principle when it constructed regionally autonomous Home Offices in the 1950s.

Regulation and real estate. With government bonds and home mortgages viewed as safe investments with predictable yields, among John Dryden's earliest investments

⁸ Ibid., 253.

⁹ Ibid., 271. In practice, mutualization insulated company directors from interference from both stockholders as well as policy-holders, who remained largely uninvolved in the corporate operations.

were eight mortgages on Newark property near the Prudential's first office, a basement space on Broad Street.¹⁰ Prudential's interest in the mortgage loan business drove the company to establish a network of field offices to inspect properties. In the 1920s, Prudential made many individual loans for the construction of small homes. In the 1930s, Prudential sought to minimize foreclosures by initiating a "reconstruction policy" that extended forbearance to the many delinquent and defaulted loans on homes and farms. The policy was formulated as part of an expansive mortgage loan network, an infrastructure that bolstered the company's national stature and sales operations.

In 1922, a New York statute allowed insurers to invest directly in housing projects. In this case, government turned to insurance companies to provide a public good—shelter—where the private housing market had failed: "The purpose of this statute was to help alleviate a shortage of housing rather than to broaden investment outlets."¹¹ The architectural historian Roberta Moudry has argued that insurance companies had an ideological interest in modern housing practices designed to enhance the health and hygiene of urban working classes. Many state urban redevelopment laws were drafted in the 1940s with the explicit intention of encouraging insurers to invest in large-scale housing projects. For example, Metropolitan Life financed the construction of Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village on a broad swath of "slum" territory on

¹⁰ May and Oursler, *The Prudential*, 203.

¹¹ Harold Wayne Snider, *Life Insurance Investment in Commercial Real Estate* (Philadelphia: S. S. Heubner Foundation for Insurance Education, 1956), 2.

Manhattan's Lower East Side after it had been cleared through the state government's power of eminent domain in the early 1940s.¹²

After World War II, insurance companies lobbied state legislatures to gain increased access to real estate markets. Beginning in 1948, many states amended their laws regulating life insurance investment practices. Henceforth, insurance companies could invest directly in real estate and act as owner-operators. Prudential immediately entered the housing arena, constructing garden apartment complexes across the United States. In the 1950s, Prudential was an early player in the market for federally guaranteed mortgage loans for suburban homes. Prudential mortgage specialists established lending policies that favored large-scale "community builders" working in green-field sites at the metropolitan fringe. Prudential financed commercial development, as well, especially suburban shopping centers, including the upscale Short Hills Mall in New Jersey.¹³ In this context, the Regional Home Office program crystallized three features of Prudential's postwar real estate developments: the confidence to take on large projects, the regional and essentially suburban qualities of these developments, and Prudential's physical manifestation as a national institution

Insurance and government. Prudential had already opened the Western Home Office in Los Angeles when Pru's President, Carrol M. Shanks, was called to testify

¹² See Roberta Moudry, "Architecture as Cultural Design: The Architecture and Urbanism of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1995); see also Marc A. Weiss, "The Origins and Legacy of Urban Renewal," *Urban and Regional Planning in an Age of Austerity*, eds. Pierre Clavel, John Forester, and William M. Goldsmith (New York: Pergamon Press, 1980).

¹³ Thomas Hanchett, "Financing Suburbia: Prudential Insurance and the Post-World War II Transformation of the American City," *Journal of Urban History* 26, no. 3 (2000): 315.

before a subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee in 1949.¹⁴ In a manner less solemn or accusatory than Hughes' 1905 investigation, the Congressmen struggled to grasp the sheer size and influence of insurance companies like Prudential. Shanks patiently described Prudential's omnipresence to the poorly informed politicians:

We are not limited by any particular geographical area. We provide capital in the forms for expansion and modernization of business and industry. We enable families to buy and build homes and to own and operate farms . . . The businesses which we have helped finance are a complete cross section of our economy. They include practically every type of business in every part of the country. They range from stockyards to the cosmetic industry, to abrasives, to television, from clocks to shipping, covering the whole field, including the great oil producing and refining companies and also the corner filling stations.¹⁵

The Congressmen were shocked to learn that Prudential's single largest investment in any given year was United States government bonds. Prudential's capital helped underwrite government, but perhaps not inappropriately. Both the federal government and Prudential sought longevity and security. Moreover, the growth of insurance companies, Shanks insisted, would precisely echo the growth of the national economy as a whole—the two were inextricable. In his curt and forthcoming way, Shanks extolled the advantages of a national institution like Prudential:

As I pointed out, gentlemen, this is one of the important economic advantages of a large national company, the channeling of funds from the surplus areas to the areas of great and growing development where those funds are needed.¹⁶

¹⁴ The subcommittee was formally named the “Special Subcommittee on the Study of Monopoly Power of the Committee of the Judiciary of the United States House of Representatives,” and was known as the “Celler Committee,” after Brooklyn's Emanuel Celler who chaired the subcommittee.

¹⁵ Carrol M. Shanks, President of Prudential, to House Judiciary Committee, November 3, 1949, Prudential Archives (hereafter cited as PA) 01–07, 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

Bigness and scope were assets, not detriments, to the national economy. Prudential could redistribute money from established areas with a large customer base (the industrialized East and Midwest) to developing areas where investment opportunities were plentiful. Shanks revealed that “Sunbelt” regions of the South, Southwest, and West received more in investment funds than were taken out in premiums—a revelation that prompted New York Republican Kenneth B. Keating to quip: “With all that money going down south from the Prudential Insurance Company, that eliminates the need of so much Federal money going to the South.”¹⁷ His colleagues laughed, but the comment was astute: insurance and government played overlapping roles.

Carrol Shanks maintained a clear idea about the social role of his insurance company. Like *Fortune*’s image of a mighty pump, Shanks portrayed the financial character of Prudential in liquid terms, pooling and flowing without geographical restraint. “The life insurance company is a sales and service organization which accumulates reserves and hence has funds to invest,” he announced to a group of realtors in Chicago. “It performs a gigantic pooling and redistribution service. These funds are directed into all parts of the American economy, wherever located geographically or in whatever segment or portion of our economy. They flow wherever there is a call for capital.”¹⁸

Shanks believed that this flow of capital should proceed unfettered by too many regulations. He believed in the American system of what he called “free enterprise

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁸ Carrol M. Shanks, “Address by Carrol M. Shanks, President of The Prudential Insurance Company of America, at the Sixty-Sixth Annual Banquet of the Chicago Real Estate Board in the Grand Ballroom of the Stevens Hotel, Chicago, Ill. at 6:30 p.m., Wednesday, May 4, 1949,” PA 01-07.

democracy,” and believed that over-regulation would undermine the natural operation of this free-market system. Shanks believed that businessmen were the best qualified people to foster economic stability and, by promoting stability, to bolster the American way of life. “If the business man is not to lead, who is?” Shanks’s rhetorical question implied that neither the politician nor the public bureaucrat was the man for this job. Shanks cultivated the reputation of business as a benevolent force in American public life, insisting that business decisions reflected the public interest more than did political maneuvering. Business, not government, contained the progressive power to resolve national problems. The weakness of the Russian system, Shanks insisted, was the draining of independent business leaders in favor of a stifling, planned economy. Democracy, for Shanks, was best preserved by corporate self-government, not the lordly oversight of cumbersome regulatory bureaucracies.¹⁹

United States Congressmen in 1949 were willing to accept the important role of a large private company in the national economy and were interested in apprehending the principles that guided Prudential’s ambitious postwar decentralization program. A very large corporation was in effect splitting off into several smaller ones—though each regional iteration of Prudential would itself be larger than almost any other competing insurance company. Shanks explained that each RHO was given enough autonomy to establish its own sales, service, and investment operations. Marketing would be locally responsive. Claims would be processed more efficiently. Executives would network with local business elites, and regional bosses would gain leadership experience that

¹⁹ Carrol M. Shanks, “Responsibilities of Businessmen,” a speech given by President Shanks of the Prudential Insurance Company of America before the Denver Rotary Club, October 7, 1948, PA 01–07.

benefited the company as a whole. And, finally, the buildings that housed these regional operations were local investments in urban real estate as well as important markers of Prudential's national standing.

Break the Whole Thing Up

The service Prudential gave to the people of the United States was constant and inconspicuous.²⁰

“Inconspicuous” was an inaccurate term to describe Prudential's service to American people. The authors of this description, from a convivial corporate biography of the firm, confused omnipresence for inconspicuousness. Prudential's activities were so pervasively diffused through American social and economic life that they seemed to disappear into the atmosphere like so many particles of air.

In fact, Prudential had a very conspicuous presence in American visual culture, from advertisements in every imaginable medium to the architecture of their home and branch offices. In 1896, a young advertising man at the J. Walter Thompson agency hit upon the Rock of Gibraltar as Prudential's defining icon, and joined it with this phrase: “The Prudential Has the Strength of Gibraltar.”²¹ The image was quickly adopted and advertised, designed to symbolize the unbreakable strength and security of the firm. The Rock of Gibraltar is a monolithic limestone promontory at the tip of the Iberian Peninsula. But a 1898 advertisement in *Life Magazine* featured a “Bright Boy (who reads

²⁰ May and Oursler, *The Prudential*, 176.

²¹ Carr, *From Three Cents a Week*, 43.

the papers)” claiming that the Rock of Gibraltar could be found in Newark, New Jersey: “It is owned by the Prudential Insurance Company” (fig. 1.2).

Home office, branch office. By 1910, the icon was branded across the nation. In large cities and small towns, Prudential established an extensive network of branch offices, opened for business among other Main Street proprietors. As historians of Prudential have noted, “The Prudential sign with its Rock of Gibraltar was a familiar sight on any Main Street, as well known to the farmers and ranchers of the Middle West and West as it was to the factory workers of New Jersey and New England.”²² In these early decades, each branch office functioned as a franchise of Prudential and reported directly to the Home Office in Newark, where policies were processed, claims paid, and investment decisions made.

As Prudential’s national scope and exposure expanded, so did the Home Office complex in Newark. John Dryden first housed the “Prudential Friendly Society” in 1875 in the basement of the National State Bank on Broad Street in Newark. In 1878 he rented a storefront and two floors in the Centennial Building on Market Street. In 1883, the growing company moved again, to the Jube Building on Market Street. By that time, Prudential had established its own actuarial department to calculate the risks associated with insuring particular policy-holders. Each policy was recorded on a piece of paper that had to be filed, and Prudential created a printing department to supply its own forms. In the 1890s, the company had outgrown its rented office space. Dryden decided to build a Home Office to house the fast-growing company and commissioned the prestigious

²² May and Oursler, *The Prudential*, 170.

New York architect George Post to design an 11-story skyscraper, the “Prudential Building,” on Broad Street (fig. 1.3).

Post’s design was a massive, heavy, and opulent building. Any building of its size would have reflected the company’s expansion and fiscal self-confidence. But the Prudential Building also used architectural iconography to project a fortress-like quality that evoked the attributes of strength and security. Post used turrets, canonical towers, and elaborate dormers with pointed roofs to suggest a fortified French Chateau. He borrowed from the Romanesque style that H.H. Richardson had popularized, incorporating heavy, rounded archways of rough-hewn stone and deeply recessed windows. Two large stone lions sat atop the squat, rounded entrance archway, and various gargoyles were scattered across the façade. The building was a palpable commitment to Newark’s urban culture and the importance of its central business district.

Despite its nostalgic external appearance, the steel-framed Prudential Building was a modern marvel with the most up-to-date amenities, including hydraulic, piston-driven elevators, steam heat, running hot and cold water, gas and electric lighting, and telephones in every office. Executives had individual offices, but most of the space was given to open floors where secretaries and clerks processed insurance policies. The Prudential was a huge urban production plant, with its own printing and mailing department, designed to function as a massive filing cabinet: “Millions of records had to be filed, indexed, and obtainable at a moment’s notice.”²³

The Prudential staff soon outgrew the 1892 Prudential Building. Prudential acquired adjacent parcels, and in 1901 four more buildings were in construction: the

²³ Ibid., 175.

twelve-story Main Building addition, the twelve-story North Building, the eleven-story West Building, and the Ten-Story Northwest Building. In 1910, an addition to the North Building was erected. The Prudential buildings housed the colossal bureaucracy of a major financial institution. And though Prudential relied on the Rock of Gibraltar to symbolize the company, the stalwart architecture of the Home Office complex was also designed to advertise the company's dependability. Moreover, the buildings themselves were significant investments in Newark's urban real estate market. The buildings were interconnected like a tight-knit urban campus, albeit one without very much open or green space. "By the end of 1948 there were 11,526 employees, nearly 65 per cent of them women, working in a rabbit warren of seven buildings in the heart of Newark, the most important of the structures being linked by a tunnel which was completed in 1947."²⁴

Dividends of decentralization. When he testified before Congress in 1949, Carrol M. Shanks had praised bigness. Scale and scope allowed Prudential to make sound investment choices without settling for quick profits or short-sighted convenience. But bigness had weaknesses that threatened to sabotage the company's future success. The most serious weakness was an elaborate, top-down bureaucracy that stifled innovation and obscured emerging leadership talent. Executives were over-specialized and acted too cautiously. Smaller companies were more nimble, more responsive to new ideas. Moreover, Prudential relied almost exclusively on the labor market in Newark for new

²⁴ Carr, *From Three Cents a Week*, 123.

employees. Robert Green, a Vice-President in Prudential's Methods Department, had a solution: "Break the whole thing up."²⁵

In a 1945 memorandum to Carrol Shanks, Green proposed an ambitious program of corporate decentralization by establishing what he called Branch Home Offices across the United States and Canada. These were designed to address three principal objectives: "(1) To make the Company a truly national institution. (2) To give the Company stronger local significance in various sections. (3) To develop executive personnel."²⁶ The Branch Home Offices would be as independent as possible, each led by a Senior Vice President who would act like a president of a smaller company, "capable of passing judgment on sales problems, investment problems and general administration. He should have the good public relations sense and devote his interests and energy to promoting the Prudential throughout his area in all branches of the business." To achieve Green's goals, the regional executives "must be allowed plenty of leeway."²⁷ The executive Home Office would remain in Newark to manage the company's overall accounts, perform most of the actuarial work, and coordinate between the Regional Homes.

Green did not explicitly view the regional homes as real estate opportunities (he did not rule out renting space), but he understood the significance of their physical presences as a public image: "The point of location, nature of the office—whether rented or Prudential owned, type of building, etc.—will have some effect on local significance

²⁵ Ibid., 119.

²⁶ "Memorandum for Mr. C. W. Shanks, Executive Vice President," PA 10-20, Correspondence/Memorandum 1945-1959, 1.

²⁷ Ibid., 2.

and public relations in the area,” he wrote to Shanks.²⁸ Green first suggested locating the Branch Home Offices in cities where the Federal Reserve had established branches, each a key financial center, but quickly dismissed the idea: “We wish to be known as a service institution and not a financial institution, and, therefore, some variation might be desirable.”²⁹ Green shrewdly recognized that Prudential’s civic orientation transcended mere finance. Shadowing the Federal Reserve would not send the right message.

The concept of decentralization came from Prudential’s Methods Department—what might today be called “corporate operations.” But Shanks chose a man with experience in the Public Relations and Advertising Department as well as the Real Estate Department to manage the home office building program: Samuel Westcott Toole. Robert Green was vaguely certain that decentralization would enhance Prudential’s national standing and local significance. But Toole had a clear-eyed view of the “extra dividends” of decentralization, and he spoke about them frequently in his public appearances, as he said in one speech: “I refer to the advertising and public relations value derived from our attractive buildings.” As an executive involved in the selection of building sites for the RHOs, Toole revealed that Prudential chose “dramatic and strategic” locations in order to yield these “extra dividends.”³⁰

“Wes” Toole was fascinated by public image and name recognition. In 1947, he commissioned a nationwide survey to “obtain a scientific assessment of the public’s attitude toward the Prudential.” The survey included this question: “When you think of

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ S. Westcott Toole, speech to Mortgage Loan Conference, Skytop, Pennsylvania, November 14, 1957, PA 01–123, 2.

the leading life insurance companies in the country, which ones come to mind?” 48% of respondents named Prudential. 56% named Metropolitan Life. A similar survey was conducted in 1954, and Prudential came out on top, with 56% of respondents naming it as a leading insurance company. Toole attributed the increase to the Prudential’s decentralization program.³¹

Toole, the ad-man, constructed a compelling theory that linked geography, architecture, and visual culture to his company’s public image and commercial success: “I think you will agree that our buildings are strategically located so that they can be seen by hundreds of thousands of people each year and they therefore become living day to day advertisements of the Prudential and what the Prudential stands for.”³² Toole focused on two aspects of Prudential’s RHO buildings: the view *of* the building, and the view *from* the building—from the observation decks and restaurants that were frequently built on the top floors. Toole understood that for architecture to function as advertisement, it had to be visually prominent and avoid being lost in the throng of skyscrapers in the central business district. To achieve this, there was a need for a buffer zone surrounding the building, so that views of the building would not be obstructed. Prudential’s Chicago tower, opened in 1955, was just north of Grant Park, a public amenity that excluded multi-story buildings. As Toole explained, Grant Park became like the building’s own front yard, “so that we will forever have an unobstructed view of our

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

building going north on Michigan Avenue. The fact that the building is not obscured by other buildings in the Loop area makes it a real landmark”³³

An urban institution. It was important to Prudential’s planners that the company remain an urban institution. This was a point of pride for Wes Toole: “It should also be noted that in no case have we gone outside the city limits for a site for one of our regional home offices. The Prudential believes strongly in the future of the downtown city.” Prudential would not join the postwar exodus of corporate offices to the suburbs. Yet Prudential’s urban identity and the architectural principles that governed home office construction created a spatial quandary in the company’s building strategies: how to find large sites that were geographically prominent and were also located in the center city. In 1955, Wes Toole delivered an address to the Real Estate Board of Newark, entitled “The Outlook for the Central City.” Toole argued that transportation technology, and the automobile in particular, had reoriented the urban region and challenged the pre-eminence of the central city. Toole noted that middle-class homes, commerce, and industry were increasingly unbound from the assets of urban concentration. But he did not think that service industries like his could afford to make the same choice: “The service industries will continue, in my opinion, to favor the central city. Can you imagine the large accounting firms, the big advertising agencies, the prominent law firms moving out to the periphery? I can’t.”³⁴

Toole conceded that there were good reasons for businesses to leave the center city: traffic congestion, parking problems, high land costs, and heavy tax burdens. But

³³ Ibid., 3.

³⁴ S. Westcott Toole, “The Outlook for the Central City,” October 13, 1955, PA 04–123, 9.

these did not outweigh the disadvantages of moving to a suburban location, where firms would have to build and operate their own buildings. Moreover, suburban office centers were too dependent on the automobile. In 1955, Toole was not willing to abandon the concepts that had established the preeminence of the central business district: the concentration of mass transit, the proximity of business contacts, and the traditions of social prominence and civic engagement. Toole urged his audience to support contemporary urban renewal plans that sought to eliminate the “slums” that surrounded the central business district. He called for more urban highways to redress the problem of new roads that bypassed the center city, thus making them less connected to their own regions. He supported Eisenhower’s proposal to throw federal funding behind the expansion of highways. Toole acknowledged that local authorities would have to improve urban parking facilities to accommodate the influx of cars. The challenges facing urban renewal efforts did not detract from Toole’s optimistic outlook for the center city. But the Regional Home Offices that Prudential proposed to build in several American cities ironically challenged the very urban principles that Toole championed. Unlike most other firms, Prudential could afford to build and operate its own buildings. And Prudential prized sites that were accessible to cars. Prudential wanted both the advantages of large, outlying sites as well as an urban address.

Location, location, location. Prudential’s RHO location choices had both local and national significance. Locally, Prudential’s architecture set new standards for the modern office landscape. The Prudential’s local choices also reoriented the established business districts, in some cases spreading them out from their established cores. And nationally, Prudential’s RHOs anointed emerging financial centers, particularly in the

South, and bolstered the fortunes of flagging cities, like Boston. In their written accounts—speeches, memoranda, and published recollections—Prudential’s executives pointed to several logics driving location. Westcott Toole emphasized public image and visibility. Charles Fleetwood, of the Southwestern Home Office in Houston, advocated “accessibility” as a leading value. He was referring principally to automotive access, which trumped what was once considered a chief advantage of a central business district (CBD) site: the proximity and accessibility of business contacts.

Prudential chose RHO cities, and locations within them, before the Interstate Highway System remapped American cities in the 1960s. The last of the RHOs, Boston’s Prudential Center, was the only project to fully embody the limited-access, highway-based logic of the regional city. In Los Angeles, Houston, and Jacksonville, Prudential built what I characterize as “boulevard” projects that anchored new business districts outside the CBD along broad, arterial streets. In Toronto, Prudential built an urban office tower in the CBD to house the Canadian Home Office. The Mid-America Home Office (MAHO) in Chicago was built downtown over the air rights of an urban rail yard—a project that directly presaged the Boston Prudential Center—and stretched the boundaries of the CBD away from the tight confines of The Loop and toward Lake Michigan. In Minneapolis, the North Central Home Office (NCHO) was built as a low-slung campus within city limits but well outside the CBD along a relatively undeveloped state highway.

As a consistent principle, Prudential’s planners sought to control large swaths of land to protect against encroaching developments, particularly those they perceived could threaten land values. In Los Angeles, Houston, Jacksonville, and Minneapolis, Prudential

buildings were developed as landscaped campuses on many acres of land, with surface parking lots, indoor and outdoor recreational facilities, cafeterias, and auditoriums. These were more than just large buildings; they were office “complexes.” They were built within city limits, a fact trumpeted by Westcott Toole when he claimed that Prudential “believed in the center city,” but they were not *of* the city. Prudential constructed independent “cities of insurance”: internally coherent but dissociated from their local environments. In their location and ambience, Prudential’s RHOs were arguably more closely related to one another than they were to their host cities.

Modern Prudential style. In a 1955 feature article, *Architectural Forum* (*AF*) described the architectural manifestations of Prudential’s corporate decentralization. *AF* tallied 3.7 million square feet of office space and \$75 million invested in Prudential’s decentralization and expansion program. Los Angeles opened in 1948, Houston in 1952, and Jacksonville, Minneapolis, and Chicago in 1955. *AF* depicted the five RHOs as a building type that shared a set of characteristics. In terms of interior organization, Prudential’s new architecture reflected the modern insurance “production line,” with broad, loft-like, open plan floors organized with long rows of electrically powered work stations. “The bulk of its work, processing thousands of insurance and investment transactions daily, is done on long white-collar production lines, with paper as the raw material and more paper as the end product.”³⁵ A single piece of paper was processed by specialized divisions before the policy was mailed back to the holder. These production line divisions—such as medical, underwriting, and issue—were spatially linked across

³⁵ “The Pru Decentralizes: A Building Program for an Office Staff of 6,200,” *Architectural Forum* 102 (1955): 144.

the open floor plan, designed for “continuous work flow in spaces as large as a small factory,” and a system of conveyors brought paper from one floor to the next. As a rule, Prudential’s floor slabs were thicker than conventional floors, reinforced with thick steel rods to bear the weight of heavy filing cabinets and business machines. Each point on the floor’s surface was as strong as the next, and modern work-stations could be “placed at will” across the homogenous plane.

The exterior architecture of Prudential’s RHOs, except for the first in Los Angeles, also shared common attributes:

Like its favorite Rock, the Pru’s last four buildings in particular are massive in shape, solidly imbedded in the ground, with a permanent-looking face of local limestone set off by granite or marble accents. A utility tower is emphasized as a rocklike slab, labeled with the Gibraltar emblem and the company’s name in letters big enough to be seen the desired distance. . . . The desired impact: the Pru is *big* but *local*.³⁶

But the massive size of each RHO was softened by the artful arrangement of wings and towers: “The big loft floors, which occupy the lower stories of the building, are broken in shape to reduce their psychological vastness and allow variations in the building’s exterior mass.” In each case, Prudential invited several local architects to propose a scheme for the new building before choosing one, though the company’s internal building department oversaw the architects’ work closely. While the approach was consistent, the aesthetic results were less than stellar: “Despite their obvious success in many respects, no Prudential building since the first one in Los Angeles is likely to win

³⁶ Ibid., 143. Emphasis in original.

any really first-rank architectural awards. . . . The problem of how a large corporation gets really distinguished architecture is still a difficult one.”³⁷

Despite the building program’s lack of aesthetic distinction, the critics admitted that Prudential’s “buildings, like its salesmen, sell solidity and permanence, and sell it by strong personal contact with the community. . . . Each building capitalizes on the strength of its location to advertise the strength of its product.” Instead of seeking distinction in modern architectural fashion, a whimsical pursuit, Prudential focused on sound planning principles to ensure each building’s long-range value and to assert the regional goals of each RHO. *Architectural Forum* explained:

In keeping with its new creed of staying ‘close to the people,’ it has made each of its headquarters highly accessible: on a major artery outside of congested areas, where it can be reached easily by employees from residential sections, yet close enough to downtown to welcome visitors and the all-important stream of mail trucks from a large post office. At the same time each site is chosen so the building will be strikingly visible: in a high or open position on a heavily traveled route.³⁸

Prudential’s locations struck a spatial bargain between the proximity to downtown amenities and accessibility at a regional scale. Visitors to a Prudential RHO might journey from a downtown office or railroad station but might also arrive from a regional airport at the metropolitan fringe. The planning and construction of the RHOs in Los Angeles, Houston, and Chicago provide case studies of the Prudential philosophy in practice and presage the planning of the Prudential Center in Boston.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

Mid-Town on the Miracle Mile: Prudential in Los Angeles

In the 1920s, Los Angeles retailers moved west from the CBD along Wilshire Boulevard to enhance their accessibility to increasingly mobile and far-flung shoppers. The stretch of Wilshire Boulevard between La Brea and Fairfax Avenues was known as the “Miracle Mile,” a trendy retail district dotted with moderne and art deco-style buildings. The Miracle Mile was an archetype for the linear, automobile-oriented commercial district. The apotheosis of this trend was the construction in 1928 of the Bullocks-Wilshire department store, designed for car access and planned with a large parking lot behind the building.³⁹ Prudential amplified this spatial trend by locating its Western Home on the Miracle Mile in 1948, hastening the decentralization of office space in Los Angeles along the boulevard. By the 1960s, this portion of Wilshire had become a high-density “mid-town” office district.⁴⁰

Westward, Ho! “The Shift from Center of Concentration.” In 1946, Carroll Shanks formed a small committee to advise him on the decentralization process. The committee’s first recommendation was to start with a home office on the Pacific coast serving eleven western states and Hawaii.⁴¹ San Francisco housed the regional Federal Reserve Bank but Shanks preferred Los Angeles, the anchor of Southern California’s energetic economy. In a 1947 speech to the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles

³⁹ See Richard Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920–1950* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).

⁴⁰ Larry R. Ford, “Midtowns, Megastructures, and World Cities,” *Geographical Review* 88, no. 4 (1998).

⁴¹ The WHO was responsible for California, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and what was then the Territory of Hawaii.

Chamber of Commerce, Shanks confided that “the selection of Los Angeles was not a difficult choice. The impressive growth of this section in all categories—and the vigorous promise of the future—seemed to make this a natural head office site for the West.” Population and industrial development were both on the rise in the West. Shanks, a man with a head for numbers, had seen the “figures” and they were “breathtaking. One can’t resist a thrill merely in reading them.”⁴² Shanks couched Prudential’s decision to open a Western Home Office (WHO) in Los Angeles in a grand historical narrative, and spoke in prophetic terms: “We are at a great turning point in our national set-up. During the next few decades we are going to see a tremendous shift of the financial and economic control of industries to the West and to the Southwest.” Shanks did not want Prudential merely to follow this historical trend, but to lead it. He wanted the WHO to be a truly Western institution, not a glorified branch office, but “autonomous to a high degree . . . it will control the destinies of Prudential—which is a great sales, service and investment institution—in the West.”

In 1948 Shanks addressed the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, titling his speech “The Shift from Center of Concentration.” The title contained multiple meanings. In terms of the national economy, Shanks saw economic power shifting from East to West. He predicted that “the further expansion and growth of the [western region] . . . will bring about a substantial shift from the older, mature Eastern centers of concentration.” Prudential would play an active role in this shift, “channeling large amounts of capital from the East to the West,” a process that he believed would have a stabilizing effect on

⁴² Carrol M. Shanks, “Outline of address before Board of Directors of Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce,” May 2, 1947, PA 01–07.

national capital flows. But Shanks' theme also contained a specifically urban-geographical meaning. He began by railing against the "artificial concentration of business" in the Northeast that was a result of business mergers and consolidations.

These institutional arrangements had socio-spatial consequences:

Then there is the concentration of the people into the cities of that area. What a price they pay in wasteful, inefficient and unhappy life. Dirt, noise, congestion. Slums and deteriorating areas. In one Eastern City (probably in many) the taxes from the slum areas are only one sixth the cost of the city services for that area. Traffic jams and delays.⁴³

Shanks sought to spare Western cities from this undesirable urban condition. We can perceive this attitude in the site planning for the WHO and other Prudential RHO projects.

Site selection: The Miracle Mile. Shanks' Decentralization Committee (also a de-facto site selection committee) asked the director of Prudential's mortgage loan office in Los Angeles, Bill Scholl, to scout locations for the WHO. Scholl kept the process secretive. In his negotiations with property owners, Scholl feigned to represent an anonymous third party. Prudential had deep pockets, and sellers who knew the prospective buyer's identity would increase the price of land. Scholl identified an unbuilt ten-acre lot on Wilshire Boulevard between Curson and Masselin Streets, one block from an exposed swath of the La Brea tar pits. The subterranean tar pits extended beneath Prudential's proposed site, but an engineer assured Scholl and Prudential's committee that a light, low-rise building (fewer than ten stories) could be safely erected. This physical constraint matched the city's ordinance for height limits on new construction.

⁴³ Carrol M. Shanks, "The Shift from Center of Concentration," a speech to the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, September 24, 1948, PA 01-07.

The engineer proposed that Prudential's new building float over the tar pits on a concrete slab, without foundations or pilings.⁴⁴

The site-selection committee recommended buying half the site, more than enough space to erect a building that could house the projected staff and operations of the WHO. But Carrol Shanks insisted on purchasing the entire tract. This was the first indication that Prudential perceived RHO sites as real estate investments and not just physical plants to house internal operations. By the mid-1950s, insurance companies were permitted by Federal and State regulations to invest more freely in real estate. But in 1947, their direct real estate activities were restricted to developing office facilities for their own use. Shanks, who forecast immense economic growth in the West, must have perceived the long-term, speculative advantages of controlling a larger site. Shanks's executive decision also matched his urban ideology. Prudential needed room to stretch out and to insulate itself from "dirt, noise, and congestion." There was no indication that Shanks entertained specific opinions concerning architectural style or site-planning principles; he certainly could have imagined the need for a broad parking plaza. But perhaps the clearest motivation behind Prudential's bid for an expansive urban site, larger than was strictly required, was the long-term security of land values. Shanks saw no reason to risk the encroachment of an unpleasant neighbor in the future. Such a neighbor could act without Prudential's approval, driven by an irresponsible, short-term profit motive, and without Prudential's public commitment to stability and enduring value.

⁴⁴ Carr, *From Three Cents a Week*, 132.

The building: Light modern. George Post's Prudential Building in Newark was heavy. The Western Home Office in Los Angeles, designed by the large, local firm of Wurdeman & Beckett, was *light*:

When the original home office was built, John Dryden had insisted on the heaviest material available. It was a massive structure, proudly described as 'an iron-and-steel building enclosed in brick and stone.' The blue granite flagstones around the Newark home office were the largest ever quarried, weighing up to eighty tons. The Prudential western home office reflected the spirit of a later day. It was lighter in construction than almost any other building of its kind and size of the world.⁴⁵

The building had to be light because it rested on only 17 feet of firm soil above the La Brea tar pits and was erected without a basement on a concrete float instead of the more typically used steel pilings. Wurdeman & Beckett used light-weight construction techniques to eliminate deadweight, including floors made of 4-inch pumice concrete slabs and pre-stressed spandrels of the same material that required fewer steel columns, beams, or girders than a more conventional building. The architects also used a light-weight fireproofing of pumice concrete and vermiculite plaster. Nonetheless, Prudential executives tethered their light building to the ground with a cornerstone shaped from a two-ton piece of the Rock of Gibraltar, a gift from the British government, which was laid on June 1, 1948.⁴⁶

The Western Home Office was eventually dubbed "Prudential Square." The 517,000 square-foot, \$8 million building was executed in a spare, postwar modern style (fig. 1.4). *Architectural Forum*, which featured the Prudential building in May 1949 along with another new office building designed by Wurdeman & Beckett for General

⁴⁵ May and Oursler, *The Prudential*, 321.

⁴⁶ Carr, *From Three Cents a Week*, 131.

Petroleum, heralded the building as “highly dramatic, thoughtfully conceived, carefully planned.” The General Petroleum building, designed as an administrative headquarters, was located on a valuable site in downtown Los Angeles, which the architects filled to its allowable limits save for two internal courtyards. Wurdeman & Beckett also designed an urban parking structure to complement the office building. But Prudential developed a less expensive, eleven-acre site on Wilshire Boulevard that was assembled when the city agreed to close a bisecting street. *Architectural Forum* announced that “Prudential, free to spread out over two city blocks, is a special product of sprawling Los Angeles.”⁴⁷ The generous lot gave the architects “plenty of space to design the building as they felt it should be—with ample room for ground floor stores, parking space for 1,000 cars and a chance to add a third wing later behind the central tower” (fig. 1.5). The ground floor stores, including a bank and the first California branch of Newark-based Ohrbach’s Department Store, faced the street and sidewalk, and the architects placed the surface parking lot at the back of the lot. Behind the two- and three-story retail pavilions rose the wide, ten-story office block, interrupted by a central tower that housed the service core, and also served as a dramatic billboard for 8’-tall letters PRUDENTIAL, highly visible from Wilshire in both directions (fig. 1.6).

The office tower of the Prudential building featured 13 ft. 9 in. ceilings across the open floor plans designed for clerical activities (fig. 1.7). Tall casement windows ran from column to column to let in as much light as possible, complemented by an indirect fluorescent lighting system. *Architectural Forum*’s writers approved: “Seen from the outside, the long lines of lighting fixtures, parallel to windows, conform very effectively

⁴⁷ “Two Office Buildings in Los Angeles,” *Architectural Forum* (May 1949).

to the basic design of the long horizontal structure. Outside rows of light are kept going until midnight for advertising purposes.” The building was entirely air-conditioned, but the architects were conscious of reducing the impact of the sun on the cooling system. They eliminated all windows on the west and east ends of the building and on all four sides of the central service core. The building’s most distinguishing external features were the horizontal, louvered sunshades that projected from each floor. “The sun shades dramatize the 325 ft. sweep of the windows, while the blank walls at the ends and in the central tower offer an effective contrast with the long rows of windows.”

Prudential’s real estate team in Los Angeles planned Prudential Square with a nod toward the commercial quality of Wilshire Boulevard, with room for ground floor stores that faced the street. (Prudential occupied no space on the ground floor of the building except for a small information office in the lobby.) Ohrbach’s agreed early to rent space in the building for its first foray in the West, and the architects designed for the department store a three-level wing with a mezzanine and sidewalk arcade. Prudential provided a second-floor cafeteria for its employees that opened to a large patio on the roof of a second, low-slung commercial pavilion.

Access to Paradise: Houston and the Great Southwest

After establishing the Western Home Office in Los Angeles, Carrol Shanks moved swiftly to advance his decentralization agenda. He requested and received approval from Prudential’s Board of Directors to open three additional Regional Home Offices. All three projects were developed simultaneously, and each opened in 1952: The Canadian

Home Office (CHO) in Toronto, the Mid-American Home Office (MAHO) in Chicago, and the Southwest Home Office (SWHO) in Houston.

The Great Southwest. Shanks chose Charles Fleetwood, Prudential's Vice President of the Mortgage Loan and Real Estate Investment Department, to head the SWHO. Like the other RHOs, the building's cornerstone featured a "time capsule," and Fleetwood contributed a letter addressed "To whom it may concern in the year 2000" that described the establishment of the SWHO. He addressed the most obvious question—the choice of Houston to host this Regional Home Office. Fleetwood echoed Carrol Shanks' conviction that the Southwest was postwar America's most dynamic economic growth region: "Houston had enjoyed remarkable growth during World War II and the post-war years and seemed on the threshold of even greater growth and economic development."⁴⁸ In his own letter for the time capsule, W.P. Hobby, President of the *Houston Post*, reiterated Shanks' conviction that the balance of financial power in the United States was in a state of transition:

This Southwestern headquarters brings to Houston a significant development in the field of investment and finance. It is one more step in a process which may be described as a shifting of the financial center of gravity of this nation from the big industrial cities of the North and East to the South, Southwest and West Coast regions.⁴⁹

The development of the SWHO contributed to this trend, and validated Houston's position as a leading financial center.

Following the pattern set by Bill Scholl in Los Angeles, Fleetwood emphasized the need for secrecy in the site-selection process: "The next step was to proceed quietly

⁴⁸ Charles Fleetwood, "To Whom it May Concern in the Year 2000," *1952 Time Capsule*, Event Files, 1952, PA 10–26, 1.

⁴⁹ W. P. Hobby to Carrol M. Shanks, *1952 Time Capsule*, PA 10–26, Event Files, 1952.

and locate and option a suitable building site in Houston before the cat was out of the bag.”⁵⁰ Prudential sought the advice of local real estate magnate Jesse Jones. Prudential had financed several of Jones’s commercial real estate projects, and Fleetwood recalled that “Mr. Jones, then in his 75th year, was an old friend.” Initially, Jones urged Prudential to locate in downtown Houston. In a somewhat self-serving gesture, he offered to sell Prudential one of his own parcels: an entire city block near the Houston Municipal building. But Fleetwood demurred, eschewing the opportunity to build on a large urban lot. Recollecting those early conversations with Jesse Jones and others, Charles Fleetwood wrote about the choice to locate in a site that was within city limits but some four miles from downtown:

Mr. Jones felt that we should locate downtown in the center of the business district, if possible, and was surprised to learn that we had in mind buying a suburban site. We explained our reasons, namely that the nature of our business made it unnecessary for us to be downtown; that by going farther out we would be able to avoid traffic and parking problems, and provide better and more practical working conditions for employees for less money. Mr. Jones was not convinced, but recognized that our needs were different from that of the average business.⁵¹

The “average” business derived influence from a downtown location by virtue of proximity to other, more powerful institutions. This was the basic principle of an urban agglomeration economy and its physical expression in a dense central business district, where land-values were high and buildings were commensurately tall and bulky. In this milieu, firms and their executives nurtured interpersonal relationships and formed business partnerships that sustained their enterprises. Leading industrial corporations—in Houston these were the large oil companies like Gulf and Shell—looked to their more

⁵⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁵¹ Ibid., 3.

average neighbors to perform specific tasks, such as banking, legal representation, accounting, and marketing. But Prudential represented a more expansive and autonomous corporate enterprise, one that internalized many of these secondary office functions. This is not to say that Prudential did not forge beneficial relationships with local businesses and professional firms. But Prudential was a heavyweight, and created its own center of gravity. Prudential was less sensitive to the typical advantages of a CBD location and freer to pursue its own agenda.

The ideal site. Houston's southwestern quadrant was bisected by Old Main Street, a broad boulevard that ran directly toward the CBD. Fleetwood enlisted a local real estate broker, Ernest Hester of the firm Hester and Wise, to scout for sites in this general area. Hester quickly identified a 27.5 acre vacant site at the intersection of Old Main Street and Holcombe Boulevard, four miles outside the CBD and near the Houston Medical Center and the Rice Institute. The site was also across the street from the recently constructed Shamrock Hotel, a \$20 million development and a choice accommodation for business travelers. "This piece of land lying at the intersection of two main arterial streets," Fleetwood remarked in his time-capsule essay, "seemed to offer great possibilities as a site for an imposing building which would dominate the area and which would quickly become a well-known landmark."⁵²

But Fleetwood was not entirely confident in his own instincts about the site, or even the best advice of his local experts, Jesse Jones and Ernest Hester. (After all, Jones originally favored a downtown site.) Fleetwood was cautiously inventing his own theory of the ideal regional location in an age of increasingly accessible jet travel and ubiquitous

⁵² Fleetwood, "To Whom it May Concern."

auto-mobility. Fleetwood turned to a nationally recognized expert to see if his intuitions corresponded with broader urban trends. He hired Homer Hoyt, a well-known real estate consultant, to prepare a “Survey of Regional Office Location in Houston, Texas.” Hoyt’s report, submitted in 1950, commenced with an overall picture of the Houston economy. He validated both Fleetwood and Shanks’ appraisals that Houston was an important urban center, a city that manifested the shift in American industrial growth from North to South. The report recognized Houston as a *growing* city, in terms of population, physical area, and industrial production. Between 1940 and 1947, Houston led the United States in per capita total investment in all new industrial plants. Hoyt reported the number of employees and annual payrolls of these new industries. Each employee, after all, was also a potential policy-holder. The Port of Houston, a 50-mile fabricated channel to the sea, ranked second in the United States in tonnage in 1950. Hoyt asserted that Houston had “already attained the position of the leading metropolis of the Southwest. . . . Houston is the most logical place in which to locate a new regional office building for the nine state area.”⁵³

Hoyt then assessed the downtown location offered by Jesse Jones, along with several suburban sites. He reasoned that a central location was at the nexus of the city’s mass-transit infrastructure, principally a bus system. And Hoyt repeated the typical rationale for the agglomeration of office functions in the center city:

A central location affords proximity to other offices within walking distance, making it convenient for direct contacts. It has restaurants

⁵³ Homer Hoyt Associates, “Survey of Regional Office Location in Houston, Texas, for the Prudential Insurance Company,” February 27, 1950, PA 10–25. The nine states included Colorado, New Mexico, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

nearby and stores and shops which have an appeal to workers in lunch hours or after work. It is close to libraries, theaters and other places of amusement.⁵⁴

Hoyt evoked S. Westcott Toole's desire for a strong public image, saying that a large downtown building could create an "attractive vista." And he figured that a well-planned, 12-story structure on Jesse Jones's full-block site could handle Prudential's office space needs and still allow for sufficient parking.

But Hoyt ultimately recommended an "outlying" site. Echoing Fleetwood's assessment, he acknowledged that "convenience of access to other downtown offices is not of primary importance to the Prudential, as it will be a largely self sufficient workshop. . . . Moreover, an outlying location with ample parking space will be more convenient to business men coming by automobile than a congested central location."⁵⁵ Prudential's sheer size and internal organization permitted its abdication from the central business district. Local business contacts, especially those who needed loans, would gladly drive or take the bus down Old Main Street for an audience with Prudential's power brokers. Prudential executives had themselves discovered the convenience of air travel, a business trend that was quickly diminishing the dominance of railroads for inter-urban transport.⁵⁶ The urban and regional geography of the postwar American city was increasingly liberated from the organizing presence of the urban rail terminal and the hotels and office buildings located nearby. Hoyt addressed this issue with a broad

⁵⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁶ Carr, *From Three Cents a Week*, 132.

appreciation of national trends and, thus, articulated a novel theory of regional office location that broke with the established logic of centralization.

In his survey, Hoyt developed this “outlying location” theory in more detail. He explicitly considered the Old Main Street location, which he identified as the superior site for an “outlying location.” In broad terms, Hoyt established a hierarchy of Houston’s quadrants, with the southwest at the top. The east and southeast were heavily industrialized and contained low quality dwellings. The east and northeast were “Negro areas” and were dismissed on that fact alone. “As far as character of the neighborhood,” Hoyt asserted, “the office building should be located in the southwest sector.”⁵⁷ Without detailed explanation, he claimed that the corner of Old Main Street and Holcombe Boulevard offered the best approach to a building site.

This site was also convenient for Prudential’s employees. Citing a recent study by the Plan Commission of Houston, Hoyt explained that 47% of Houston’s downtown office workers lived in the southwest sector, and many of them already commuted to the city along Old Main Street. Houston’s bus system made frequent stops at the intersection of Old Main Street and Belaire Boulevard, one block from the Holcombe site. Hoyt also anticipated the completion of a new semi-circular expressway and several other road improvements that would serve commuters from the city’s other quadrants. The area boasted a set of “conveniences” that enhanced the desirability of the proposed site. Foremost was the Shamrock Hotel, which provided “the most modern accommodations for business visitors to the Prudential offices.” The Shamrock and its many restaurants also featured performances by top entertainers, making it a desirable cultural destination.

⁵⁷ Homer Hoyt Associates, “Survey of Regional Office Location in Houston,” 7.

The Rice Institute was building a new football stadium, another attraction. Hoyt anticipated a large regional shopping center at the corner of Bellaire and Main, giving workers “attractive nearby places in which to shop.”⁵⁸ Hoyt painted a picture of an emerging mid-town commercial and office district that featured large-scaled buildings planned for broad tracts and organized along wide boulevards.

Hoyt identified another key advantage of the Holcombe Boulevard site: its architectural visibility. A twelve-story building erected on the nearly 30-acre site would create an impressive vista along Old Main Street, unfettered by the proposed low-rise shopping center. Hoyt’s analysis addressed Prudential’s concerns regarding the long-term value of a potential site. The southwest quadrant as a whole was characterized by high land values. Recent and proposed developments for the area—all of which were high-quality, well-planned, and large-scale projects produced by sound, future-oriented institutions—would not threaten that trend. Like the site for the WHO in Los Angeles, the Houston site was insulated—protected from hard to predict encroachments from shortsighted, small-scale, or otherwise irresponsible developers.

Office building de-luxe. Having decided to purchase the site, Prudential looked for an architect. On Jesse Jones’s recommendation, Prudential hired Kenneth Franzheim’s Houston-based firm for the project. Though he never received graduate training, Franzheim (1890-1959) had practiced architecture since graduating from M.I.T. in 1913. He worked in Boston until the First World War, and then became a partner with C. Howard Crane in Detroit, specializing in the design of commercial buildings and airports. In 1928, Franzheim moved to Houston at the request of the developer Jesse

⁵⁸ Ibid., 10.

Jones, where he collaborated with Alfred C. Finn on the design of the Gulf Building at 712 Main Street. Oil companies were chief patrons of Houston's urban architecture, and the Gulf Building was one of several skyscrapers that adorned Houston's central business district in the then-fashionable art deco style. The Gulf Building, then the tallest in Houston, was characterized by stepped-back massing; recessed, ornamental spandrels; ornate metalwork; and an elaborately appointed lobby featuring classical motifs in relief and frescoes of "Modern Houston."⁵⁹ Among Franzheim's many works in 1930s Houston was the Oil and Gas Building, finished in 1937. The petroleum industry was spared the worst effects of the Great Depression, and Houston's economy was buoyed by the discovery of large oil deposits in the 1930s. Nonetheless, the Oil and Gas Building was more squat and decoratively austere than the exuberant Gulf Building and other towers of the late 1920s (fig. 1.8). The exterior design leaned toward the spare, "modernistic" style that characterized Prudential's buildings in Chicago, Jacksonville, and Franzheim's own design in Houston.⁶⁰

In New York, set-backs had been prescribed by the 1916 zoning ordinance to mitigate the canyon-like quality of lower Manhattan's business district. Subsequent permutations in architectural massing became associated with art deco towers, a common urban building type of the 1920s. But the shape of Prudential's SWHO building was not regulated by a zoning envelope. Franzheim broke the building's mass into an

⁵⁹ Kenneth Franzheim, "The Handbook of Texas Online," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/FF/ffr26.html>, accessed September 6, 2007.

⁶⁰ I am using "modernistic" to describe a transitional style between art deco and the "International Style" that began to flourish in American corporate architecture in the mid-1950s. Welton Beckett's design for the WHO in Los Angeles, though also "modernistic," carried out a horizontal emphasis.

asymmetrical composition of three interconnected towers, suggesting a miniature skyline four miles from downtown Houston: a 21-story center section, a 16-story west extension, and a 10-story east extension. The central section turned its thin edge to the Old Main Street frontage, with vertical lengths of aluminum, framed in limestone, extending past the cornice line in a fashion reminiscent of art deco styling (fig. 1.9). The architecture was boxlike and plain, but the overall massing was imposing. Prudential executives—including S. Westcott Toole, Carrol Shanks, and Charles Fleetwood—insisted, as they did in Los Angeles, in clearly labeling the building as their own. The result was a three-story high sign bearing the company’s name and its trademark, the Rock of Gibraltar, cut from Texas granite and built flush into the east and west sides of the central tower.

The Rock of Gibraltar was joined on the ground by symbolic gestures of local place-attachment. Four pillars of Texas granite were used to accent the main entrance. Prudential commissioned local artist Peter Hurd to create a southwestern-themed mural for a 46-foot curved wall in the lobby. But these flourishes were overshadowed by the building’s principal selling points: the Prudential building was Houston’s most modern, technologically up-to-date, and amenity-laden office environment. The SWHO was among the first office buildings in Houston to employ an integrated air conditioning system that heated, cooled, and dehumidified the building. The open office floors, organized with flexible partitions, were completely wired for fluorescent lighting, office machines, telephones, buzzer systems, the “Edison Televoice System” (an early type of intercom), and a public address system. The third floor housed an employee health service and the entire fourth floor was devoted to Photostat copying equipment and mail distribution. Nine large elevators were installed in the building to accommodate peak

loads. Even the toilets were organized with removable partitions to respond to fluctuating male and female populations of the building.⁶¹ In 1953, Prudential's SWHO was featured in the magazine of Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company (PPG), a publication distributed to patrons and distributors of the company's products. The magazine trumpeted the SWHO as the "office building deluxe." The building's exterior was glazed with PPG's Solex, a "heat-absorbing and glare-reducing polished plate glass." Prudential also used PPG's "Herculite" doors and door-frames. These material innovations, like the air conditioning and lighting systems, were there to make working at Prudential more comfortable for employees.

The brochure produced to accompany the opening of the SWHO, *At Home in the Great Southwest*, announced that "a Prudential Home Office is a virtually self-contained 'city of insurance.'"⁶² Franzheim had designed a sprawling campus across the 27.5-acre site that included a surface parking lot for 705 cars, 114 of which were covered carports, complete with electrical lighting standards (fig. 1.10). The parking lots were connected to the main building by designated sidewalks and covered passages. The site had been heavily wooded. Much of it was cleared, yet the design preserved selected patches of trees. An underground sprinkler system was installed to maintain the professional landscaping improvements, which featured many native plants. The forecourt in front of the main entrance was planted with azalias and featured a fountain and sculpture by Wheeler Williams titled "Wave of Life," which depicted a man, woman and child set in a

⁶¹ "Building System Information," PA 10-26, Reports 1953-1954.

⁶² "At Home in the Great Southwest," brochure 1952, PA 10-25.

small pool. The theme of the sculpture was apt, illustrating the normative family structure upon which the Prudential's business model was based.

A paradise for office girls. The provision of recreational facilities was an important aspect of the building's design, creating a "Paradise for Office Girls," as featured in *Life Magazine* in 1955 (fig. 1.11). Investments in recreational facilities were seen as important investments in the overall efficiency of the workplace, fostering employee contentment, and were part of what Prudential called a "sound personnel program and a necessary aid to efficient operation of the intricate business of life insurance."⁶³ Prudential installed two tennis courts on the east side of the building, as well as a softball diamond. The most outstanding facility was a large swimming pool at the southern end of the building, measuring 72' x 42'. The text created for tour-guides to use as they led visitor through the SWHO explained the presence of a swimming pool on the grounds of an insurance company building: "Such benefits as this pool provides for our employees more than pay their way. It costs money to employ and train people. Anything which reduces employee turnover is money well spent and good business for the Prudential and its policyholders. For example, if our clerical employee turnover were cut just 2% the pool would pay for itself."⁶⁴ Prudential's view was that the pool helped retain employees. This was certainly the case for Oveta Smith, the 18-year-old "office girl" profiled by *Life*, who turned down a \$180-a-month job at a maritime insurance firm for a \$140-a-month job at Prudential because of the fringe benefits which included "such

⁶³ Ibid. In many ways these programs and facilities recalled the "welfare work" provisions of Progressive Era factories. See Andrea Tone, *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁶⁴ "Conducted Tour for the Public," PA 10-26.

unprecedented luxuries as a free swimming pool, free books, free lunches, free tennis courts—in surroundings suggestive of spacious and graceful living.”⁶⁵

Thinking Outside the Loop in Chicago

The story of Prudential’s Mid-America Home Office (MAHO) in Chicago centers on the convoluted political process of building on a complex urban site. Prudential’s Chicago development was a prelude to the Northeastern Home Office (NEHO) in Boston, the Prudential Center, and emboldened company leaders to tackle a similarly ambitious project in an established yet economically flagging industrial city. Like the Prudential Center in Boston, the MAHO story heralded the transition from the railroad to an insurance company as the leading player in urban real estate. In Chicago, the Illinois Central Railroad sought to capitalize on its urban land assets while Prudential looked to erect a monument to its growing importance in American economy and society.

City salvage. As in Los Angeles and Houston, Prudential executives were stealthy in their search for a site in Chicago. They worked through local brokers and eventually negotiated anonymously with the land owner (the Illinois Central Railroad) through a trusted third party. Any developer who considered purchasing a significant swath of urban rail yard territory had to have plentiful resources. But the discretion that Prudential exercised—and the cloak-and-dagger efforts they made to hide their identity to sellers—demonstrated how disproportionately powerful the mammoth insurance

⁶⁵ “*Life Goes to Houston’s Paradise for Office Girls, Prudential Life Insurance Company,*” *Life* 33, September 15, 1952, 150–55.

company was in the national economy. Land sought by Prudential immediately increased in value. Prudential's decentralization planners did all they could to limit the inflation of land values by shielding their intent as long as possible.

Prudential expressed interest in building in Chicago as early as 1949. The Los Angeles WHO had opened, Houston's SWHO was in the works, and a decision on the location of the Mid-America Home Office was imminent. Prudential contacted Leo J. Sheridan, president of a leading Chicago real estate firm, and asked him to suggest locations across the region; but Chicago, the commercial, industrial, and financial heart of the Midwest, was the clear choice. Sheridan recommended an unconventional solution: the Illinois Central Railroad was selling "air rights" to their rail yards lying just east of The Loop, north of Grant Park, and west of Lake Michigan. These air rights would give a purchaser the right to build above the rail yards without disrupting the railroad's activities, which would continue unabated below (fig. 1.12). Prudential executives were impressed by the visibility of the site, which Prudential's president Carrol Shanks called "one of the most dramatic in the country."⁶⁶ Building on the Illinois Central rail yard required not only Prudential's sheer wealth, but also the institutional patience to see it through. Less financially stable developers, or developers with a less refined sense of long-range purpose, shied away from engaging in what was bound to be a long and arduous process of negotiating for the air rights and for the ground-level parcels that would contain the building's supports. There would also have to be protracted negotiations with the city about zoning restrictions. But Prudential saw the

⁶⁶ "The Story of the Prudential Building," *The Quadrennial Book of Valuations of the Central Business District of Chicago, 1951-1954*, repr., PA 10-37.

Chicago project to be within their mandate as a public service corporation. They could solve an intractable land use and development issue for the city and lay claim to a coveted urban site at the same time.

Prudential retained James Brennan, a Chicago real estate attorney, to oversee the complex negotiations for the rights to build on this site. Brennan later explained this daunting task to a group of Chicago real estate brokers: “The site for years and years had been the object of acquisition by many influential and wealthy individuals and corporations, who hoped to build a skyscraper or several skyscraper edifices on the site but none of them were ever able to bring negotiations to a successful conclusion.”⁶⁷ Brennan’s comment suggests that Prudential, which finally did succeed in developing the site, arrived in Chicago as an urban savior, willing and able to undertake complicated and expensive negotiations in order to achieve a positive result for both the company and the city at large.

Like many large cities, the economic depression of the 1930s had deep impacts in Chicago that lasted into the early 1950s. The building industries were almost completely paralyzed. If not for the massive Field Building of 1934, there would have been a net loss in office space for the city of Chicago during the years 1930-1940.⁶⁸ Many of the 1920s office towers in the Loop were deposited to receiverships of bankrupt companies. In some cases, once-profitable commercial buildings were razed when property owners sought to avoid taxes on non-paying real estate. A typical example—if glaring from the

⁶⁷ “Remarks of James J. Brennan,” undated and untitled, but apparently remarks he made to a group of Chicago-based real estate brokers in a luncheon setting, PA 10–37.

⁶⁸ See Sally A. Kitt Chappel, *Architecture and Planning of Graham, Anderson, Probst & White, 1912–1936: Transforming Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

perspective of architectural preservation—was when the H. H. Richardson-designed Marshall Field Wholesale Store was destroyed so that the land could be sold to the R. G. Lydy Company as a surface parking lot. The architectural historian Carl Condit credited the Prudential building with breaking the stagnation of postwar building in Chicago.⁶⁹

Sheridan and Brennan commenced negotiations with the Illinois Central in 1950, but they had to first convince the railroad company that it was dealing with a reputable, albeit anonymous, partner. A federal judge, William J. Campbell, played a key role in providing this assurance. Sheridan revealed to Campbell the identity of his client, Prudential, and Campbell in turn advised the president of the Illinois Central, Wayne A. Johnson, who was a personal friend, that he was dealing with a responsible and able buyer. “Judge Campbell’s assurances were all that was necessary to keep the negotiations proceeding over many months without disclosing the identity of the buyer.”⁷⁰ At first, representatives of Illinois Central were doubtful that they could come to terms on such a complex development process. “The railroad could hardly be blamed for thinking that this was another impossible and speculative dream,” Brennan recalled. “They had tried it before without success.”⁷¹ Reporting on the recently released plans for the Prudential building in 1952, *Architectural Forum* stated the case plainly:

Not until a company with the resources of Prudential decided to build was anyone willing or able to go through the expensive process of acquiring title the hard way. This meant 18 months of negotiations during which 550 separate lots for caissons, impinging girders, columns, column

⁶⁹ Carl Condit, *Chicago, 1930–1970: Building, Planning, and Urban Technology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 4.

⁷⁰ “The Story of the Prudential Building.”

⁷¹ “Remarks of James J. Brennan.”

footings and windbracing structures were separately defined and purchased.⁷²

Prudential had finally cracked the code to developing railroad air-rights, and future developers, which the Illinois Central hoped to attract to the many acres of air rights still available on the site, could follow the wording of Prudential's deed for similar projects in the future.

A lawyer's dream. The Illinois Central rail yard was exceptional among downtown Chicago building locations. Buffered by Grant Park and Lake Michigan, the prominent site promised permanent unobstructed views. This physical insulation had negative consequences, too. The 3 ½ acre site had no adjoining streets. At ground level, beneath Prudential's proposed building, were located no fewer than 21 tracks for passenger and freight traffic of the Illinois Central and Michigan Central Railroads, including passenger platforms for the railroad's suburban lines, a freight house, and a 15 story electric advertising sign. (The freight house and the sign had to be removed.) A projected building would have to be located above the Randolph Street suburban passenger station. Early in the site negotiation process, the firm of Naess & Murphy was hired to consult on architecture and engineering and was eventually awarded the contract to design the building. The Illinois Central planned to continue rail service on the site and the architects had to demonstrate that it was possible to build a large office tower built over a functioning rail terminal.

The purchase price for the air space and hundreds of small ground parcels was \$2,270,315. Brennan, the real estate lawyer, described the time-consuming and

⁷² "Chicago's Prudential Building," *Architectural Forum* 97 (August 1952): 96.

expensive negotiations between architects, engineers, attorneys, and corporate representatives that convened nearly every day for a year and a half. Brennan, for one, relished his role and was stimulated by the task. It was groundbreaking work, both literally and figuratively, and gave the real estate attorney a moment to shine:

From a lawyer's viewpoint this deal was the quintessence of real estate law practice. It was a lawyer's dream. He was in the picture relatively early in the negotiations and formed a part of them. The contracts were novel with few precedents upon which he could rely. There was no 'boilerplate' in the two contracts written, except perhaps the introductory and closing sentences; all the rest was pure, creative draftsmanship.⁷³

The agreement required legal creativity because it pioneered the concept of a three-dimensional "air-rights" space, where the railroad retained ownership of the space between the columns and caissons below the air lot levels. The negotiations impacted the building possibilities for the site and explained why Naess & Murphy had to be called to consult early in the process. The eventual design was constrained by the negotiations that determined the caisson lots that Prudential would own (fig. 1.13). As Brennan put it, "Ordinarily, you buy a piece of land and then you make up your mind what kind of building you are going to put on it. This was a situation where we had to make up our minds exactly what kind of building we wanted to build before we knew what land we were going to buy."⁷⁴

Prudential's site did not encompass the entirety of the Illinois Central holdings, and was locked within land that was zoned for industrial uses. Brennan explained Prudential's negotiation team was "faced with a very grave situation in trying to guarantee that the buildings adjoining us, when they were erected, would not be

⁷³ "Remarks of James J. Brennan."

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

objectionable to us.” Prudential solved the problem by proposing restrictions on the surrounding property, effectively changing the area’s zoning from industrial to commercial uses. The city of Chicago was willing to oblige this request in order to satisfy Prudential’s concerns. The new zoning rules provided that no use could be made of the property “which shall be of more objectionable character or produce greater or more offensive odors, fumes, smoke, gases, dust, noise or vibrations than are now conducted on or under the property.”⁷⁵ The Illinois Central was already electrified, reducing the railroad’s production of these undesirable effects. Prudential agreed to build broad viaducts along three sides of its building, and negotiated with the city of Chicago to build a fourth raised street, effectively creating a new ground plane. Prudential was loath to bear the full cost of the viaducts that subsidized future development for others and worked out a plan with the city for the eventual reimbursement of one half the cost of these new roads. Prudential had succeeded in unilaterally rezoning an emerging urban office district, and they sponsored the city’s public realm improvements that made the new district accessible.

Civic duty. For the city of Chicago, the investments in infrastructure were well worth the expense to enable a massive, tax-paying property improvement and the thousands of jobs that Prudential would bring. Prudential’s successful interactions with the city relied on the support of Mayor Martin H. Kennelly, who seized his role to facilitate Prudential’s investment. An official history of the Prudential building in Chicago highlighted this cooperative relationship:

⁷⁵ Ibid., 17.

The keen interest with which Mayor Kennelly followed the negotiations and the important assistance which he contributed at many stages of the discussions reflected the high civic importance he attached to the enterprise and his great anxiety to see that the City of Chicago was selected for the Mid-America home office of Prudential so that Chicago might reap the future large benefits which such a development assured.⁷⁶

This statement encapsulated the symbiotic relationships between pro-growth mayors like Kennelly and powerful financial institutions like Prudential: encouraging private development was a civic duty. In a letter to Kennelly, Shanks noted that “one of the impelling reasons why Prudential came to Chicago, was that we had confidence in the integrity of the government which you head up—that when the citizens of Chicago have a man like Martin H. Kennelly as mayor, it sustains my faith in the government of our cities.”⁷⁷

Mayor Kennelly, playing the part of the showman and booster so typical of big city mayors, also saw Prudential’s MAHO as a bullish investment in the urban fortunes of his city. At the groundbreaking ceremony in 1952, Kennelly crowed that “this Mid-America building has been conceived of a superb confidence in Chicago’s future.”⁷⁸ And at the ceremony marking the topping-out of the building’s steel structure in 1954, Kennelly equated Prudential’s private venture with the civic pride of his city and its citizens. The occasion of Prudential’s development of the Mid-America Home Office in Chicago had captivated “the public interest.” The mayor went on:

That interest has made the Mid-America building more than just another triumph of the architectural genius of the world-famous Chicago firm of

⁷⁶ “The Story of the Prudential Building.”

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Martin H. Kennelly, “Address at the Ground-Breaking Ceremonies for The Prudential Building,” August 12, 1952, PA 10–38, Event Files 1952.

Naess and Murphy. It has made it more than just another new skyscraper—more than just another big Chicago commercial enterprise. Bigness—in itself—even forty-one stories of bigness—doesn't impress Chicago too much. But—in many ways—this Mid-America building has become a civic project—a rallying point for Chicago's newly awakened civic pride. Millions of Chicago citizens regard it as the brightest new gem in the crown of “Chicago—the Magnificent City.” They accept it as the symbol of the city's rebirth. That renaissance—as you know—is the talk of the country.⁷⁹

Tooting his own horn, Kennelly proudly noted that in 1951, Carrol Shanks explained Prudential's choice of Chicago based on his “confidence in the integrity of the local government.”

On spec. The Prudential building opened in 1955, rising 41 stories and including its own 350-car parking garage—at that time one of the largest parking facilities incorporated into an office structure in the U.S. (fig. 1.14). There were also pedestrian connections between the lower levels of the building and a 2,400-car municipal garage constructed under Grant Park and managed by the Chicago Park District. The building cost more than \$40 million, and was Chicago's first new skyscraper to open since 1934. On the 40th floor was the “Top of the Rock” restaurant, and the 41st floor featured a public observation deck. A ground floor auditorium was designed to accommodate 1,000 seats.

The MAHO in Chicago marked a departure for Prudential because a large portion of it was rented out to other companies and firms. Each of the other regional headquarters had been planned so that the Pru could eventually occupy the whole building.⁸⁰ In the 21-story Houston tower and 22-story Jacksonville tower, Prudential

⁷⁹ “Remarks of Mayor Martin H. Kennelly,” November 16, 1954, PA 10–39.

⁸⁰ “The Pru Decentralizes,” 141.

planned to start by occupying the lower floors of the buildings' broad wings but anticipated moving upward into the smaller tower floors.⁸¹ In the smaller, 12-story Los Angeles and Minneapolis buildings, Prudential occupied nearly the entire building. Each of these buildings were themselves among the biggest in their respective regions. But the Chicago building, which *Architectural Forum* first announced in 1952 as the fifth largest office building in the country and the tallest in Chicago, was explicitly an office structure available for rental. Prudential positioned its new tower as the most desirable, most modern, best-serviced office space in the city for prospective tenants. Prudential planned to charge 50% more than the going rate for good office space in Chicago, and offered a host of amenities and higher "space standards" to justify this hike.⁸² The Prudential building, in this sense, did not compete with existing office buildings. Prudential created a "de luxe building that will lift itself out of competition, so higher rentals can be charged to make the building pay off." Prudential offered tenants "advantages not found elsewhere in Chicago."⁸³

In terms of building mechanics, *Architectural Forum* explained, Prudential's Chicago building set "a new high for many US office building standards and is well worth careful study to see just what improvements such a big, well-informed investor is willing to buy." In a list of superlatives, *Architectural Forum* explained just what Prudential had bought, including, among others: the biggest tower floors (20,000 sq. ft.) outside of New York City; the highest intensity lighting of any major US office building;

⁸¹ In Jacksonville, Prudential initially planned to occupy the first eight floors of the tower, which was the tallest in Florida. "South Central Home Office," PA 10-31.

⁸² "Chicago's Prudential Building."

⁸³ Ibid.

the highest electrical design load; the biggest floor-to-floor height (13'); the fastest high-rise elevators; more elevators than any office building built since 1929 (26 passenger cars to serve 40 floors); the biggest built-in garage serving a single building; and the biggest air-conditioning tonnage and heaviest air-conditioning design load, as well as other novel cooling techniques including the use of the Chicago River as a cooling agent.⁸⁴

The MAHO building in Chicago combined so many services and amenities in one location that *Architectural Forum* described it as a “one-building Rockefeller Center.” Planners of the Prudential building also positioned the MAHO as an urban institution. The facility included a “travel bureau,” which consolidated ticket offices for rail, air, and steamship travel and could deliver tickets to the building’s tenants on short notice. There were meeting and conference rooms equipped with motion picture, slide projector, and kinescope facilities (the last for previewing television programs). However, Prudential was wary of intimidating its neighbors or ruffling feathers among Chicago’s established property owners. For this reason, Prudential began its search for renters by looking for out-of-town companies that wanted to move to Chicago. After that, they looked to firms whose offices were scattered about the central business district and who wanted to consolidate and streamline their operations.

In terms of exterior architecture, *Architectural Forum* conceded that “Prudential will be no design experiment, no Lever House, no Alcoa, no UN Secretariat. Like Pittsburgh’s Mellon-US Steel Building (which Prudential likes very much), its emphatically vertical limestone and aluminum (or stainless steel) slab is contemporary

⁸⁴ Ibid.

with Rockefeller Center.⁸⁵ The comparison to Rockefeller Center, which embodied a successful civic-oriented, private development, was a favorable one. But Rockefeller Center was already twenty years old, so the comparison also presented Prudential's architecture as a dignified throwback. Yet if the Chicago RHO lacked the flash of its Los Angeles cousin, it was a solid design: a clean, spare mass organized with vertical, limestone piers running uninterrupted the full height of the building, featuring spandrels faced with a fluted aluminum skin.

Corporate policy, urban policy. Despite the City of Chicago's involvement, Prudential's principal partner in urban development was another private enterprise, the Illinois Central. At a press conference on March 1, 1951, Leo Sheridan, the realtor who brokered the deal, diplomatically praised both Prudential's Carrol Shanks and Wayne A. Johnston of the Illinois Central:

The real importance of the development, the beginning of which we are celebrating today, lies in the fact that it becomes a reality due to the vision, the prudent business sagacity, the courage and determination of two men . . . one heading one of the world's greatest insurance organizations . . . an organization devoted to the advancement of human interests, human welfare, and human happiness, under the system of private enterprise, and the other guiding the affairs and determining the policies of one of the great railroad systems of the world.⁸⁶

Sheridan predicted that Prudential's investment would encourage others to make their own investments in Chicago.

At the groundbreaking ceremony in August 1952, J. M. Trissal, Assistant Chief Engineer of the Illinois Central, alluded to the increasing tension between the American system of free enterprise and a planned economy and collectivist enterprise embodied by

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

the Soviet system: “This occasion is particularly significant because it strikes a strong note of optimism in an unsettled world. It is a tribute to free enterprise, as we enjoy it in America, and will be a monument symbolizing the achievement of free men.”⁸⁷ Two private corporations—a railroad and insurance company—had worked together, over long and hard negotiations, to bring about the redevelopment of a seemingly intractable piece of urban real estate. Trissal passed the baton of urban growth from his railroad to the insurance company. The railroad had been essential to the land-making process, and served as the progenitor of vast urban fortunes. In the postwar era, wealthy insurance companies would claim this mantle. Trissal conveyed to his audience the heroic proportions of this endeavor:

For more than a century, the Illinois Central has had a stake in the growth and development of Chicago’s lake front and all of Mid-America. It was on this very property that the Illinois Central built its Great Central Station nearly one hundred years ago. To do this, it was necessary to reclaim area which was formerly Lake Michigan. Through Great Central Station passed thousands of pioneers on their way to populate and cultivate the lands opened to development by the completion of the Illinois Central Railroad. . . . The Illinois Central is proud of its part in the development of Chicago and Mid-America. We are happy to play a role in this new chapter of Chicago’s progress, marked by the erection of the new Prudential Building on this spot—a Gibraltar on the Lake front.⁸⁸

Needless to say, Mayor Martin H. Kennelly would not be shut out of the festivities: “I am glad . . . to accept my share of responsibility for the birth and up-bringing of this lusty lake-front ‘baby.’” The Prudential Building, Kennelly trumpeted, would spur “the modern era of Chicago’s rejuvenation. . . . It cannot fail to encourage other investors in Chicago’s unlimited potential, because there is nothing so contagious as confidence.”

⁸⁷ “Remarks of J. M. Trissal, Assistant Chief Engineer, Illinois Central, Prudential Ground-Breaking Ceremony,” August 12, 1952, Event Files 1952, PA 10–38.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Kennelly pledged that the City of Chicago would not “do anything that would let Prudential down.” Kennelly promised to “service” the Prudential Building in terms of transportation and parking. He devoted his short address to outlining future enhancements to metropolitan Chicago’s transportation infrastructure, including improved mass transportation, parking facilities in the loop, and several new “superhighway developments.” Kennelly had mastered the pathological metaphors of urbanism, and employed them dramatically: “No—Chicago is in no danger of dying from hardening of the arteries, nor from any disease of the circulatory system. The evidence is all about us that Chicago today is more virile—stronger in both sinew and spirit—than it has ever been.”⁸⁹

Prudential, Kennelly continued, had provided the city with a “psychological ‘shot in the arm’ that Chicago badly needed.” He aligned the Prudential’s significant undertaking with his own campaign for civic improvements. “Actually, Chicago is ‘topping out’ all over,” bubbled the irrepressible mayor. He highlighted some of Chicago’s city-initiated urban renewal projects that complemented Prudential’s development, including new urban highways and municipal garage structures that were the infrastructural components of a modernized urban environment. Chicago’s success, particularly with respect to the city’s “fifty million dollar off-street parking program,” was the “talk of the country” and had engendered a bit of jealousy from representatives of other cities foundering with postwar modernization. Kennelly even quoted from an editorial in the Boston Daily Record:

⁸⁹ “Remarks of Mayor Martin H. Kennelly.”

Pardon us, Chicago, if we seem a bit envious of your ability to get things done, for we are envious. For eight weary years, we Bostonians have been talking about building a five-thousand car garage under a useless portion of our neglected Commons. In little more than a single year, you have constructed an almost identical garage and you are prepared to go ahead with more.

Kennelly noted that the editorial concluded by saying that “Chicago’s reward for action, instead of words, is its first new skyscraper since 1934—the forty-million dollar Mid-America building.”⁹⁰

Prudential’s projects in Los Angeles, Houston, and Chicago—as well as its other regional home offices in the U.S. and Canada—presaged Boston’s Prudential Center in several important respects. Like Prudential Square in Los Angeles, Boston’s Prudential Center would mark the establishment of a midtown district. Like the Prudential building in Houston, the Boston Pru would represent an extension of the city’s economic life from the central business area to an outlying area that was well-connected to downtown. And, like the Prudential building in Chicago, the construction of the Prudential Center in Boston would involve a dramatic handing of the baton of urban development from the railroad to the insurance industry and highway agency. Prudential learned from all of these efforts, so that by the time it announced its plans for a Northeastern Home Office in Boston, the company had refined and developed its ambitious mission: a mission that was nothing short of transforming the physical and social contours of the cities that it inhabited and, by so doing, insuring their survival and growth.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Chapter Two:

“I Hate Boston”: Constraints that Confronted Builders in Boston

“I hate Boston. I don’t know why. . . . The general spirit is so far, far, far back that it gets on my nerves.” —Lincoln Steffens¹

In 1948, the essayist David McCord published a book *About Boston* that sought to capture the “sight, sound, color, flavor, inflection, and atmospherics” of his home town. McCord focused on the dowdy charms of an old city, a city where ruffled patricians ambled from tidy townhouses on Beacon Hill across the ancient Common toward the cultural institutions of the Back Bay.² He painted a richly described and affectionate portrait, not a critical piece, noting that he was “not here concerned with city government or dirty streets or book-banning or the pips of cheapness that any radar can detect within the city limits.”³ As a backdrop to the study of the rebuilding of Boston in the mid-twentieth century, this chapter will focus on precisely those aspects of the city that McCord chose to ignore: 1) an ossified and corrupt political culture; 2) the city’s decaying physical plant and congested system of streets; 3) Boston’s reputation for conservatism (or, perhaps, puritanism) in the arts, including architecture; and (4), with respect to the “pips of cheapness,” the similarly conservative culture of capital

¹ I do not have a precise source for this quotation, but it is quoted in both David McCord, *About Boston: Sight, Sound, Flavor and Inflection* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948) and Patricia Harris and David Lyon, eds. *1001 Greatest Things Ever Said About Massachusetts* (Boston, Lyons Press, 2007), 56.

² The Back Bay landfill development was initiated in the 1840s. By the 1870s many of Boston’s leading cultural institutions—churches, museums, and university buildings—had relocated to big sites in the new district.

³ McCord, *About Boston*, 12.

investment in Yankee Boston. This chapter provides an historical overview of Boston's economy, politics, and built environment, from the start of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth. Some of the key events were part and parcel of the life and times of the entire industrial Northeast, while others—like the 40-plus year reign of Mayor James Michael Curley—were unique to Boston. The upshot of this short history is to describe a postwar Boston that presented problems, challenges, and opportunities that were met by a new approach to insuring the city, an approach embodied by the story of Prudential.

Greater Boston: The Rise of an Industrial Region

McCord's elegant and wistful portrait ironically articulated the worst fears of urban boosters and other observers: Boston was a city of antiquated charms and long-cherished traditions, yet it was culturally outmoded and increasingly marginalized in the national economy. McCord's Boston was a pleasant village, moving at its own deliberate pace, a city of distinct neighborhoods where the irregular, curving streets of the colonial settlement still formed the basic patterns of city life. In 1868, Oliver Wendell Holmes called the Massachusetts Statehouse, the golden-domed landmark designed by Charles Bulfinch in 1798 that crowned Beacon Hill, the "hub of the solar system." But if the world revolved around the Hub, as it came to be called, the city itself remained firmly in place. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Boston rivaled New York as an economic and cultural force. But the city's glory days as a pre-eminent metropolis were already on the wane, even if the city's elites refused to acknowledge that fact. In 1825,

the Erie Canal connected the Hudson River to the Great Lakes, Chicago, and the West beyond, and New York City quickly became America's most important commercial entrepot and financial center.

The industrial region. Boston capitalists were once known for daring and innovation. The earliest fortunes were made in the eighteenth century China trade, when high-masted clipper ships tacked across Boston Harbor. Money amassed in commerce was used in the first half of the nineteenth century to spark an industrial revolution along the major rivers, like the Merrimack, of the city's hinterland regions. The woolen and cotton mills of Lowell and Lawrence produced textiles and garments that came to form the new base of Boston's export economy. Paper mills and soap factories were also established in these productive cities. Directly west of the city, Waltham was known as the "City of Five-Score Industries," where the famous Waltham Watch Company was established in 1854. The Boston region was a national leader in shoe production, in places like Haverhill and Lynn, to the north of Boston; or Brockton, to the south, which became the largest shoe manufacturing city in the country during the Civil War as a result of U.S. government contracts to produce boots for the Union Army.⁴ Among the key factors in the early industrial economy, especially in the textile industry, were Yankee

⁴ Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of Massachusetts, *Massachusetts: A Guide to Its Places and People* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937); Barry Bluestone and Mary Huff Stevenson, *The Boston Renaissance: Race, Space, and Economic Change in an American Metropolis* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2000); and Walter F. Carroll, *Brockton: From Rural Parish to Urban Center* (Northridge, Calif.: Windsor Publications, 1989).

farm girls. But after 1845, factories became dominated by immigrant labor, chiefly from Ireland, and the Irish dominated Boston's well-organized unions.⁵

Boston's economic vigor was already on the wane at the dawn of the twentieth century. Brockton's peak year of shoe production was in 1899, followed by a long, slow decline over the first half of the twentieth century. The New England economy prospered during World War I, spurred by the wartime demand for textiles, garments, and shoes. But the textile industry in particular was in steep decline at the start of the 1920s. Mill owners relocated their plants to the American South, where they profited from low labor costs, tax advantages, and lower rates of unionization. The Boston region, and New England as a whole, was suffering from high rates of unemployment well before the onset of the Great Depression, which only accelerated a downward trend. At the end of the 1930s, the large General Electric plants in Lynn were the state's largest employer, and G.E. prospered during World War II producing piston-driven aircraft engines. War production temporarily restored full employment to the region's remaining mills, but this proved to be an ephemeral blip on the larger chart of economic decline.

Imperial Boston. Boston was a trading center—endowed with a deep-water port that was closely linked to the city's prosperity—and as late as 1930 Boston housed the nation's largest wool market in red-brick warehouses along the Fort Point Channel. The largest factories in the region were located in isolated company towns, but the city itself boasted a host of warehouses and steam-driven plants that crowded along an industrial

⁵ Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1959); Tom Juravich, William F. Hartford, and James R. Green, *Commonwealth of Toil: Chapters in the History of Massachusetts' Workers and Their Unions* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996).

belt encircling the central business district. Industrial Boston was organized around a cluster of rail facilities, the Fort Point Channel, the Charles River, and the harbor. In 1900, the Gillette Razor Company, founded by the visionary inventor King C. Gillette, was producing shaving devices in a South Boston factory.⁶ Roxbury (annexed by Boston in 1868) and East Boston (annexed in 1836) housed many small industrial concerns, including foundries, breweries, and factories producing a diverse set of commodities, from rope and cigars to suspenders and shoes. East Boston and Charlestown (annexed in 1874) cultivated maritime-based industries, including ship-building and repair. Boston was a city of wharves, and Boston Harbor played host to the fishing and whaling industries.⁷

In the nineteenth century, Boston's aristocratic politicians and leading citizens expanded the land mass and physical boundaries of the small, peninsular city to accommodate urban growth. The North End and South End became tenement districts for the immigrant working classes, but Beacon Hill, in the shadow of the State House on the north side of the Boston Common, remained an elite bastion of expensive townhouses. On the south side of the Common, a dense business and retail district sloped toward the many wharves that lined the harbor. The marshy flats of the Back Bay, first traversed by railroad viaducts in the 1830s, were filled between 1850 and 1880 and platted as a formal gridiron. The new district quickly became a high-class residential

⁶ Russell B. Adams Jr., *King C. Gillette: The Man and his Wonderful Shaving Device* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978).

⁷ See W. H. Bunting, *Portrait of a Port: Boston, 1852–1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1994) and Lawrence Kennedy, *Planning a City upon a Hill: Boston Since 1630* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994).

enclave and home to the city's leading cultural institutions.⁸ In the 1880s and 90s, Boston land developers established a set of streetcar suburbs to house the middling classes.⁹ And in the 1890s, Boston was the first American city to construct a subway designed to reduce the congestion of the business district.¹⁰

Metropolitan growth. Beacon Hill elites had long maintained isolated suburban retreats. But the earliest “commuters” to Boston lived in spacious Victorian-era subdivisions in Newton and Cambridge, located near passenger stations built by railroad companies.¹¹ The exodus of white professional classes from Boston's central neighborhoods increased in the late nineteenth century along the electrically-powered streetcar lines.¹² Over the course of the 1920s, 30s, and 40s the streetcar suburbs of the 1890s would become “inner city” neighborhoods, annexed to the City of Boston. Some of these newly middle-class Bostonians would themselves soon decamp for greener pastures of more suburban places, such as Newton to the west and Medford to the north, which rapidly evolved in the 1920s from independent, colonial-era towns to bedroom communities. The 1920s suburban settlements, though planned for automobile access, fundamentally depended on mass transit. There was a clear physical connection between

⁸ See William A. Newman and Wilfred E. Holton, *Boston's Back Bay: The Story of America's Greatest Nineteenth-Century Landfill Project* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2006) and Nancy S. Seasholes, *Gaining Ground: A History of Landmaking in Boston* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

⁹ Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870–1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

¹⁰ Charles Cheape, *Moving the Masses: Urban Public Transit in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, 1880–1912* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

¹¹ See Henry Binford, *The First Suburbs: Residential Communities on the Boston Periphery, 1815–1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) and Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

¹² See Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs*.

peripheral residential communities and the center city, still the location of the region's main employers.¹³ In contrast, post-WWII suburbanization, fueled in part by federal subsidies to homeownership, became untethered from the streetcar and rail lines. Connections to the city were provided by a system of parkways, constructed during the 1930s by the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) as pleasure drives to access parkland, and other state highways constructed by the Department of Public Works. These highways were almost exclusively radial roads extending outwards from the center city, with the exception of the initiation of a circumferential road, Route 128, in the 1930s. The Master Highway Plan of 1948 sought to amplify these radial connections with limited-access expressways, and to complement them with a set of "loop" highways that allowed for suburb-to-suburb transportation that would open more land to suburban development, both residential and industrial.

Route 128 eventually became the key physical armature for the Boston region's postwar industrial "renaissance" based in high-technology firms, though the seedlings for such a boom were long in the making. In the early twentieth century, there were signs of a new industrial economy emerging from an alliance between the region's educational institutions, federal funding, and industry. Since its founding in 1861, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology—first located in Boston's Back Bay but eventually developing an expansive campus across the river in Cambridge—nurtured close relationships with the

¹³ "All houses had driveways and frequently garages to provide off-street parking, and one-family homes became the rule rather than duplexes and triplexes; still the suburbanization occurred only where there was good access to Boston by public transit." Matthew Edel, Elliott D. Sclar, and Daniel Luria, *Shaky Palaces: Homeownership and Social Mobility in Boston's Suburbanization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 59. See also Gerald Gamm, *Urban Exodus: Why the Jews left Boston and the Catholics Stayed* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

region's industrial concerns. In 1886, MIT graduate Arthur D. Little established the first "industrial consulting" firm in Boston, and his company advocated the establishment of industrial research laboratories that became an important part of Boston's regional economy. In 1922, MIT engineering professor Vannevar Bush founded the American Appliance Company, which produced refrigerators in Kendall Square, Cambridge. The small company eventually became Raytheon and maintained a strong collaborative relationship with MIT. Bush was crucial to the establishment of President Roosevelt's National Defense Research Committee (NDRC) on the eve of World War II, initiating a new model for federal spending on military technology and channeling millions of dollars of research contracts directly to Boston-area universities, especially MIT. The war years were important growth years for the high-technology sector and Raytheon moved from producing radio tubes to radars and military armaments. By the early 1960s, Raytheon had spun off nearly 150 different companies. Most of them had relocated from the "Research Row" area of Cambridge, where they occupied existing warehouse and loft spaces, to new industrial parks located along Route 128. But while the region showed signs of an economic boom, the center city struggled. The new technologies were being developed and produced in Raytheon's Framingham complex, not in Boston.¹⁴

¹⁴ Bluestone and Stevenson, *The Boston Renaissance*; Anna Lee Saxenian, *Regional Advantage: Culture and Competition in Silicon Valley and Route 128* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994); Otto J. Scott, *The Creative Ordeal: The Story of Raytheon* (New York: Atheneum, 1974); Alan R. Earls, *Route 128 and the Birth of the Age of High Tech* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia, 2002).

“Our Fair City”: The Political Geography of Urban Decline

In 1948, when David McCord composed *About Boston*, the center city was in economic decline. Boston was no longer either the bustling mercantile port of the 1850s nor the robust industrial center of the 1890s. In the years immediately after World War II, many urban critics were frustrated by what they perceived as a debased system of local government—in Boston and many other cities—and sought to elevate the status of urban political discourse. In 1947, Robert S. Allen, a journalist and decorated military veteran, edited a collection of essays on the political leadership of American cities. Inspired by the fresh memory of America’s victory in World War II, Allen introduced his book in strong terms:

We are a mighty nation, we Americans. Industrially and financially we are without equal. In the air, on land and on the seas we are all powerful. We alone possess the cataclysmic atomic bomb. But, ironically, while our victorious Armies are imposing democracy on millions in Europe and the Far East, local government here at home is a reeking shambles of corruption, incompetence, waste, and misrule.¹⁵

Allen spelled out “the melancholy story of the failure of good municipal management to take root in our cities.”¹⁶ He called for “sensible city management,” the kind of dispassionate management that had organized American victories in the two great wars of the first half of the twentieth century. Municipal governance had to catch up to the norms of efficient bureaucracy. Yet cities continued to rehearse “the same old story of boodling

¹⁵ Robert S. Allen, *Our Fair City* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1947), 3. Allen was a Washington, D.C.–based journalist and heavily decorated military man. He was a veteran of World War I and served on General George Patton’s staff in World War II.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

bosses and businessmen, of horrendous slums, of dirt and filth, disease and vice, of gross and shameless waste, of mismanagement and misrule, of crass disregard of public health and human dignity.”¹⁷

Robert Allen meant his title, *Our Fair City*, as “ribald mockery.”¹⁸ In fact, cities were in trouble. Though many middle-class people still worked in central cities, they now lived in suburban residential communities that resisted annexation to the big city. In Greater Boston, they were happy to let the city “stew in its own juice.”¹⁹ Robert Allen saw *blight* in the physical environments of the city itself, but he was also startled by the “strangling blight of parasitic suburbs and satellite communities.”²⁰ The middle-classes were sabotaging their own livelihoods by ignoring the fate of the center city. The *Boston Globe* writer Louis M. Lyons filed a report on Boston for Allen’s book in which he dolefully called the city a “study in inertia.” Lyons described Boston’s geographic, demographic, and political dilemma, where the city’s “phenomenally narrow geographic limits . . . have shorn it of its middle class, leaving an aloof Brahmin minority politically smothered by an inert mass who are largely without a taxpayer’s stake in their own dwellings.”²¹

By the end of the nineteenth century, Boston’s population had become largely composed of immigrants. In 1906, the emergent Irish Catholic majority expressed its

¹⁷ Ibid., 4.

¹⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁹ Louis M. Lyons, “Boston: Study in Inertia,” in Allen, *Our Fair City*.

²⁰ Allen, *Our Fair City*, 7.

²¹ Lyons, “Boston,” 16. Lyons goes on to say that “the descendants of those who pioneered the public school system in Boston now live in the suburbs, partly to have good schools for their children,” 25.

political will by electing John F. Fitzgerald (known as “Honey Fitz”) to the mayoralty, unseating Yankee patrician James J. Storrow and inaugurating a period of tension between Boston’s aristocratic capital-holding classes and the working class majority. In 1912, Honey Fitz was succeeded by James Michael Curley, who dominated Boston politics for the next 40 years. Lyons described Curley as “big, bluff, theatrical, crude in his methods, but with a voice to melt brass.”²² The Yankees were finally out of power and Curley was not one to let them forget it. As white, middle-class households continued to leave for the suburbs (save for the Brahmin enclave of Beacon Hill and some parts of the Back Bay), Boston became what Louis Lyons called a “home of the poor.” In 1940, a Housing Authority survey reported that a fifth of all Boston dwelling units were “substandard,” without running water, private toilets, or centralized heating. “These are the harsh conditions of the voting population,” Lyons reported.²³ But despite their poor living conditions, the voting population did not easily tire of their “boodling boss,” who was also their champion.

“Curleyism” and the politics of land use. When Robert Allen and David McCord wrote in the late 1940s, Boston was in the throes of political chicanery manifest in Mayor Curley’s reign. Curley was first elected in 1912 and again in 1922, 1930, and 1946. He was twice sent to Washington as a U.S. Congressman (1911-1914; 1943-1947), and served once as Governor of Massachusetts (1935-1937). But James Curley was always essentially running for Mayor. The son of Irish immigrants who settled in the streetcar suburb of Dorchester in 1864, Curley’s political career embodied the ascendancy of Irish

²² Ibid., 18.

²³ Ibid., 29.

political power in the Democratic Party and the efflorescence of machine politics. Curley's loyal constituents adored him. To them, he was a pugnacious populist who stood up for the common man. Early in his career, Curley was sentenced to jail for taking a civil service exam for a constituent. But Curley turned his misdemeanor into political capital when his reputation spread as a good-hearted politician willing to help out a friend. As one historian put it, "The idea of assisting the needy quickly became an essential part of the Curley appeal and legend. To thousands of Bostonians James Michael was a latter-day Robin Hood who stole from the rich and powerful to help the poor and needy."²⁴

Boston's business elite distrusted Curley. They viewed him as an extortionist and a crook, too entrenched in the idiosyncratic world of patronage and political favors to successfully manage a city. Indeed, Curley delighted in his hostile relationship with Boston's business community, despite the fact that he relied on the business people to finance his administration through tax rolls and loans. In his autobiography, Curley fondly recalled an episode in which the President of the First National Bank of Boston refused to loan him money to meet the city payroll: "I decided a bit of political banditry was in order," Curley swaggered. He claimed to have told the banker: "There's a water main with the floodgates right under your building. . . . You'd better get that money up by 3 PM or those gates will be opened, pouring thousands of gallons of water right into your vaults."²⁵

²⁴ Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill*, 142.

²⁵ James Michael Curley, *I'd Do It Again: A Record of all My Uproarious Years* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1957), 220–21.

Political scientist Paul Peterson has written that “urban politics is above all the politics of land use.”²⁶ Curley understood this perfectly. The city’s main source of revenue was the property tax, which was based on the assessed value of real estate. Predictably, the practice of assessing property was among the most corrupt in the city and a persistent source of antagonism between Curley and downtown business elites who felt that tax assessments were not only too high but also vexingly unpredictable and seemingly arbitrary. Curley’s political and fiscal strategy was to redistribute income from the core to the inner-city districts. Taxes on downtown real estate generated revenue for Curley’s public projects in Boston’s neighborhoods, the heavily immigrant (Catholic) and working-class districts that revolved around Boston’s peninsular center. In the 1920s, Curley championed the expansion of the public realm in Metropolitan Boston, building parks, schools, branch libraries, and health clinics. He created a Municipal Employment Bureau to employ former soldiers. He oversaw the construction of public beaches, parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities; he built roads, bridges, and tunnels to get to them. All of these projects entailed awarding contracts. This process was at the heart of “Curleyism,” the political patronage championed by the Mayor: firms that won contracts were expected to kick back to the Boss and donate to his campaigns. Meanwhile, Curley built up a loyal constituency by providing his people with jobs and services.²⁷

²⁶ Paul E. Peterson, *City Limits* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 24.

²⁷ See Jack Beatty, *The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley (1874–1958)* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1992) and Thomas H. O’Connor, *Building a New Boston: Politics and Urban Renewal, 1950 to 1970* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 11.

The neighborhoods flourished at the expense of the center city. Curley instructed his assessors to squeeze as much tax revenue as possible from downtown real estate, which were taxed at higher rates than residential properties in the neighborhoods. Many of Boston's commercial buildings were owned by prominent family trusts, which could afford to pay taxes on downtown buildings even if they were not earning money from rent. "Raising assessments on owners under no commercial imperative was a temptation that Curley rarely resisted."²⁸ Property owners could petition for tax abatements, but this was a tedious, case-by-case process that was mediated by a group of politically well-connected lawyers who negotiated settlements with the city. This Byzantine process became known as the "abatement racket." Property owners in Boston feared over-assessment and were thus deterred from improving their properties. Older buildings languished and few new ones were constructed. Some property owners even lopped off the tops of their buildings in an effort to lower assessments, an act that Curley biographer Jack Beatty characterized as "economic cannibalism."²⁹ Curley was unrepentant. He bragged about manipulating downtown tax assessments and he was not above wielding the city's taxing powers to exact political reprisals. Curley recalled punishing the *Herald-Traveler* newspaper for opposing the construction of the Sumner Tunnel to Logan Airport in East Boston in the late 1920s. He wrote in his autobiography how he avenged this betrayal, "when [he] raised the assessments of the *Herald-Traveler* paper, along with other business in Boston which had not been paying their share of the tax burden."³⁰ This

²⁸ Beatty, *The Rascal King*, 231.

²⁹ Ibid., 231–32; see Cynthia Horan, "Organizing the 'New Boston': Growth Policy, Governing Coalitions and Tax Reform," *Polity* 22, no. 3 (1990): 489–510.

³⁰ Curley, *I'd Do It Again*, 220.

politicization of tax policy created an uneasy environment for new investments in downtown real estate, from the construction of new buildings to even modest improvements to existing buildings.

The Boston planning historian Lawrence W. Kennedy reminds us that not all the blame for the stagnation of urban development in the 1930s can be laid at Curley's feet. The entire nation was suffering from a vast economic depression that stifled new investments in nearly every sector of the economy. But Curley, despite his Robin Hood persona, was not notably successful in helping Boston recover from the Great Depression. Curley advocated relief programs and job creation for Boston's poorer citizens and championed liberal government expenditures. But his ambitious building projects were often stymied by a hostile state legislature dominated by Republicans. And though Curley was one of the first big city mayors to support Franklin Roosevelt for President, FDR did not embrace the affiliation with this notoriously corrupt politician and kept his distance.

Thus, in the milieu of the Great Depression and Roosevelt's New Deal, Boston did not reap the benefits of federal largesse to the same extent as other leading cities. Federal grant-makers did not perceive Curley or his administration as responsible fiscal stewards and Boston was largely passed over. In her study of New Deal landscapes, Phoebe Cutler wrote: "Only in Boston, where the WPA wallowed in politics and chicanery, did the New Deal riches fail to raise a surf."³¹ What relief money that did surface was used to conduct surveys and create land-use maps and real estate inventories.

³¹ Phoebe Cutler, *The Public Landscape of the New Deal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 10.

But the tangible benefits of the New Deal were few in Boston.³² On a national scale, the New Deal marked the Federal government's first overt foray into the housing market.³³ Federal money for housing was funneled through local authorities. The Boston Housing Authority (BHA) was formed in 1935. New Deal-era housing policies popularized the rhetoric of "blight" and the practices of "slum clearance" that set the stage for postwar urban renewal policies that had an even broader impact on the built environments and social makeup of American cities. Between 1937 and 1940, the BHA sponsored public housing projects in several outlying neighborhoods—purchasing land from willing property owners, when possible, and using eminent domain when necessary. But projects such as these were impossible in the dense neighborhoods surrounding Boston's downtown core, places like the West End and the North End, because relatively high land values made acquisition too expensive.³⁴

The fall of the "Rascal King." When Curley was elected once again to the mayoralty in 1945, Boston's dismayed business elite (then represented principally through the Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Boston Real Estate Board) initiated a

³² One notable exception was the Huntington Avenue subway, which was extended through the Back Bay district of Boston with Works Progress Administration (WPA) funds. See Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill*, 146–147.

³³ See Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

³⁴ The BHA used Public Works Administration (PWA) funds to construct Old Harbor Village in South Boston, a heavily Irish neighborhood. It was one of the PWA's first housing projects in the United States, and the first in Boston. Predictably, a crony of Curley's was chosen as the contractor, a coincidence that raised cackles from the City Planning Board. In 1937, the United States Housing Authority (USHA) was created under the Wagner-Steagall Act, and the USHA took over PWA projects. See Kennedy, *Planning the City on a Hill*, 148; Mark Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933–1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); and Lawrence Vale, *From Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000).

concerted effort toward political reform. These interest groups wanted comprehensive tax reform. As political scientist Cynthia Horan puts it, they wanted “not only to get rid of Curley but to abolish the entire system of ward politics that had produced him,” and advocated replacing the ward-based City Council with “at-large” representation.³⁵ The shift from cronyism (or, in this case, “Curleyism”) to *managerialism* began in June 1947, when Curley was sentenced to the federal penitentiary in Danbury, Connecticut, for tax fraud.³⁶ With the blessings of the downtown business elite, the unprepossessing City Clerk, John B. Hynes, was appointed temporary mayor. After several months, President Harry Truman commuted Curley’s jail sentence, who returned to the Mayor’s office in November 1947. As one observer noted, Curley quickly resumed work:

In the course of the next frantic few hours, he interviewed sixty persons, found jobs for every one of them, and made a series of decision involving millions of dollars for contracts relating to such things as parking meters, voting machines, and rubbish contracts. When his work was done and he emerged from his office, he boasted expansively to newspaper reporters: “I have accomplished more in one day than has been done in the five months of my absence.”³⁷

Curley’s ostentatious remark wounded John Hynes, who decided to challenge Curley for Mayor in 1949, running under the banner of a “New Boston.” Though he did not possess Curley’s charm or charisma, Hynes appealed to a diverse coalition united against Curley and was carried by a broad backlash against a city government that seemed mired in corruption. Hynes reached out to Yankee business leaders. He attracted

³⁵ Horan, “Organizing the ‘New Boston,’” 495.

³⁶ The concept of urban political “managerialism” is drawn from David Harvey’s essay “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation of Urban Governance in Late Capitalism,” in *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (New York: Routledge Press, 2001).

³⁷ O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 22.

the support of young World War II veterans. And he recruited the political talents of young stars from Boston's academic establishment. Hynes was able to exploit the personalized and quixotic nature of Curley's relatively disorganized machine. For Republicans, reform-minded Democrats, and, indeed, anybody who was anti-Curley, Hynes was the clear choice. He represented clean, businesslike government and an inclusive way forward, especially for young, educated elites, many of whom had assumed that they would have to leave Boston to succeed in business. Hynes was elected in November 1949. He split votes with Curley in the lower-class wards but prevailed in Republican bastions like Beacon Hill, the Back Bay, and other middle-class districts.³⁸ Incredibly, Curley twice again challenged Hynes for the Mayor's office in the 1950s, but lost both times. Hynes served for ten years before ceding the reins to John Collins, who also pushed for a "New Boston" and expanded the city's urban renewal program.

Also on the ballot in 1949 was an amendment to Boston's city charter that would replace the twenty-two member City Council, each member representing a single ward, with a nine member Council determined by a citywide, "at-large" election. At the same time that they turned away Curley, the voters approved the at-large City Council system, a clear expression of the pent-up desire for reform.³⁹ But some of those who supported the reformed city charter may have voted against their own political interests. A ward-based City Council favored machine politics and its attendant system of patronage; but poorer, working-class districts could at least elect local representatives to stand for their

³⁸ See Timothy Rose, "Civic War: People, Politics, and the Battle of New Boston, 1945–1967" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2006).

³⁹ This change actually returned the City Council to the arrangement it held until 1924, when under Curley's leadership the Council adopted a ward-based system.

interests. Under the new system, these districts no longer had direct representation. “What many Bostonians failed to recognize,” writes the historian Tim Rose, “was that under the reformed charter, neighborhoods lost power in lieu of special interests and political organizations. On the City Council, for instance, councilors were less beholden to neighborhood allegiances and therefore less inclined to sponsor or protect a single enclave.”⁴⁰ An at-large system rewarded well-funded and well-organized political groups. Moreover, the at-large system over-represented wealthier voters, who were more likely to show up to vote on Election Day. And yet this system was associated with “reform” because it ostensibly freed the City Council to concentrate on citywide issues and avoid the acrimonious divisions that characterized a more parochial, ward-based system.

Curley was a machine politician who perceived it as his duty to serve voting constituents and not merely to bolster private enterprises. He stalwartly refused to acknowledge any coincidence between the public interest and private enterprise. To the contrary, he saw public interest and private gain as opposed to one another. There was something appealingly democratic about Curley’s unyielding dogmatism on this issue: the idea that urban planning and public investment (in the built environment or otherwise) should be directed by popular wishes and not designed for private business interests. Postwar Urban Renewal regimes, beginning in Boston with John Hynes, represented a revolution in urban political thinking: progressive mayors perceived an inherent convergence between the public interest and business development. Growth was good for just about everybody, even if those sitting atop the capitalist hierarchy—those

⁴⁰ Rose, “Civic War,” 104.

who owned the factories, made investments, and amassed fortunes—would reap the largest share of the benefits. The political-economic ideology was simple enough: a rising tide lifted all boats. Urban Renewal explicitly evoked the public interest by employing the constitutional powers of eminent domain to condemn privately held property (usually a contiguous set of small parcels) and assemble it for “higher and better uses.” Private business interests in the 1950s actively organized and represented themselves as the “public interest” and, as a result, were able to receive government subsidies for their development projects. The development of the Prudential Center in Boston was a notable example this process of private appropriation of the public interest.

Urban decline and the rise of planning. By the 1950s a high-tech economic trend was manifest in the gleaming industrial parks that dotted the Route 128 landscape. As the journalist Elizabeth Hardwick wrote in 1959, Boston had “unlimited promise” for the “engineer, the physicist, the industrial designer, for all the highly trained specialists of the industrial age.” But the center city did not reflect these regional stirrings of economic activity. “In Boston the night comes down with an incredibly heavy, small-town finality,” Hardwick wrote. In her eyes, the city had become physically derelict: “Downtown Boston at night is a dreary jungle of honky-tonks for sailors, dreary department-store windows, Loew’s movie houses, hillbilly bands, strippers, parking lots, undistinguished new buildings.”⁴¹

Many Bostonians shared this sense of the city’s economic stagnation and physical deterioration. Some observers wanted to rebuild the antiquated city and start again. In

⁴¹ Elizabeth Hardwick, “Boston: The Lost Ideal,” *Harper’s Magazine* (December 1959): 64.

his panoramic history of Boston's leading capitalists, Russell B. Adams, Jr., recounted a strangely morbid story that epitomized this attitude:

Speaking at a Faneuil Hall meeting in the closing month of 1944, architect William Roger Greeley had gone unchallenged when he lamented that Boston had not shared with London the "advantage" of widespread destruction by aerial bombardment, leaving behind the rubble of an old city as a foundation for the new. In the absence of such wholesale but healthy razing, Greeley went on with graphically clinical metaphor, Bostonians needed to "destroy our own diseased tissue and by heroic will-power rebuild our community as a worthy competitor of the newer type of city."⁴²

That Greeley could look longingly toward the devastation of London as an advantageous urban condition expressed more than just bad taste. His statement also indicated how closely the physical city was associated with economic wellbeing. Greeley articulated a generalized desire to produce new landscapes that would both reflect and generate a new, progressive era. He betrayed no nostalgia for the existing built environment, which he saw as physically decrepit and morally ambiguous. The architect acted on these impulses and in 1944 he chaired the "Boston Contest" which solicited broad-reaching proposals for the political and physical reorganization of the city and region. The winning team, led by Harvard political scientist Carl Friedrich, leaned on the pathological metaphors of urban decay and disease. The city, Friedrich wrote in his team's statement, had "become ill, decaying at the core, because its vitality has not been a common concern of all those having a stake in it."⁴³ Friedrich's winning proposal—the "Harvard Plan," as it was known—called for a powerful metropolitan government to supersede the existing system

⁴² Russell B. Adams Jr., *The Boston Money Tree: How the Proper Men of Boston Made, Invested & Preserved Their Wealth from Colonial Days to the Space Age* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1977), 305–06.

⁴³ *The Boston Contest of 1944*, (Boston: Boston University Press, 1944), 3, quoted in Kennedy, *Planning a City Upon a Hill*, 152.

of urban politics. Not surprisingly, distinguished members of Boston's business elite supported the Boston Contest, attended its meetings, and sponsored its proceedings.⁴⁴

As it turned out, the Boston Contest was a planning exercise that produced few concrete results. Yet the winning Harvard Plan marked a key moment in the business community's desire to find common ground in an effort to right the economic fortunes of the city. The Harvard Plan also reflected the dominant feeling in academic planning and architectural circles that the core of the nineteenth century industrial city had to be improved with drastic measures. Jose Luis Sert, the modernist architect who joined the faculty of the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1953, articulated this attitude in the 1942 publication *Can Our Cities Survive?*. Following the urban principles promoted by the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM), Sert's text represented the challenges of postwar urbanism as a series of crises, analogous to physical diseases, that could be analyzed, diagnosed, treated, and eventually cured if the experts were only given the necessary authority.⁴⁵ The essence of Sert's solution was blunt: the chaotic, clogged, and filthy nineteenth century city—where housing, commerce, and industry dangerously mingled—had to be gutted and rebuilt along the strict principles of functional zoning. To save the center city, as William Greeley also believed, it first had to be destroyed.

⁴⁴ The "Boston Contest" was a postwar reincarnation of the "Boston-1915" movement, which advocated City Beautiful-era municipal reform, infrastructural modernization, and aesthetic embellishment of the city. "Boston-1915" was the brainchild of Louis Filene, the city's leading Jewish businessman and owner of its most prestigious department store. Downtown department stores and insurance companies were also the essential backers of the "Boston Contest" of 1944. See Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

⁴⁵ Jose Luis Sert, *Can Our Cities Survive?: An ABC of Urban Problems, their Analysis, their Solutions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942).

Academic tracts and blue-ribbon committees aside, there were statistics that suggested that Boston at the end of World War II faced a daunting set of economic and social challenges. The city's population had fallen by 10,372 between 1930 and 1940. The number of manufacturing establishments had also decreased, along with the number of wage earners and total wages paid by manufacturing activity. "By almost any index one chooses to use," one political scientist writes, "the central city showed evidence of being in serious trouble."⁴⁶ Outside the central city, the Boston region was also losing its manufacturing base, as textile manufacturers, in particular, fled to the temperate climates and open-shop labor practices of the "sunbelt." New England, as a whole, did not benefit from the wartime economic surge as much as other areas, like California. Boston had not recovered from the Depression years, when banks failed, businesses closed, and industrial production diminished. Boston's port facilities fell into disuse and disrepair. Real estate assets languished, as single-family townhouses were converted to tenements and boarding houses. In his history of urban renewal in Boston, Thomas O'Connor described Boston in the 1930s and 40s as a "hopeless backwater," where there was a pervasive, palpable sense of the city's economic and physical deterioration.⁴⁷ These problems were exacerbated by federal policies in the 1950s, which made it easier to build and purchase suburban homes in new subdivisions that relied on automobile transportation. Federal policies made it difficult to obtain mortgages on urban property, and created an institutionalized bias against racially diverse neighborhoods. When Boston and other cities began to implement federally sponsored urban renewal in the 1950s, they sought to

⁴⁶ Robert T. Norman, "The Harvard Plan for Metropolitan Boston," *Western Political Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (September 1963): 710.

⁴⁷ O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 3.

mimic the social norms and landscape forms of suburbanization in a desperate attempt to compete economically with their own suburban hinterland.

The politics of urban renewal. When he wrote in 1948, Robert Allen had little faith in the ability of business leaders to put aside their individual self-interest in favor of collective reform. Allen felt that the “public” had abdicated its responsibility to oversee municipal government. Not much had changed, in other words, since the famed muckraker journalist Lincoln Steffens wrote *The Shame of the Cities* in 1904. Steffens had indicted the businessman as a “bad citizen, . . . a self-righteous fraud” and a chief source of corruption.⁴⁸ Allen and Steffens might have been pleased to observe that in the ten years following the publication *Our Fair City*, business interests in many American cities had begun to form citizen organizations that promoted ambitious programs of physical redevelopment, economic revitalization, and political reform. In Pittsburgh, led by the industrialist and banker Richard King Mellon, the Allegheny Conference unified business leaders who worked together with Democratic Mayor David Lawrence to launch the “Pittsburgh Renaissance,” which sponsored the rebuilding of the city’s mixed-use, industrial core as a gleaming office center. Pittsburgh was heralded as an early example of “business-led renewal.”⁴⁹ At nearly the same time, in New Haven, Connecticut, Mayor Richard C. Lee and his Redevelopment Agency chief, Edward Logue, pioneered the tricky process of unearthing federal grant money to launch urban renewal projects.

⁴⁸ Lincoln Steffens, *The Shame of the Cities* (New York: McClure Philips, 1904); see Herbert Shapiro, *The Muckrakers and American Society* (New York: D. C. Heath and Company, 1968).

⁴⁹ See Roy Lubove, *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh: Government, Business and Environmental Change* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1969); Jon Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Jeanne Lowe, *Cities in a Race with Time: Progress and Poverty in America’s Renewing Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1967).

New Haven became known as the “Model City,” where a new form of urban governance, the redevelopment authority, was given broad powers to shape the physical, economic, and social futures of the city.⁵⁰ Similar pro-growth coalitions between politicians and business interests were formed in cities across the country, often taking advantage of federal programs aimed at relieving urban blight.

In Boston, John Hynes, and John Collins after him, were deeply vested in cultivating a friendly “business climate.”⁵¹ Yet Boston’s Brahmin business community did not immediately trust John Hynes. Ephron Caitlin, Jr., the Yankee president of the First National Bank of Boston, expressed this uncertainty: “Nobody had ever seen an honest Irishman around here.”⁵² But Hynes was cut from a different cloth than James Curley. Unlike the self-aggrandizing Curley, Hynes was soft-spoken, mild-mannered, forthcoming, and serious. Where Curley cultivated ethnic antagonism, Hynes sought common ground. Hynes actively solicited the participation of the business community in government affairs, forming special committees composed by leaders of local banks and insurance companies.

Under Hynes, Boston’s pro-growth coalition took shape. An essential catalyst was the organization of the Citizen Seminars at Boston College, directed by the Dean of BC’s School of Business, the Reverend W. Seavey Joyce, a clergyman who also held a Ph.D. in economics. Joyce established the forum to bring business and political elites

⁵⁰ See Fred Powledge, *Model City: A Test of American Liberalism: One Town’s Efforts to Rebuild Itself* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970) and Allan R. Talbot, *The Mayor’s Game: Richard Lee of New Haven and the Politics of Change* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

⁵¹ See Bennett Harrison, “Regional Restructuring and ‘Good Business Climates’: The Economic Transformation of New England Since World War II,” in *Sunbelt/Frostbelt: Urban Development and Regional Restructuring*, ed. William K. Tabb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁵² Quoted in O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 44.

together to speak frankly about the future of the city and to build trust between public and private leadership. Beginning in 1951, the Citizen Seminars emboldened local business leaders to see themselves as a kind of “steering committee” for the fortunes of the city at large. Inspired by the Allegheny Conference in Pittsburgh, Boston leaders saw the benefit of a unified business-led coalition that transcended internal differences. Over the course of these meetings, businessmen and politicians came to share a common vision for a “New Boston,” one that called for both the modernization of the city’s administrative bureaucracy and the renovation of the city’s built environment. With political will, Boston could revitalize its slums and fight against the corrosive elements of blight. The city could rebuild its downtown office and commercial districts, create attractive housing for the middle classes, renew the region’s transportation and port infrastructures, and even furnish new spaces for conventions and tourism. Indeed, Boston could begin to compete with the suburbs, which had become more attractive to residential, commercial, and industrial developers. If business and political leaders could achieve all this, “Boston would then be able to put an end to the flight from the central city, attract homeowners and customers back from the suburban shopping malls, promote a vigorous commercial activity, and attract substantial investments by outside corporations that would have real confidence in the city’s future.”⁵³

Urban renewal policy in the 1950s and 60s, in Boston and elsewhere, was aimed at purging the city of both the *urban village* and the *urban jungle*—the slum and the vice district, respectively. These low-rent neighborhoods were also low tax-paying sites.

⁵³ Ibid., 112; see John H. Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

Boston had two sacrificial urban villages: the New York Streets neighborhood in the South End, which was cleared for the eventual construction of a plant for the *Herald-Traveler* newspaper; and the largely Italian West End, which was destroyed to make way for a large middle-class housing estate and the expansion of Massachusetts General Hospital.⁵⁴ Boston's urban jungle was Scollay Square, a rowdy burlesque district clattering with sailors, transients, working class revelers, and a variety of small-scale enterprises (dance halls, tattoo parlors) and light craft industries (cigar rolling, for example). Scollay Square was razed and replaced with a sprawling government center complex, housing local, state, and federal government.⁵⁵

In the early 1950s, the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) was the local planning authority charged with administering federal renewal funds. The New York Streets project was the BHA's first attempt at assembling smaller parcels of privately owned land for large-scale development. The project was conceived in 1952 under the misperception that industrial plants would locate on an urban site if the state subsidized development by clearing the land. The New York Streets had been created in the 1840s and 50s by the South Cove Corporation, a subsidiary of the Boston & Albany Railroad (B&A), which filled the marshy cove along the Fort Point Channel and laid out streets named after cities in upstate New York served by the railroad. The land development was part of the railroad's larger efforts to extend their lines into Boston and construct a South Station. By 1950, the New York Streets had become a diverse immigrant

⁵⁴ O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*; Mel King, *Chains of Change: Struggles for Black Community Development* (Boston: South End Press, 1981); Herbert Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans* (New York: Free Press, 1962).

⁵⁵ David Kruh, *Always Something Doing: Boston's Infamous Scollay Square* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999).

community living in close proximity to the industrialized Fort Point Channel and the B&A's rail facilities. Contemporary newspaper accounts manipulated public opinion by characterizing the New York Streets neighborhood as a "Skid Row" area—illustrating how propaganda was a key element of urban renewal, perhaps as instrumental as the application of eminent domain itself. In his political autobiography, the African-American activist and Massachusetts State Representative Mel King, who was raised in the New York Streets neighborhood, wrote about how newspapers shaped the public impression of this place:

The *Herald-Traveler* series which described the Dover Street area as "Skid Row" was an important factor in the "renewal" of the New York Streets. Labelling those streets as slums depersonalized the issue, and blocked out any understanding of the impact urban renewal would have on the lives of the people, like my family and friends, living there, and provided a rationale for replacing "undesirable" elements of Boston with less troublesome "light industry." . . . Those articles helped reinforce the attitudes that allowed the city to come in and raze my family's house.⁵⁶

There was no effective local resistance to question the BHA's claim that it was in the public interest, in the interests of Bostonians at large, to undertake this renewal effort. The 13-acre tract was destroyed—not for modern housing but for a private industrial project. With no small irony, it was the *Herald-Traveler*, precisely the newspaper that maligned the neighborhood as blighted, which eventually constructed a plant in the renewal zone.

The New York Streets project did not then, and has not since, attracted much attention. But Boston's next attempt at urban renewal gained more notoriety. In his mostly sunny history of city planning in Boston, Lawrence Kennedy wrote that "The

⁵⁶ King, *Chains of Change*, 21.

West End clearance symbolized all that was wrong with city planning in the 1950s because it bulldozed the homes of poor people and replaced them with an enclave for the wealthy.”⁵⁷ The case of the West End is better remembered than the case of the New York Streets not only because of the scale of the undertaking but also because of the compelling literature produced on the subject, particularly *The Urban Villagers* by the sociologist Herbert Gans, Marc Fried’s essay “Grieving for a Lost Home” on the psychological impacts of displacement, and Chester Hartmann’s study of the relocation of the West Enders.⁵⁸ Together, these documents revealed the myopia of early postwar planners who could not perceive meaningful social or economic relationships in visually chaotic environments. Gans called the West End an “urban village.” In the 1950s, villages like these across the country were targeted for renewal by private developers and public sector city-builders. They were seen as run-down, antiquated, obsolete, and even dangerous places that had the added misfortune of being located near central business districts. In the 1950s, Gans explained, “neighborhoods” were declared “slums.” The power of this declaration was immense. The determination of “blight” was a sociological judgment based on an oversimplified set of visual cues, governed by ideology, and often fabricated by redevelopment authority photographers who sought to document unseemly living conditions.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill*, 162.

⁵⁸ Gans, *The Urban Villagers*; Marc Fried, “Grieving for a Lost Home,” in *The Urban Condition*, ed. Leonard J. Duhl (New York: Basic Books, 1963); Chester Hartmann, “The Housing of Relocated Families,” in *Urban Renewal: People, Politics, and Planning*, eds. Jewel Bellush and Murray Hausknecht (New York: Clarion Books, 1967).

⁵⁹ Gans, *The Urban Villagers*. For examples of how photographers sometimes manipulated images of housing interiors to accentuate “blighted” conditions, see Paul Groth, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (Berkeley: University of

As a poor neighborhood near the central business district, the West End was an obvious target for urban renewal. Its proximity to downtown office jobs made the area potentially attractive to middle-class, white-collar employees who liked to live near their places of employment. Gans neatly summarized the rationale behind urban renewal in the West End:

Boston is a poor city, and the departure of middle-class residents and industry for the suburbs has left it with an over-supply of tax-exempt institutions and low income areas that yield little for the municipal coffers. Through the federal redevelopment program, the city fathers hoped to replace some of the low-yield areas with high-rent buildings that would bring in additional municipal income. Moreover, they believed that a shiny new redevelopment project would cleanse its aged, tenement-dominated skyline, and increase the morale of private and public investors. This in turn would supposedly lead to a spiral of further private rebuilding in the city.⁶⁰

Renewal planners believed that the West End should be torn down not only for the sake of the city but also to improve the lives of the people living there. The planners adopted what we now recognize as a narrow, paternalistic attitude toward acceptable norms of urban habitation. But the project was not designed to re-house the people who were displaced in more appropriate, modern housing. The city and its chosen private developer wanted to lure the middle-classes back to Boston and turn a low-rent area into a sparkling new asset. The majority of West Enders did not believe that they were living in a place that was sub-standard and they did not want to leave. Though many residents were tenants, beholden to absentee landlords, the West End was a neighborhood that offered tremendous social sustenance. In the planning phases for urban renewal, Gans

California Press, 1994) and Gabrielle Brainard, "Party Walls: Understanding Urban Change Through a Block of New Haven Row Houses, 1870–1979," *Journal of the New Haven Colony Historical Society* 48, no. 1 (2001).

⁶⁰ Gans, *The Urban Villagers*, 285.

wrote, West Enders did not apprehend the real possibility that their neighborhood would be destroyed and they displaced:

They had watched the demolition of parts of the North End for the Central Artery—the city’s expressway system—and while they disapproved, they realized that a highway was of public benefit and could not be opposed. But the idea that the city could clear the West End, and then turn the land over to a private builder for luxury apartments seemed unbelievable.⁶¹

But as the project proceeded, disbelief turned to disillusionment. When residents learned that the development contract had been awarded to the second highest bidder and that he planned to build apartments that would rent for at least six-times the going rate, they concluded that city government had struck a crooked deal. The action could not be justified by the public interest, West Enders reasoned, but only made sense in the context of a corrupt political system. “Many West Enders argued that only in Russia could the government deprive citizens of their property in such a dictatorial manner.”⁶² The West End project did not foster a sanguine outlook for the possibilities of urban renewal in Boston. It was clear to contemporary observers—including political elites—that renewal could be violently disruptive and that the city had to improve its ability to communicate the nature and purpose of proposed urban changes to residents.

John Hynes served as Mayor throughout the 1950s and had begun, with mixed results, the process of physical modernization and administrative reform. But the rest of the job was left to John Collins, who became Mayor in 1959 on an urban renewal agenda. Collins promptly lured Edward Logue from New Haven to serve as his redevelopment administrator, and together they launched an ambitious “\$90-million plan for Boston,”

⁶¹ Ibid., 291.

⁶² Ibid., 292.

which proposed the rehabilitation of one quarter of all of Boston's acreage, an area that housed half of the city's population. Wary of the bitter taste lingering from the West End, Collins and Logue explicitly advocated a "rehabilitative" approach to renewal that emphasized the preservation of neighborhood character as opposed to wholesale clearance. Logue's citywide renewal program included a series of housing projects in the city's neighborhoods.⁶³ But the most notable and widely publicized project was meant to be a sign of the city's downtown revival and to spark the redevelopment of the commercial and business districts: the plan to construct a vast Government Center in Scollay Square. The most important political achievement toward realizing Government Center was convincing Franklin Floete of the federal General Services Administration (GSA) to locate a new federal office building in the disreputable Scollay Square district.⁶⁴ The Massachusetts legislature then agreed to locate a suite of state office buildings in the complex and the City of Boston decided to build a new, modern city hall in the same.⁶⁵

As a guiding theory for urban renewal, Logue and Collins believed in the operative principle of *scale*. Urban renewal could not work on a piecemeal basis.

⁶³ For more on Boston's renewal-era public housing projects, see Lawrence Vale, *Reclaiming Public Housing: A Half Century of Struggle in Three Public Neighborhoods* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002) and *From Puritans to the Projects*; see also Langley Carleton Keyes, *The Rehabilitation Planning Game: A Study in the Diversity of a Neighborhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971); Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty, Planning and Politics in the New Boston: The Origins of ABCD* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

⁶⁴ At first, GSA officials wanted to build a new federal building in the Back Bay and had already purchased land there. Federal GSA bureaucrats did not at first apprehend the fact that the entire district would be razed to make way for the new Government Center and that they would not have to locate in the middle of a notorious "vice district."

⁶⁵ See O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*; Kennedy, *Planning a City on the Hill*; Harold D. Hodgkinson, "Miracle in Boston," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 84 (1972); Edward Logue, "Boston, 1960–1970—Seven Years of Plenty," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 84 (1972); and Rose, "Civic Wars."

Despite Logue's rhetoric of neighborhood sensitivity, this principle applied to a district like Scollay Square—the entire area had to be cleared—and it applied to the centralized coordination and administration of the program as a whole. Logue was also attuned to the concept of *momentum*: large projects had a catalytic effect on the public's attitude—or, at least, the attitude of leading private interests—toward renewal and boosted the city's self-perception. This outlook underscored the economic theory of urban renewal: strong and swift government action gave confidence to private developers and potential investors. Logue did not want to repeat the mistakes of the New York Streets or West End projects. He secured the commitments of federal, state, and local government to build at Government Center before initiating the process of acquiring land, relocating residents, and soliciting a physical plan. The prominent modernist architect I. M. Pei generated the initial site plan for Government Center, and a group of high-profile, academic architects designed a bold set of public buildings and spaces. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held in September 1963 and buildings were ready for occupancy in 1968, just as Collins turned over the Mayor's office to Kevin White.

But the story behind the story of urban renewal in Boston was the Prudential Center. As we will discuss in Chapters 3 and 4, the state legislation that enshrined Ed Logue's Boston Redevelopment Authority as the city's chief arbiter of urban land use was also the statute that formalized the Prudential Insurance Company's tax abatement. The "Prudential Bill" of 1961 rewrote the state's urban renewal law to extend tax breaks to commercial enterprises. As a result, the insurance company's project would be officially administered by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA). Prudential formally applied to the BRA to proceed with its project under the rubric of urban renewal

based on the “blighted” condition of the B&A rail yard and the prohibitively expensive obstacles to developing the site under the “ordinary operations of private enterprise,” as specified in the state’s revised urban renewal legislation. The topping out of the Prudential Center in 1964 was viewed by many, including Logue, as the chief harbinger of the “New Boston.” Prudential was the catalyst to the private redevelopment of the center city.⁶⁶

Banned in Boston: Culture, Capital, and Architecture

David McCord’s brief allusion to “book-banning” at the beginning of *About Boston* was a subtle indication of a conservative quality in the city’s collective cultural leanings. He was referring to the phrase “Banned in Boston,” which gained traction in the mid-1920s. In the midst of the high-flying jazz age, stodgy Boston elites were busy censoring literary works that they considered too risqué for public consumption. This cultural conservatism can be seen to extend to the city’s architectural character and financial culture, as well, which the Prudential planners would have to contend with.

The Watch and Ward Society, founded in 1878 as the New England Society for the Suppression of Vice—and which counted as members many of the city’s Brahmin elite—monitored for obscenity the content of written material circulating in Boston. There were many books that could not be sold in Boston, including Theodore Dreiser’s 1925 novel *An American Tragedy* (probably because of its vivid evocations of

⁶⁶ Logue, “Boston, Seven Years of Plenty.”

alcoholism, prostitution, and abortion) and the 1926 novel *The Hard-Boiled Virgin*, by Frances Newman, which threatened middle-class attitudes toward women by portraying a sexually adventurous woman who chose career and independence over marriage and motherhood.⁶⁷ The noted essayist H. L. Mencken stood trial in Boston when the Watch and Ward Society tried to suppress an issue of his magazine, *The American Mercury*. Mencken had published a chapter from Herbert Asbury's book *Up From Methodism*, which told the story of a churchgoing prostitute, and the Watch and Ward demanded that the Harvard Square peddler who sold the magazine be arrested. In a theatrical protest, Mencken came to Boston, publicly sold a copy of the magazine to Watch and Ward member Reverend J. Frank Chase, and was placed under arrest. In 1925, Mencken published an angry diatribe against Boston's thin cultural tolerance titled "Keeping the Puritans Pure," bemoaning censorship as another form of upper-crust paternalism.⁶⁸ Once considered America's intellectual capital, Boston in the postwar period was better known for its priggishness. *Harper's* writer Elizabeth Hardwick wrote in 1959 that the character of the city itself was akin to the title character in John Marquand's 1936 novel about a proper Bostonian, *The Late George Apley*. Like Apley, Boston was "fussy, sentimental, farcically mannered, archaic." Boston represented to her a *lost ideal*,

⁶⁷ Elmer Davis, "Boston: Notes on a Barbarian Invasion," *Harper's Magazine* (1928). Davis points out the irony of Boston's strict censorship statute: "The most obscene book I have ever read was an argument by an Irish judge against birth control; but I do not imagine that my protest would induce the Boston police to suppress it," 143.

⁶⁸ Mencken was tried and acquitted. Later, he sued Reverend Frank Chase and won, when a federal judge ruled that a private organization had no right to govern the censorship of literature. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_American_Mercury, accessed March 23, 2008; and Paul S. Boyer, *Purity in Print: Book Censorship in America from the Gilded Age to the Computer Age* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

“wrinkled, spindly-legged, depleted of her spiritual and cutaneous oils, provincial, [and] self-esteeming.”⁶⁹

“*Where’s Boston?*” *Architecture and urban identity*. Hardwick’s loose description of Boston’s cultural character can be extended to the realm of architecture. Geographer Mona Domosh has written about how “civic values” influenced the production and appearance of the built environments in Boston and New York. Architecture was a functional container as well as a cultural product—an act of collective self-representation that could be read by a perceptive iconographer. New York and Boston, Domosh argued, offered two very different cultural responses to the socio-economic upheavals of nineteenth century industrialization. New York’s eruptive skyline, constructed by an emerging industrialist class, expressed both wealth as well as a competitive jostling for prestige and status. Bostonians were slow to accept the New York skyscraper idiom or Chicago’s practice of modern, steel-framed construction. Boston’s rising bourgeoisie and established mercantile elite shared an interest in preserving the “Sacred Skyline,” embodied by the highly ordered residential landscape of the Back Bay, punctuated only by church steeples, and the consistent cornice-line of tall office buildings in the city’s business district, which was shaped by strict height limits.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Hardwick, “Boston: The Lost Ideal,” 62. See also John P. Marquand, *The Late George Apley* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1936).

⁷⁰ Mona Domosh, *Invented Cities: The Creation of Landscape in Nineteenth-Century New York & Boston* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Michael Holleran and Robert Fogelson, “‘The Sacred Skyline’: Boston’s Opposition to the Skyscraper,” (Working Paper 9, Center for Real Estate Development, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1987). This is not to say that there was not architectural diversity in the Back Bay. See Bainbridge Bunting, *Houses of Boston’s Back Bay* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967).

There is a story, perhaps apocryphal, about W. Seavey Joyce—the Dean of Boston College Business School who convened the Citizens Seminars—that can be connected to the city’s staid architectural character. In 1956, Joyce returned to Boston by plane from an out-of-town trip—the first time he had flown into the city. The approach to Boston afforded Joyce a rare aerial perspective of his hometown:

As the plane neared Boston and banked lazily to begin its approach to Logan Airport, the priest overcame his aversion to heights long enough to look out the window at the scene below, which he now saw from a distance and a perspective he had never before experienced. As he gazed down on the low-lying protuberance of land beneath him, which was completely undistinguished, had no distinctive skyline, and not a single identifiable structure except the old Custom House tower, he exclaimed in a startled voice: “Where’s Boston?”⁷¹

Joyce was looking for a landmark, a visual cue that distinguished Boston as a great city. But that visual cue was nowhere to be seen. In 1919, the tallest building in New England was Hartford’s 527-foot Travelers Insurance Tower, a massive beaux-arts skyscraper topped by a campanile steeple. In Boston, the tallest building for a very long time was the 16-story Custom House Tower (1915) designed by Peabody and Stearns, which was exempted from height restrictions because it was federally-owned property. The tower was built on top of the 1849 Custom House, a four-faced Greek-revival temple featuring a Doric portico. The Customs House Tower, like Napoleon LeBrun’s tower for Metropolitan Life in New York (1909) and the Travelers Insurance Tower in Hartford, featured an overscaled campanile and clock tower. Both government and insurance companies appropriated this icon, drawn from the Medieval Campanile di San Marco in Venice, to represent civic pride and public purpose.

⁷¹ O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 105.

Tall buildings in Boston. Beginning in the 1870s in New York and in Boston, life insurance and newspaper companies were early adopters of “tall buildings” that surpassed the accepted norm of four-story commercial blocks and loft structures. The urban historian Robert Fogelson notes that corporate leaders “saw tall office buildings not only as a sound investment but also as a source of prestige and a form of advertising.”⁷² When fire ravaged Boston’s business district in 1872, insurance companies were among the first to begin the rebuilding process.⁷³ The first major new building in Boston was financed with New York money when the Mutual Life Insurance Company built a five-story building on Post Office Square with a 130-foot (10 story) tower, sheathed in the fashionable French Second Empire-style that was inspired by Napoleon’s additions to the Louvre in Paris. This architectural fashion had made its debut in Boston in 1865 with the Boston City Hall building, designed by Gridley J. Fox Bryant and Arthur Gilman, endowing the richly detailed style with civic connotations.⁷⁴ Architects from the prestigious local firm Peabody and Stearns modeled the Mutual Life building on its New York counterpart, which had steep mansard roofs and a much taller, 234-foot clock tower. The campanile-style tower, not itself a common attribute of Second Empire architecture, became an oft-repeated symbol of the civic pretensions of insurance companies and other institutions. A few years later, Nathaniel Bradlee, another prominent Boston architect, designed a matching Second Empire edifice on the adjoining

⁷² Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880–1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 117.

⁷³ See Christine Meisner Rosen, *The Limits of Power: Great Fires and the Process of City Growth in America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁷⁴ Douglass Shand-Tucci, *Built in Boston: City and Suburb, 1800–2000* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 35.

lot for the New England Mutual Life Insurance Company, though he tastefully eschewed repeating the tower (fig. 2.1). A stone's throw away stood the Equitable Life Insurance building, housing the Boston offices of the venerable New York firm, in yet another Second Empire-style building designed by Arthur Gilman. Although these early tall buildings were sumptuous affairs of neoclassical pastiche, their underlying impulse was to project dignity and a fussy sort of propriety, consistent with the city's cultural conservatism.

After the 1872 fire, insurance companies were attracted to the development possibilities around the new Boston Post Office and Sub-Treasury building (1868-1875), a federal project designed by Alfred B. Mullett, who was then the Supervising Architect for the U.S. Government. The Post Office, too, was designed in the trendy Second Empire style. Post Office Square, as the area was called, represented an expansion of business offices into the warehousing district near South Station.⁷⁵ The 1870s insurance agglomeration around Post Office Square marked an exodus from Boston's established financial district anchored by State Street, the relatively broad and straight road that led from Boston's prosperous wharves toward the Common. State Street was lined with counting houses, banks, and the offices of bonds salesmen. In the 1880s, Boston capitalists began to rebuild their State Street office buildings. Peabody & Stearns designed the ten-story Fiske Building in 1887 for a respected dealer of bonds and

⁷⁵ See David Ward, "The Industrial Revolution and the Emergence of Boston's Central Business District," *Economic Geography* 42 no. 2 (April 1966).

securities; and in 1889, H. H. Richardson's successor firm, Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge, designed the 14-story Ames Building for a large shovel-producing company.⁷⁶

The new State Street structures stood more than 160 feet tall. They were masonry buildings and their heights were limited by the thickness of supporting walls. Chicago's Monadnock Building, at 16 stories one of the tallest masonry structures every built, was viewed as a limit to this construction technology.⁷⁷ But the Monadnock was an exception to the rule of steel-framed buildings in Chicago. Boston architects and building financiers, on the other hand, avoided the steel frame that had been used so effectively in Chicago. Even though Boston-based capitalists Peter and Shepard Brooks financed many of Chicago's most important steel-framed skyscrapers of the 1880s, the local real estate community did not completely trust this relatively unproven technology.⁷⁸ For Bostonians, the steel-frame was an audacious Chicagoan innovation, considered "too visionary" and "experimental." A Chicago architect, C. H. Blackall, designed the first steel-frame building in Boston in 1893, and was free to do so only because he also owned the building. Nonetheless, the building inspector insisted that the structure be engineered at triple the strength believed to be required for stability.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Owners of the Fiske Building mutilated the building in 1964 when they covered the granite edifice with metal panels and destroyed the mansard roof. These "renovations" were so unsuccessful that the entire building was taken down in 1989.

⁷⁷ See Holleran and Fogelson, "The Sacred Skyline"; Carl W. Condit, *The Chicago School of Architecture: A History of Commercial and Public Buildings in the Chicago Area, 1875–1925* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁷⁸ See Kenneth Turney Gibbs, *Business Architectural Imagery in America, 1870–1930* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984).

⁷⁹ Holleran and Fogelson, "The Sacred Skyline," 17–18.

Tall buildings clashed with Boston's cultural milieu or collective personality and many late-nineteenth century observers of the building scene protested their construction. There were objections that tall buildings stole light and air from neighboring structures and thus created health risks. Critics claimed that tall buildings exacerbated downtown traffic congestion. Real estate developers thought that while tall buildings might appear impressive, they were not profitable. Boston's market for office space was not as heated as those in New York or Chicago. Despite their stature, the Ames, Fiske, and Exchange Buildings (built in 1891) did not charge premium rental rates and did not pay well on their investments. The historians Michael Holleran and Robert Fogelson write that "Many contemporary observers questioned how well tall buildings anywhere paid during these early years and wondered whether they were not created more as monuments and advertisements than as sound investments."⁸⁰ Some Bostonians considered the Ames Building in particular to be a source of civic pride. But as a group, Boston capitalists favored discretion in their architectural expressions. This discretion reflected conservative Boston attitudes about money and even the financial instrument of the trust fund. The journalist Louis Lyons claimed in 1947 that "the trust fund was invented here and has found in New England its most elaborate use, with a full half of the assets of the region in what banks call 'conservative capital,' that is, in savings banks and trust funds which by their nature cannot be risked."⁸¹ These "trusts" operated in a fiduciary, not an entrepreneurial, spirit. Skyscrapers were expensive and risky speculations, and broke a

⁸⁰ Ibid., 17, which cites the *Boston Real Estate Record*, October 15, 1892. At the time, real estate entrepreneurs were not adept at calculating the value of the "extra dividends" of architecture as advertisement. But Prudential would explicitly evoke this secondary source of value with respect to the buildings created during their Regional Home Office building program.

⁸¹ Allen, *Our Fair City*, 29.

law of conventional wisdom among Boston investors that warned against “putting upon land improvements that are worth much more than the land itself.”⁸²

Height limits. In addition to their link to such economic conservatism, Boston’s height limits were based on a shared public concern with urban congestion and expressed a conscious public policy of business decentralization. Height limits, urban property interests supposed, would spread commercial development over a wider area. In 1891, the State legislature’s Joint Committee on Cities passed an ordinance limiting new construction to 125 feet (about 11 stories) in all Massachusetts cities, including Boston. (The restriction exempted ornamental extensions such as steeples or cupolas.) In 1892, the legislature enacted a more nuanced building code that further restricted tall buildings on narrow streets. There was a broad consensus among Boston landowners who agreed on these regulations. Large landowners supported height limits because they assumed that development pressure would raise the value of their idle land. Downtown property owners supported height limits because they believed that their existing buildings would not be overshadowed or rendered obsolete by towering new structures. For them, tall buildings implied new, modern spaces that could steal tenants and spur unprofitable competition. In 1904, the legislature elaborated the height ordinance, providing for a “B district” throughout most the city, limited to 80 feet, and maintaining the 125-foot limit in the “A district,” the downtown business district.⁸³ New buildings on State Street were built to the limit and height restrictions became a comfortable status quo—a legally

⁸² William Minot letter to the *Boston Herald*, February 8, 1898, quoted in Holleran and Fogelson, “The Sacred Skyline,” 17.

⁸³ Holleran and Fogelson, “The Sacred Skyline.” Height limits were not uncommon in American cities. By 1913 there were height restrictions in Chicago, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Baltimore, and Cleveland, among others.

enforced agreement among downtown property owners that they would forgo individual aspirations for taller buildings with higher property values for collective security through predictable and stable land values. The proof was in the pudding: “During a period [1890-1930] when real estate prices in other American cities went through devastating cycles, Boston was free of bust as well as boom.”⁸⁴

The national norm of flat height restrictions came to an end in 1916 when New York City passed the first comprehensive zoning ordinance that was designed to mitigate the height and bulk of large building by mandating set-backs.⁸⁵ Set-backs did not explicitly limit height but formed a building envelope based on street-width. The goal was to expose as much of the sky as possible from the street, thus preserving light and air.⁸⁶ New York’s zoning code also became a norm for real estate capitalists, delineating an accepted formula with potentially universal applications. Boston’s business district, meanwhile, was quickly built out to the 125-foot limit, implying that taller buildings could profitably be built. But New York financiers, frequently insurance companies, were hesitant to lend money to Boston developers working within the flat height restriction. “By 1923, the president of the Massachusetts Real Estate Exchange could list specific projects which were ‘held up because the big insurance companies of New York

⁸⁴ Ibid., 28.

⁸⁵ The Equitable Building (1915), a massive, 42-story edifice that filled its site on Broadway in downtown New York spurred the movement toward zoning. See Keith D. Revell, “Regulating the Landscape: Real Estate Values, City Planning, and the 1916 Zoning Ordinance,” in David Ward and Olivier Zunz, eds., *The Landscape of Modernity: New York City, 1900–1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

⁸⁶ The new buildings produced under this regulatory framework were frequently designed with an art deco aesthetic that emphasized verticality and expressed streamlined modernity; see Hugh Ferriss, *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Architecture Press, 1986).

will not loan money under the present building [height] restrictions.”⁸⁷ As a result, Boston was not fully integrated into the national real estate market and this situation damaged the city’s development prospects. Boston real estate interests began to question the height restriction, not only because the demand for office space required taller buildings but also because the comfortable aesthetic of a uniform cornice-line had been threatened by those who admired New York’s daring new towers. The construction of impressive skyscrapers in New York between 1905 and 1920 began to influence Bostonians’ vision of the ideal skyline, which they associated with the city’s economic success. Skylines were urban icons, and Boston’s uniform cornice-line did not project a vigorous or exciting image. And yet there were enough supporters of height restrictions—those who were happy to see New York, and not Boston, claim those garish, oversized skyscrapers—that change in Boston was slow.

In 1928, the Massachusetts State Legislature finally passed a set-back skyscraper ordinance, though it capped the ultimate height at 155 feet. A structure could exceed 125 feet, but above that height had to step back one foot for every two and a half feet it rose. Freed by the new ordinance, Boston’s most powerful corporations launched ambitious building projects. In 1929, the United Shoe Machinery Corporation, which controlled a large proportion of the nation’s shoe machinery production and distribution, built a large new headquarters building at 140 Federal Street in downtown Boston. The 24-story structure conformed to the 1928 code, its mass dramatically stepped back from the street and capped with a sliced-top pyramid (fig. 2.2). Boston-based architects Parker, Thomas & Rice shaped the building’s blocky massing, made of tan-colored brick over a steel

⁸⁷ Holeran and Fogelson, “The Sacred Skyline,” 34, quoting the *Boston Herald*, March 8, 1923.

frame, into vertical piers that framed recessed windows and spandrels. “The Shoe” introduced Boston to the design aesthetic of art deco, featuring elaborate metal work, especially in the lobby, and minimal surface ornamentation in relief. The federal government also contributed to Boston’s art deco scene. In 1930-1931, Ralph Adams Cram’s firm designed the Boston Post Office and Federal Building (replacing the Second Empire-style building on that site), a 22-story office building that faced Post Office Square (fig. 2.3). The building’s bulk—it occupied the entire block—was broken into a C-shape that allowed natural light to penetrate the office wings as well as the street. The building embraced the upward thrust of the thin piers and art deco style and was faced with vertical shafts of stone.⁸⁸

Insurance-Deco and the Back Bay district. For the most part, Boston’s new skyscraper ordinance in 1928 came too late. The national building boom of the 1920s had mostly passed and very few new office buildings were built in Boston during the 1930s or 40s. There were two significant exceptions, however. Their sources were both powerful insurance companies and both located in the emerging insurance district in the Back Bay. Insurance companies were the rare institutions that could afford real estate investments during the 1930s, though the architecture of these buildings revealed a kind of artistic stagnation in uncertain economic times. The Boston-based Liberty Mutual Insurance Company erected a new building at 175 Berkeley Street in 1937. In his architectural guide to Boston, Donlyn Lyndon dismissed Chester Lindsay Churchill’s design: “If you did not have death on your mind before, passing by Liberty Mutual may

⁸⁸ Donlyn Lyndon, *Boston: The City Observed* (New York: Vintage, 1982), 265.

quickly induce morbid thoughts of life insurance.”⁸⁹ In 1939, the New England Mutual Life Insurance Company left its quarters on Post Office Square for a new building on Bolyston Street in the Back Bay. The symmetrical building, designed by Cram & Ferguson, blended the stripped classicism that was popular with government buildings in the 1930s with picturesque details like a temple front and cylindrical cupola atop a clock tower (fig. 2.4). The building was panned by critics and inspired David McCord to wax poetical:

Ralph Adams Cram
One morning said damn,
And designed the Urn Burial
For a concern actuarial.⁹⁰

More recently, Donlyn Lyndon added his own dry critique, writing that the New England Mutual Life Building was “a Cram & Ferguson opus so lifeless that it defies even unsympathetic description.”⁹¹ Yet this building helped establish the Cram firm as a trusted designer of insurance company office buildings.

The Liberty Mutual and New England Mutual buildings reinforced a westward spatial trend in the location of the Boston insurance industry that had begun in 1922, when the John Hancock Insurance Company commissioned Parker, Thomas & Rice to design an office building on Clarendon Street, which they executed in a conservative, beaux-arts style (fig. 2.5). In 1947 the John Hancock Insurance Company expanded again and erected a 26-story tower, designed by Cram & Ferguson (fig. 2.6). The building displayed the vertical piers, stepped-back “ziggurat” massing, and pyramidal top

⁸⁹ Ibid., 192.

⁹⁰ McCord, *About Boston*.

⁹¹ Lyndon, *Boston*, 147.

typical of art deco. The lobby featured relief sculpture and elaborate murals. But the cornice lacked the extruding crenellations that endow art deco with so much of its vertical lift. The building is more restrained, more sober, than the sometimes effusive deco style. In 1947, the John Hancock building, clad in heavy limestone, was looking backward, not forward. Donlyn Lyndon called its style “retardataire deco,” implying that it was behind the times and instantly out-of-date.⁹²

The 1947 Hancock tower is very handsome and a landmark. But the earliest postwar architects working in Boston confronted an architectural culture that was hostile to experimentation. Insurance companies in particular sought out established architectural styles that expressed the solidity of the enterprise, and Cram & Ferguson had become the de facto architects of Boston’s insurance district (fig. 2.7). It should come as no surprise that Prudential sought out Cram & Ferguson to serve as associate architects for the Northeastern Home Office project in Boston. Pereira & Luckman (and later Charles Luckman Associates), the coordinating architects, offered experience in large-scale master planning projects. But in choosing Cram & Ferguson, Prudential hedged its bet on the Los Angeles-based Pereira & Luckman by hiring an established local firm to help produce the architecture of the proposed new complex.

⁹² The other notable “retardataire deco” building produced in this period was the New England Telephone and Telegraph Building on Post Office Square, also in 1947 and designed by Cram & Ferguson.

Dirty Streets: Transportation and Modernization

The insurance district represented an expansion of the business district, but also the drift of office space away from the cramped financial core of State Street and Post Office Square toward the bigger parcels of the Back Bay that were more accessible by arterial streets. The Prudential Center marked the culmination of this trend in spatial terms—a vast parcel that was designed in conjunction with an urban highway penetrating Boston’s city limits from the west. While the insurance district of 1948 was highly accessible by major roads such as Commonwealth Avenue, Boylston Street, and Huntington Avenue, the Prudential Center was ultimately planned in coordination with the Boston Extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike, a limited-access highway that followed the route of the B&A rail corridor through the western suburbs and into downtown Boston where it connected to the Central Artery. In this section, I explore the challenges to transportation planning in Boston leading to its eventual resolution with the Pike and the Pru.

As noted earlier, in 1948 David McCord had admitted that Boston suffered from “dirty streets” and he chose to overlook this banal topic in his portrait of the city, *About Boston*. But McCord’s fleeting reference was not without significance. On the surface, the author indicated that Boston’s streets needed a good scrubbing; implying further that the city’s street-cleaning services were not well organized or deployed. To read more deeply, McCord betrayed a subtle disdain for the street—not as urban form, but as a place. The street was dirty: physically, yes, but socially, too. It was crowded, unclean, and even impure. As a source of urban form, McCord was drawn to the picturesque, curving streets that were the legacy of Boston’s colonial street pattern: “There is

something about the curving of any path, urban or otherwise, that is more inviting to the pedestrian or traveler than the way that is straight.”⁹³ Yet he allowed that navigating those streets could be troublesome:

The streets of older Boston are like the contours of a map of a mildly hilly region. They turn and twist on each other without provocation. It is undoubtedly harder for a stranger to learn his way about in downtown Boston than in any other American metropolis.⁹⁴

Modernist intellectuals, workaday traffic engineers, and city planners did not share McCord’s admiration for the curving street. For Le Corbusier, it was the “pack-donkey’s way,” and unfit for the dignified, rational human being.⁹⁵ And if the street was dirty, it was because there were too many unlit and unregulated spaces. Old streets were too narrow or too irregular to function as an efficient conduit for traffic; they were stagnant, congested, and obsolete. These intellectuals and engineers shared a common goal: to produce a purified street that was regularized, always in motion, and sparkling clean. Streets for them were essentially placeless spaces of pure circulation and not stable sites for human activity or a mixed-use public realm.

The crooked and narrow streets of Boston. There have been many historical and quasi-historical renderings of Boston’s idiosyncratic pattern of streets and their development over time. The most engrossing is Walter Muir Whitehill’s magisterial

⁹³ McCord, *About Boston*, 92.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁹⁵ Le Corbusier wrote: “Man walks in a straight line because he has a goal and knows where he is going; he has made up his mind to reach some particular place and he goes straight to it. The pack-donkey meanders along, meditates a little in his scatter-brained and distracted fashion, he zigzags in order to avoid the larger stones, or to ease the climb, or to gain a little shade; he takes the line of least resistance. But man governs his feelings by his reason; he keeps his feelings and his instincts in check, subordinating them to the aim he has in view.” *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning* (1929; Reprint, Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 1987), 5.

narrative of the city's physical history, *Boston: A Topographical History*, first published in 1956 and now in its third edition. In 1920, Annie Haven Thwing published a dotting portrait, *The Crooked and Narrow Streets of Boston*.⁹⁶ The 1930 Thoroughfare Plan for Boston, prepared by the city planning consultant Robert Whitten, included a lengthy article, "History of Boston's Street System," by Elisabeth Herlihy, the Secretary of Boston's City Planning Board and a frequent writer on topics relating to Boston's planning and physical history. Herlihy wrote:

To the pioneer upon the western prairie it is comparatively easy to lay out a prospective city in squares and streets of unvarying size and shape; to the colonist of 1630 upon the rugged promontory of New England, it was a different matter. Without the means of surmounting the natural obstacles in the way, he proceeded to adapt himself for them. Thus the narrow winding streets, the crooked ways and alleys, the short cuts, the curious twists and turns, the paths and lanes worn by the feet of the early settlers, and established for their convenience three centuries ago, remain today practically unchanged and even cherished by posterity for their early associations.⁹⁷

At first, the Shawmut Peninsula—the site of first European settlement—was only tenuously connected to the mainland by a narrow neck, navigated by Washington Street, which served as the organizing spine of the colonial village. This situation changed little until the 1830s, when two railroad viaducts traversed the Back Bay and the "neck" was thickened and filled to support these transport connections to the west. The triangular intersection of the Boston & Worcester (later Boston & Albany) and the Boston & Providence lines created the urban form that became a large rail yard and eventually the site of the Prudential Center. Filled land, on the neck or elsewhere to enlarge the

⁹⁶ Annie Haven Thwing, *The Crooked and Narrow Streets of Boston* (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., 1920).

⁹⁷ Elisabeth M. Herlihy, "The History of Boston's Street System," in *Report on a Thoroughfare Plan for Boston* (Boston: City Planning Board, 1930), 156.

peninsula, was usually platted in a more orthogonal and less meandering fashion. In 1807, the seven commissioners of the Mill Pond Corporation, including John Quincy Adams, employed Charles Bulfinch to produce a plan for new land created by filling the pond at the city's northern edge. Bulfinch designed a perfect, equilateral triangle divided by equally spaced linear streets.⁹⁸ In the 1840s, Boston's commercial and political elite conceived plans to fill the Back Bay, and the process of filling, street-platting, and construction would continue unabated for the next 40 years. The Back Bay was designed as a grid, with long east-west blocks and short north-south blocks, anchored by the broad, tree-lined boulevard of Commonwealth Avenue, the district's central spine and chief public space.⁹⁹

Though both were laid out in clear, geometric patterns, neither the Bulfinch Triangle nor the Back Bay were designed with the intention of moving traffic, a goal that became the governing obsession of urban planners in the twentieth century. At the turn of the twentieth century, Boston's urban planners, politicians, businessmen, and journalists were preoccupied with a foul and meddlesome problem that seemed destined to strangle both the economic well-being and moral rectitude of the city: congestion. The discourse about urban congestion and the images used to represent it have been in circulation nearly as long as the modern city itself. In photographs, engravings, and cartoons dating to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, images showed a mix of

⁹⁸ Walter Muir Whitehill and Lawrence Kennedy, *Boston: A Topographical History*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 20007), 9. The basic form of the "Bulfinch Triangle" is still perceivable today, though obscured by the intervention of rail lines and the North Station terminal.

⁹⁹ See Newman and Holton, *Boston's Back Bay* and Whitehill and Kennedy, *Boston: A Topographical History*.

transportation apparatuses stuck in gridlock. The horse-drawn cart, electric streetcar, pedestrian, and eventually the automobile and motor-truck competed for space on the street. The concept and rhetoric of congestion, and the biological allusions it implied, accentuated a central tension in how we think about streets: are streets for circulation, or are they *places*?

Congestion versus metropolitan thoroughfares. In her dissertation, “The Congestion Evil,” Asha Weinstein traces the perceptions of congestion in Boston in the 1890s and 1920s and compares the solutions proposed in each of the two time periods—a subway and a “loop” highway, respectively. Weinstein uses contemporary newspaper accounts to reconstruct the discourse around urban congestion as a problem to be surmounted. Congestion was widely feared as a form of “strangulation” that threatened not only the economic vitality of the city but also the moral character of the community. To be sure, congestion was a sign of economic vigor and the primacy of the central business district. But heavy traffic was also an impediment to the efficient circulation of goods and threatened the desirability and accessibility of downtown as a commercial district.¹⁰⁰

One solution to congestion was to create multi-leveled streets. Two methods of achieving this were elevated rail lines and underground subways, both of which eliminated at-grade crossings for streetcars and opened up the street surface for other forms of transit. A subway was more expensive, but both were politically controversial because they implied the uneven enhancement or diminution of abutting property values.

¹⁰⁰ Asha Elizabeth Weinstein, “The Congestion Evil: Perceptions of Traffic Congestion in Boston in the 1890s and 1920s” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2002).

Private companies in New York and Chicago obtained charters to build elevated transit lines as early as the 1870s. But a proposal for an elevated transit viaduct in downtown Boston was rejected in the 1890s in favor of a subway, which was considered more reliable and less physically intrusive than an elevated line. Downtown business interests in Boston united to back the subway proposal. The Massachusetts legislature authorized the Boston Transit Commission to build a 1.5 mile subway beneath Tremont Street, in the heart of the retail district, which was leased and operated by the West End Street Railway Company.¹⁰¹

The intent of the subway was to free street-space for the passage of other wheeled vehicles and pedestrians. But subway planning did not address the larger question of road planning at a metropolitan scale, a challenge picked up by the landscape architect Arthur Shurtleff in 1911. Shurtleff proposed an ambitious set of road improvements for the metropolitan region with the goal of rationalizing a discontinuous system of streets that had developed, as he saw it, merely by “natural” evolution. The existing pattern could be improved by minor design interventions in some instances, but also required a set of new roads. He recommended a system of radial and circumferential thoroughfares that would complete and perfect the ad hoc street network. The result would be an efficient, comprehensive system designed to facilitate the flow of “traffic”—a term that Shurtleff used broadly to embrace the movement of people, goods, and, in a more abstract sense, commerce itself. Like his forebears F. L. Olmsted, Charles Eliot, and Sylvester Baxter, Shurtleff perceived the transportation network as a constituent element

¹⁰¹ Fogelson, *Downtown*, 59; see also Cheape, *Moving the Masses*.

of a metropolitan *circulatory* system that also included sewerage, water supply, and parks.¹⁰²

Shurtleff's plans were mostly unrealized. But his image for Boston's new streets was influenced by a prevailing design paradigm: the boulevard, a modern street type that provided ample space for various transportation modes, sometimes organized around a landscaped mall. Boulevards were broad, multi-lane roads designed as urban amenities that also moved traffic. When Boston leaders later proposed a "loop highway" in downtown Boston, they adopted the boulevard form. This ambitious proposal was designed to circumnavigate the central business district and curve its way around the edges of the city's peninsular core. By the 1920s, the dramatic proliferation of motor vehicles, which competed vigorously (and dangerously) for street space, had added another element to the already meddlesome downtown congestion problem. The "loop highway" plan was initiated in 1923 by the City Planning Board and supported by Mayor Curley. This new street, also called the "intermediate thoroughfare," was designed to be 100 feet wide, and was expected to cost nearly \$33 million. The public expense of the road would be recouped, its advocates imagined, by increased tax assessments accruing to improved properties along the edges of the road and in the business district more

¹⁰² Arthur Shurtleff, "A Street Plan for Metropolitan District of Boston," *Landscape Architecture* 1 (January 1911): 71–83. Shurtleff's scheme followed a nineteenth-century tradition of metropolitanism first suggested by Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed an "Emerald Necklace" for Boston in the 1880s as a ring of parks and parkways—the Boston Common, Public Garden, and Commonwealth Avenue were its urban fountainhead—that also functioned as an urban drainage system for the Back Bay. In 1893, Charles Eliot, a landscape architect, and Sylvester Baxter, an urban reformer and journalist, proposed a more ambitious regional system of parks, open spaces, and parkways, as well as a new institutional body, the Metropolitan District Commission, to procure and administer these new spaces.

broadly.¹⁰³ Thus, the loop highway was a plan to secure the fiscal integrity of downtown. *The American City* magazine reported that the new thoroughfare was a “city-wide rather than a local improvement, and that the entire business district will derive a direct, substantial and assessable benefit therefrom.”¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, construction required land acquisition, either by willing sellers or through eminent domain, and would be expensive. As it turned out, it was too expensive. Planning for the loop highway never got beyond the drawing boards and the state legislature eventually vetoed the project. Beyond sheer cost, the road was stifled by the lack of unified business support for the plan, and drew resistance from self-interested property owners who denounced public appropriations of private property.

Though it ultimately failed, the loop highway proposal introduced to Boston a key innovation in transportation planning: the development of “scientific” techniques to document and quantify traffic flow and assign a monetary cost to traffic congestion. In December 1926, Elisabeth Herlihy reported in an article for *The American City* the results of traffic counts in Boston taken in 1924 and then again in 1926. The study, produced by the City Planning Board with the backing of the Boston Chamber of Commerce, reported a 21% increase over the two years in vehicular traffic entering Boston’s central district. That number disguised the fact that automobile traffic had jumped by 29% and motor trucks by 21% while horse-drawn vehicles had declined by 21%. In lieu of entirely new streets, municipal government initiated a set of incremental measures to address the impact of cars and trucks on city streets, including street-widenings, regulatory tactics to

¹⁰³ See Weinstein, “The Congestion Evil.”

¹⁰⁴ “For Traffic Relief in Boston—New Two-Mile Thoroughfare Proposed,” *American City* (February 1924): 215.

limit on-street parking and double-parking, and other technological fixes designed to move traffic more efficiently.¹⁰⁵

More ambitious than efforts to manage the flow of traffic at a single grade were proposals for elevated streets, repeating the basic idea behind elevated or submerged transit lines but applying it to automobile traffic. This was the driving concept for Robert Whitten's "Central Artery" in Boston, the centerpiece of his 1930 regional thoroughfare plan. Whitten's plan was based on extensive traffic count statistics, and left readers little room to question the idea that the city was choking with congestion. Whitten devoted the first half of his report to the exhaustive documentation and representation of the city's traffic congestion in a dizzying array of charts, graphs, and maps. The second half was a detailed proposal for a system of improved or new roads for metropolitan Boston.

Whitten stated: "The Plan is based primarily on a recognition of the need for a modernization of the present highway system by the development of a limited mileage of express roads and parkways of generous width and permitting a continuous flow of traffic."¹⁰⁶ The concept of *continuous flow* was the ideological core of Whitten's proposal. *The American City* picked up on this distinguishing feature and reported in 1930 that the Boston Thoroughfare Plan called for "the provision of continuous-flow

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth M. Herlihy, "Traffic Count Helps Boston Planning," *American City* (December 1926), 849. Throughout the 1920s, the pages of the *American City* were littered with advertisements for inventions designed to regulate and improve traffic flow. These included the "Lehman Traffic Guide," which promised to "put an end to all traffic troubles." It was a small, heavy dome with reflective lenses that sat in the middle of streets to divide traffic. Or the Automatic Signal Corporation's "Electro-Matic vehicle-actuated traffic dispatching system," which could be installed at complicated intersections to control traffic and allow "non-interfering flows to move independently." The Electro-Matic was essentially a dressed-up version of traffic lights, designed to manage the flow of multi-modal traffic through congested intersections and prevent collisions.

¹⁰⁶ *Report on a Thoroughfare Plan for Boston*, 6.

traffic facilities.”¹⁰⁷ When possible, this ideal flow could be attained through traffic circles, or round-a-bouts. But in dense urban areas it was necessary to build broad streets with an “express” underpass that allowed through traffic avoid to intersections with cross traffic. In the central business district, Whitten proposed an elevated “Central Artery” that was lifted off the ground on steel girders.

Postwar highway plans. Whitten’s plan gathered dust through the 1930s and into the war years. The concept of a Central Artery was revived in 1947 when Governor Robert Bradford, a Republican, commissioned a study that led to the Master Highway Plan for Metropolitan Boston, published in 1948 and authored by the private consulting firm of Charles A. Maguire & Associates with the aid of DeLeuw, Cather & Co., a Chicago-based planning firm. The intent of this document mirrored the 1930 Thoroughfare Plan: to furnish the traffic statistics necessary to substantiate an expensive and ambitious highway-building program. The research methods of traffic engineering—traffic counting and origin-destination studies used to illustrate demand for new roads—had not technically advanced in the eighteen years between Whitten’s report and the 1948 Master Highway Plan. But the rhetoric had been amplified, the techniques of visual representation were more compelling, and the physical proposals themselves were bolder. The individual data points from a series of origin-and-destination studies were accumulated into traffic demand statistics that were projected upon a map of the Boston region and labeled “desire lines” to sleekly dramatize the demand for modern, express highways that had built up during war time. The Master Highway Plan explained this novel turn of phrase:

¹⁰⁷ “Speed and Safety for Boston’s Traffic,” *American City* (December 1930): 148.

A desire line can be defined as a straight line between the point of origin and the point of destination of a trip or group of similar trips, without regard to routes traveled, in other words the line of travel if a direct highway-existed.¹⁰⁸

The desire lines invariably lead from the suburban periphery toward the center city. The Plan proposed to satisfy those desires by translating them as directly as possible into a set of radiating freeways and also included a set of circumferential highways that facilitated inter-suburban transport and allowed cars and trucks to bypass the City of Boston if necessary.

The Master Highway Plan coincided with a political mandate and fiscal policy to construct new roads. In 1949, the newly elected governor, Democrat Paul Dever, and the state House of Representatives, enjoying a Democratic majority, passed a \$100 million bond bill for state highways, financed by an increase in the state gas tax. The money was turned over to William F. Callahan, who was reappointed as the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Works (DPW) after a 10-year hiatus. Callahan gave the highest priority to two links in the 1948 Master Highway Plan: the Central Artery designed to ease congestion through downtown Boston, and Route 128, the circumferential highway that he had initiated in his first term as DPW Commissioner, between 1934 and 1939. These two projects for Metropolitan Boston consumed nearly all of the \$100 million bond dedicated to roads.¹⁰⁹

In the 1930s, Callahan had launched a project to modernize and expand Route 128, which was the state's designation for a haphazard and disconnected series of local

¹⁰⁸ Master Highway Plan for the Boston Metropolitan Area (1948), 12.

¹⁰⁹ The remainder of the money was allocated to the Metropolitan District Commission (the successor of the Metropolitan Parks Commission) to construct a river-side drive—Storrow Drive—in conjunction with a landscaped esplanade along the Charles River in Boston.

roads that weaved its way through Boston's suburbs in a vaguely circumferential pattern. Callahan wanted to build a divided parkway with limited-access interchanges that bypassed the small villages and towns which marked the awkward hinges of the old state road. Contemporary reports divided the new road into two parts—the “Northern Circumferential Highway” and the “Southern Circumferential Highway.” In 1936, construction began on a small stretch of the road in the northern suburbs, but little progress was made and nearly all highway construction came to a halt with the onset of the Second World War. When Callahan returned to the Route 128 project in 1949, he oversaw the swift construction of a 22-mile section that completed the northern leg of the highway. But critics called the new highway a “road to nowhere.” Did the region really need a modern roadway that connected small suburban hamlets while Boston was choking with congestion? Undeterred, Callahan went forward and divided the work into nine separate contracts to hasten its completion. Construction began in 1950, and the Northern Circumferential Highway was open eighteen months later. Callahan left the DPW in 1952 to focus on his new venture, the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, and was succeeded by John Volpe, who continued with the southern section of Route 128.¹¹⁰

The Central Artery was planned as the urban link of the 1948 Master Highway Plan. Unlike Route 128, which entailed cheap land acquisition and little destruction of the built environment, the urban highway was a major physical intervention. In his vision of the Central Artery in 1930, Robert Whitten produced a rendering of a delicate, steel-framed, elevated road neatly inserted amidst the broad commercial structures on Atlantic Avenue, a major commercial thoroughfare dividing Boston's wharf facilities from the

¹¹⁰ Yanni Tsipis and David Kruh, *Building Route 128* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Arcadia, 2003).

commercial and office district. Yet the Central Artery launched in 1952 was designed at a much broader scale and required the procurement of expensive urban land parcels. As we will see in Chapter 4, William F. Callahan's proposal for an urban extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike was based on his conviction that the region required a direct connection to the Central Artery from the west.

A Fine Old Painting of Character

To those who scoffed at Boston's antiquated urban culture and languishing built environment, David McCord had a ready defense: "You would not stand in front of a fine old painting of character and say that it might be good if it had a new frame and a cleaning and a coat of varnish."¹¹¹ Yet the political and business leadership of Boston made precisely that assessment when looking at the "old painting of character" that was downtown Boston in 1948. In fact, the fear soon became that the new frame, the cleaning, and the varnish would go too far and would have the result of stripping much of the fine old painting itself from its worn canvas. Could urban renewal—of the business district, the neighborhoods, and the streets—be accomplished in a way that preserved the distinctive history, culture, and ambience of Boston? More generally, could the economic future and well-being of the city be insured—both by government and by private enterprise—in ways that also insured aesthetic and social continuity with the past?

¹¹¹ McCord, *About Boston*, 12.

These were among the challenges facing the planners of the Prudential Center and the Massachusetts Turnpike at mid-century.

Chapter Three:

“We Believe in Boston”: The Politics of the Prudential Center

Prudential announced its intention to build a Northeastern Home Office (NEHO) in Boston at a luncheon hosted by the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce at the Sheraton Plaza Hotel on January 31, 1957. For assembled politicians, business leaders, and newspaper reporters, Prudential’s president, Carrol M. Shanks, delivered a rousing address that heralded a bright future for the city and its regional economy. Shanks then displayed a large image of the ground-plan for the site: a 28-acre parcel in the Back Bay acquired from the Boston & Albany Railroad. But it was not until he unveiled a set of colored renderings of the Prudential Center that his audience perceived the enormity of his company’s proposal (figs. 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3). As one reporter put it, “The audience appeared stunned momentarily as it gazed in wonder at the two screens and listened to Shanks describe a project that will mean the revitalization of New England’s economy.”¹

Sight and Scope

When he arrived in Boston, Carrol Shanks appeared as a prophet of confidence, conveying that intangible yet critical factor in urban economics. His speech to the Chamber of Commerce, entitled “We Believe in New England,” was received by local

¹ Richard Connolly, “Scope of Prudential Plans Astounds Business Leaders,” *Boston Herald*, February 1, 1957, 11. See also Benjamin C. Waterhouse, “‘Through the Ordinary Operations of Private Enterprise’: The Prudential Insurance Company’s Corporate Renewal in Boston” (unpublished paper, Harvard University, Department of History, 2005).

businessmen as a validation of the region's emerging high-technology and commercial economy and Boston's role as its financial hub. Shanks' tone blended prophetic economic analysis with the missionary zeal of an urban booster. The press widely reported the address as an important vote of confidence from a visionary corporate chieftain of national stature. Shanks emphasized that the proposed "Prudential Center" would benefit both his company and the city of Boston:

I am told this represents one of the largest single areas within a metropolitan center ever to be developed at one time under a single plan. It is important to The Prudential. But more than that, we believe it can serve as a stimulus for added vigorous growth and progress in the heart of one of America's very great cities. We have ambitious plans for this development, which will require substantial investment. The very existence of these plans reflects a firm conviction on our part that Boston faces a dynamic future. Our investigations into Boston and New England indicate that there is developing here a new economic empire, built upon modern technology. We believe in Boston. We believe in the entire New England Area.²

Yet Prudential's choice of Boston was not based on sheer faith. "This is the result of many months of research," Shanks told his audience. New England, the pioneering hearth of American industry, had fallen upon hard times as regional manufacturing dispersed to locations with cheaper labor. But in Shanks's broad view, these changes were ultimately for the best. What appeared locally to be a crisis was only a temporary, if painful, process of rebalancing the nation's free market economy:

The exodus of industries which provided New England with sometimes alarming sounding statistics is no reason to assume that New England will not progress: it simply means that businesses that belong somewhere else will go where it is most economical for them to operate, and those that belong in New England will stay here, or will come here and grow – as

² Carrol M. Shanks, "We Believe in New England," address at a Luncheon of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, January 31, 1957, Prudential Archives (hereafter cited as PA) 10-42, Press Kits 1960.

they have been doing in the past few years. In the end, when the transition period is finished, you will have a sounder economy than ever before.³

The cotton and textile mills had decamped for the South, but they were being replaced by high-technology industries that offered higher wages to fewer workers. The region's new companies—in electronics, military armaments, new consumer products, and industrial research—operated “on a high and complex plane.” Let the old manufactories go, Shanks advised, and welcome the new world of radars, electronic components, and intellectual property: “These are the industries upon which the future economy of the nation will be founded.”⁴

The economy of Boston's industrial region was improving, but Shanks believed that urban leaders had neglected the city itself. Like its broader economy, Boston's physical plant faced the challenge of obsolescence. A city's built environment performed economic functions and had to stay up-to-date to be productive and compete with other cities. Now cities had to compete with their own suburbs, Shanks lamented, and resist the “national trend towards decentralization.” This meant that Boston had to be rebuilt with modern facilities that met suburban standards for accessibility, convenience, and amenities. Shanks predicted that Prudential's commitment to build a massive new office, commercial, and residential complex in the Back Bay would convince local businesses to stay in the city and even persuade other firms to relocate to Boston. This is what had happened in Chicago, where Prudential's Mid-American Home Office building encouraged local businesses to stay in the city instead of “moving into new areas, which a few years ago was an alarming possibility.” Shanks noted that business leaders of

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Pittsburgh, under the guidance of the Allegheny Conference, initiated a “sizable overhauling,” channeling investment capital that might have gone elsewhere into the city’s downtown office district. But Boston’s investor class had too frequently passed over their own city, finding more distant beneficiaries of its capital. Shanks expected local capitalists to follow Prudential’s lead and seek opportunities closer to home:

More and more of the money in this area can be put to work in Boston, in Massachusetts, and in New England. The returns here will be as good as anywhere else; in my estimation the investments will be at least as secure; and the money you invest in making local progress is money that, as it does everywhere, will pay you extra dividends in pride and contentment and security.

Prudential championed this concept of “extra dividends,” but Shanks made clear that psychological factors such as pride or contentment were secondary to Prudential’s financial mission. He intoned: “Our project in Boston is being made strictly for business reasons and for profitable investment.”⁵

City within a city. The set of renderings of the future “Prudential Center” that Shanks displayed were credited to three firms: local architects Hoyle, Doran & Berry; Metcalf & Eddy, a Boston engineering firm; and Pereira & Luckman, a national firm based in Los Angeles that would serve as coordinating architects. The images showed a vast campus of dramatic rectangles, centered by a 50-story office tower and punctuated by two round, dome-roofed structures—the first to house a municipal auditorium that the city proposed to build, the second for a restaurant. It was a sparkling acropolis without an urban context—no streets ran through it—and was hailed as a “city in a city.” The main tower housed Prudential’s Northeastern Home Office (NEHO), but allotted nearly

⁵ Ibid.

three quarters of the floors to outside tenants. Flanking the tower were rectangular low-rise commercial pavilions that framed a sequence of public spaces. The master plan also called for a slab-shaped hotel, attached to the city's auditorium, and five residential towers. One apartment tower matched the massing of the hotel. Four smaller apartment towers rose as a suite of identical finger-like extrusions that mimicked the central tower's square plan, each neatly wrapped in steel and glass envelopes. Shanks summarized the concept: "This project is planned not only to provide peak efficiency for ourselves, but to provide high-class office space for rental to some of Boston's other businesses, and equally high-class apartments within Boston where people can live."⁶

Prudential majestically announced "the erection in downtown Boston of the world's largest integrated business, civic and residential center. . . . It will be known as The Prudential Center."⁷ In addition to building over the Boston & Albany rail yard, Prudential had options to augment the parcel with two smaller properties—the Mechanics Hall, at the site's southeastern edge, and several square blocks to the southwest that belonged to the Christian Science Church. The total site occupied more than 31 acres in the Back Bay. A press release echoed what Shanks had mentioned in his speech: "It is believed to be the largest single metropolitan site ever purchased for re-development." The "focal point" would be a "unique square-shaped" tower that housed Prudential's northeastern headquarters. The building contained over 750,000 square feet of office space, and at 50-stories would be the tallest structure in New England. But the office

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "For Release after 10 a.m. Thursday, January 31, 1957," PA 10-42, Press Releases.

tower was only the centerpiece of this massive “city-within-a-city.”⁸ The project called for 12 separate structures that encompassed more than twice the space of Rockefeller

Center:

It is planned to surround this tower-like structure, rising some 600 feet into Boston’s skyline, with a 6,000 seat municipal convention hall, a hotel that will be one of this city’s largest, a complex of garden and tower apartments housing about 4,000 persons, a restaurant accommodating 800-900 patrons at a single sitting and a “city full” of shops and specialty stores. The project will also provide underground parking for some 5,000 automobiles.⁹

Prudential officials proclaimed that the project would avoid the “cloistered atmosphere of a downtown development.” A large portion of the plinth that capped the garage substructure would be left open for “plazas and malls, reflecting pools, fountains and sculpture, enclosed glass-walled walkways and other esthetic features.” The overriding impression would be the “freedom of space.”¹⁰

Mayor John Hynes was euphoric, if a bit startled by the image of such a massive new development. In a press release, Hynes enthused that the Prudential Center was “the biggest thing that has ever happened in Boston in a physical sense. There has never been anything here faintly resembling it.” The governor, Democrat Foster Furcolo, was also swept up in the moment, declaring: “There perhaps has not been a single more significant event in the history of Massachusetts.”¹¹ The hyperbolic politicians were likely inspired by the spectacular renderings of the proposed project, which promised a

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Arthur Stratton, “Huge Center to Make 12,000 New Jobs,” *Boston Herald*, February 1, 1957, 10.

¹¹ Connolly, “Scope of Prudential Plans,” 11.

new scale, aesthetic, and planning sensibility for Boston's urban landscape. The *Boston Globe*'s A. S. Plotkin, who covered architecture and real estate, reported: "Boston got an electrifying view yesterday of what its \$100 million Back Bay 'city-within-a-city' will look like about five years hence." Prudential's project would "transform the dingy Boston & Albany railroad yards area into a spacious, picture-book vista of clean-lined structures. The emphasis will be on glassed-in, air-conditioned comfort."¹² To proper Bostonians accustomed to the more opaque and stolid built environment of masonry structures, Prudential's vision of a gleaming city of steel and glass was stunning:

The sight and scope of Prudential's plans for the now near-blighted area were breath-taking as they were unveiled on giant screens in the Sheraton ballroom. Rising high from about the center of the plot was a 50-story skyscraper which easily will dominate Boston's sky line.¹³

The sheer size and look of the project made it seem like an overblown proposal, but Hynes insisted that it would be achieved: "I cannot over-emphasize that this is not something that may happen, this is something that will happen." Some cynics murmured that Prudential's plans were unrealistic. Hynes corrected this misimpression: "This is not a dream, this is an actuality. Prudential officials are not promoters, they are hard-headed businessmen who finance their own building program."¹⁴

Unobstructed vision. To Hynes, Prudential's proposal marked a revolution in the city's self-image and he was determined to make that vision a reality: "Here it is before our eyes," the mayor said:

¹² A. S. Plotkin, "Hail Prudential Center as City Reviver," *Boston Globe*, February 1, 1957, 1.

¹³ Stratton, "Huge Center to Make 12,000 New Jobs," 10.

¹⁴ "Hynes Stresses Development 'An Actuality, Not a Dream,'" *Boston Herald*, February 1, 1957.

It has been said, with some justification, that we have permitted our vision to become clouded—that we looked to the future as through a glass, darkly. Perhaps that is all too true. But from this time forward, from this very day forward, we shall have clear-eyed, unobstructed vision. The Prudential Company has wiped the mists from the glass.¹⁵

In Hynes' view, Boston businessmen had been blind to the possibilities of their own city, but Prudential had opened their eyes. In an editorial, the *Boston Herald* reflected on the role of the outsider: "It has taken some non-Bostonians to sell Boston to the Bostonians."¹⁶ It seemed as though Prudential had come to Boston and found a very different city than that one inhabited by locals: "Those who attended the unveiling of the plans for the Prudential Center and heard President Shanks of the insurance company express his confidence in a great future for Boston and New England wondered to themselves: Is this the Boston we have been living in?" Prudential conveyed a global vision of Boston, one that transcended the infighting and provincialism of the faltering city:

So, after all, this is Boston. We look at it and New England with newly opened eyes, and see a place for modern complex industries, a world research and educational center, a commercial link with Europe, Latin America and the vast resources of Canada to the north, and, as we take the contagion of Prudential, a society of dynamic and daring planners.¹⁷

If Prudential was a "contagion," it was the sanguine infection of fiscal confidence. The unveiling event was framed as a confirmation of Boston's economic and urban development prospects. The metaphor of vision was only one of many rhetorical devices used to describe the Prudential Center. At the press conference, an exuberant Hynes took

¹⁵ Connolly, "Scope of Prudential Plans," 11.

¹⁶ "Is This Boston?" *Boston Herald*, February 1, 1957, 20.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

simile to new heights to express his glee and promote the broader rebuilding of the city's economy and built environment: "Nothing like it has ever before happened to inspire us to take the bit in our teeth and to run at full speed ahead. Nothing that I know could better cause the mourners in our midst to sing a new song—a song of joy." Hynes turned to Shanks and regaled him: "Your confidence in our city, and in its future, entitles you to our undying gratitude."¹⁸ Confidence itself had economic value, and Hynes was giddy over what he called the "tremendous psychological effect" of Prudential's rail yard project. "Confidence begets confidence, as it were," the mayor explained.¹⁹

Prudential Center had revived, even reincarnated Boston. "That is what this amounts to; a rebirth of our city," the mayor said.²⁰ It was also a wake-up call to Boston businessmen. The *Herald* fawned: "An awakened Boston last night began to realize what the sweeping rehabilitation of a 32-acre Back Bay eyesore, as announced yesterday by the Prudential Insurance Company of America, will do for the city, state and region."²¹ The Prudential Center would generate a direct investment of over \$100 million and the complex would house 12,000 new jobs. But "overshadowing these specific economic advantages" were the ripple effects across the larger investment community: "The decision of the world's third largest company to construct a mammoth Prudential Center will have an impact nationally that will unlock the floodgates of new private and

¹⁸ "Hynes Says Center Means New Life for City," *Boston Herald*, February 1, 1957.

¹⁹ Arthur Stratton, "Hynes Plans 6000-Seat Auditorium: Project Seen Key to 'Floodgates' for New Capital," *Boston Herald*, January 23, 1957, 11.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Stratton, "Huge Center to Make 12,000 New Jobs," 1.

federally-sponsored developments.”²² Hynes explicitly saw Prudential’s investment in terms of inter-urban competition:

With the exception of New York, no other city in the country has anything like it. It will make Boston the envy of many of the larger cities. The Prudential decision to build in Boston marks the re-birth of the city. It is certain to inspire other such developments here. And it comes at an appropriate time, for the Boston community has come alive, so to speak, and realizes that the face of the city must change if Boston is to keep abreast of other cities and remain in competition with them. We know that other cities have been in competition with us. We are tremendously gratified that the Prudential has chosen Boston.²³

How Hynes steered the Pru to Boston. If Mayor Hynes was thankful to the Prudential, Carrol Shanks was equally gratified by the mayor’s efforts to clear the hurdles in the path of Prudential’s Boston proposal. There were two crucial obstacles:

Prudential’s desire to secure a tax concession and the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority’s threat to claim the Boston & Albany rail yard for its own purposes, a Boston Extension of the turnpike. Hynes “worked tirelessly to help us untangle the complications,” Shanks said at the January 31, 1957, press conference. “He has given us a new concept of what an asset to the city a great public servant can be.”²⁴ In this shining moment, Shanks and Hynes could hardly have predicted the complications yet to come on the way to finally opening the Prudential Center in 1965. For Hynes, Shanks’ announcement in 1957 that Boston would host Prudential’s massive project was a vindication of a long effort to secure a developer for the Boston & Albany rail yard site and to stimulate investment in the city’s real estate.

²² Stratton, “Hynes Plans 6000-Seat Auditorium.”

²³ “Statement of John B. Hynes, Mayor of Boston, on the Prudential Center,” PA 10-43, Press Releases 1956-57.

²⁴ Shanks, “We Believe in New England.”

In 1970, the *Boston Globe* posthumously published an excerpt from a manuscript by John Hynes detailing his role in attracting Prudential to Boston. The editors explained that Hynes “had been urged to do this by friends who feared that his innate modesty would keep from the history books the details of the top event of his administration, and the birth, as it was, of the *New Boston*, and of a new spirit of urban renewal in the nation.”²⁵ Hynes was mayor between 1951 and 1959, when renewal in Boston got off to a halting start with the New York Streets and West End projects. Yet his supporters sought to connect Hynes’s political legacy to 1960s urban renewal and Boston’s emergence as a major office center for both the public and private sectors. The Prudential Center opened in 1965 under the mayoralty of John Collins. Yet Hynes claimed authorship of the idea to turn the Boston & Albany’s derelict urban rail yard into a major office development and he mediated the process of marketing the land to Prudential.

When he took office in 1951, John Hynes contemplated how he might restore confidence in the city’s future. James Curley had left the city on a weak financial footing. The city was dangerously close to fiscal insolvency, plagued by a shaky credit standing and an unappetizing menu of municipal bonds. Hynes resolved to pull off something big to silence the critics and soothe their “jittery apprehension,” as he put it. He “went on the hunt for big game,” seeking to attract a major investment from a national concern. In his mind, a major investment implied a significant real estate venture. Hynes hit upon the perfect place for it when he learned in May 1951 that the Boston & Albany

²⁵ John B. Hynes, “How Hynes Steered the Pru to Boston,” *Boston Sunday Globe*, January 11, 1970, A-25.

Railroad Company, owned by the New York Central, had decided sell its rail yard that fanned across 28 acres in the Back Bay. But who could afford to replace the railroad and advance an urban redevelopment at such a grand scale? In the spring of 1952, Hynes met Mayor Hayden Burns of Jacksonville, Florida, who confided that Prudential had chosen his city to host the company's Southeast Regional Home Office, "scouring away a pocket of rickety properties which had become an eye sore." Burns briefed Hynes on Pru's decentralization program and disclosed that the big insurance company was eyeing northeastern cities for another branch. This was the light-bulb moment for Hynes: "There popped into my mind's vision of a Prudential Building on the Boston and Albany land in Boston."²⁶

Hynes was not the only one who saw great possibilities for the rail yard site. Not long after Hynes met with Burns, George Oakes, a leading Boston real estate man, bounded into the mayor's office on his own initiative with designs on the site. Oakes had persuaded the railroad to grant him an option to buy the land for \$4.5 million and he wanted to broker a deal on the site. But first Oakes wanted the mayor's blessing in the form of a tax concession: a guarantee that the value of the property would not be assessed higher than the sales price, a necessary assurance for any potential financier. "This was a fly in the ointment," Hynes grimaced. The mayor asked Oakes if he had any connections to Prudential. Oakes knew the New York developer Roger Stevens, who had recently brokered the sale of the Empire State Building with Prudential money, and agreed to approach Stevens with the rail yard project. Stevens did have useful connections to Prudential—he was "known and respected by the Prudential officials,"

²⁶ Ibid.

Hynes recalled—and the ambitious developer was enticed by the prospects of a large-scale urban redevelopment project. Stevens was nominated to pick up the option on the Boston & Albany land so as to make a direct overture to Prudential. Thus, the “courtship” between Boston and Prudential began: the former seeking to land an extraordinarily wealthy investor and the latter coveting a deep tax concession.²⁷

Stevens and Oakes did not wait for Prudential’s commitment to begin planning for the expansive rail yard site. The developer and the realtor recognized that the parcel offered a rare occasion to radically reconceive a large swath of urban land in the most modern, progressive terms. Stevens approached some of Boston’s most distinguished urban planners, architects, and consultants to consider the program and spatial possibilities of a unified development on the site. Stevens contacted Walter Bogner, a city planner and professor at Harvard, to help assemble a team to work on what was called the “Back Bay Center.” The team, which called itself the Boston Center Architects (BCA), included luminaries from the local academic establishment, including Walter Gropius, then 69 years old and a former dean of Harvard’s Graduate School of Design; members of Gropius’ firm, The Architects Collaborative (TAC); Pietro Belluschi, the Italian-born modernist who was dean of the architecture school at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and Hugh Stubbins and Carl Koch, eminent designers who had trained at Harvard with Gropius. Stevens commissioned the prolific New Haven-based traffic consultant, Wilbur Smith, to prepare a transportation plan, and hired Kenneth

²⁷ Ibid.

Welch to perform an economic analysis that gauged the market draw for what was projected to be a new, midtown business district.²⁸

It is possible that over the course of these preparations, Roger Stevens was acting as Prudential's clandestine real estate agent in the northeast. Prudential frequently worked through agents to mask their interest in urban real estate.²⁹ It is also possible that Stevens, with the aid of George Oakes, acted independently and was actively recruiting any number of possible investors. Certainly Stevens did not at first reveal the name of a client to his team of architects and planners, though Walter Bogner recognized that his team was likely designing an office tower for an insurance company—the type of institution with the financial wherewithal to consider such an ambitious project.³⁰ In 1954, the BCA plan for the Back Bay Center was published to great fanfare in the architectural press. Many of the basic concepts of this design—the “ring road,” parking garage, unifying plinth across the site, and the program of a central office tower, hotel, residential towers, commercial blocks, and public spaces—would characterize the eventual design of the Prudential Center.³¹ The BCA architects were not ultimately chosen to see the project through, but the developer clearly sought to elaborate and publicize an appealing vision for the Back Bay rail yard site that might entice potential investors.

²⁸ “Proposed Back Bay Center Development,” *Progressive Architecture* XXXV (January 1954): 73–84.

²⁹ The *Globe* reported that Stevens would work as a consultant to Prudential on the project. Plotkin, “Hail Prudential Center as City Reviver.”

³⁰ Walter Bogner notes, October 26, 1955, Walter Bogner Collection, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Graduate School of Design.

³¹ The details of this plan are discussed in chapter five.

In the fall of 1953, Stevens arranged a meeting in Newark between Mayor Hynes and Carrol Shanks. In fact, the meeting was more like a job interview, with “Boston,” hat-in-hand, appealing to “The Boss,” comfortably ensconced in his office. Prudential was slow to commit to a Northeastern Home Office project in Boston because of what Hynes himself called “the immovable tax hurdle.” It was “all too clear that no development worth its salt would or could happen unless capital investors could be certain that they would not be victims of a tax monster with a voracious appetite.”³² The situation looked bleak in 1954. The railroad had stopped using the yards. Prudential was ambivalent and no other investor had stepped forward. In 1955, the New York Central’s boss, Robert Young, pushed to close out Roger Stevens’s option to buy the land. To the railroad executive, Stevens was sitting on a gold mine but unable to attract finance capital. Young’s move forced the waffling Prudential to call his bluff. Unwilling to foreclose on a unique urban development opportunity, Prudential underwrote the option on behalf of Stevens. In 1956, Stevens assigned his rights to Prudential. At the start of the next year, on January 22, 1957, the insurance company formally purchased the 28.5 acre lot in the Back Bay for \$5 million. When Prudential publicly announced its plans to build the Prudential Center on the Boston & Albany rail yards at an estimated cost of least \$100 million, the tax issue remained unresolved. At the January 31, 1957, press conference, Hynes made clear that Prudential had not been promised a real estate tax concession from the city. “Prudential pays its way everywhere it goes,” the mayor said.³³

³² Hynes, “How Hynes Steered the Pru.”

³³ Stratton, “Hynes Plans 6000-Seat Auditorium,” B-11.

But he suggested that perhaps it was time for Boston to reconsider its tax policies, which were driving investment away to other cities.

Toward a Tax Concession

Between 1953 and 1957, George Oakes—the realtor who was given much of the credit for conceiving of the Prudential Center—and John Hynes cultivated local support for the controversial Prudential project.³⁴ Not everyone in Boston was thrilled by the possibility of a large new office and commercial district in the Back Bay. Downtown business leaders and property owners had several concerns. Prudential would insist on a significant tax abatement from the city, which seemed unfair to those property owners already burdened with high tax bills. The Back Bay development threatened the spatial integrity, and thus land values, in the central business district; Prudential Center represented an instant “midtown” district that could favorably compete with downtown. Furthermore, Prudential Center’s up-to-date office facilities were likely to lure tenants from existing buildings.³⁵ More broadly, Prudential signified an unfamiliar and vastly powerful source of corporate wealth and influence that unsettled Boston’s cloistered business community. Oakes and Hynes curried favor with local leaders, including heads of labor unions and members of the influential Catholic clergy, to soothe apprehensions and frame Prudential’s investment as a boon to the city’s collective economic fortune.

³⁴ Victor O. Jones, “The Man Who Believed in Boston,” *Boston Globe*, July 15, 1966.

³⁵ This concern echoed the anxiety that inspired building height limits in the 1880s and consecrated the “sacred skyline” in Boston.

On Prudential's side, Carrol Shanks delegated the task of considering Boston for the Northeastern Home Office to two of his executive vice presidents: Valentine Howell and Fred Smith. Howell managed the project from Newark; but Smith, who eventually relocated to Boston, was the more closely involved in Prudential's intricate negotiations in Boston. Smith's top priority was to resolve the taxation issue with the city. A secondary issue involved the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, which wanted to be certain that Prudential's plans would not interfere with its own commitment to construct the Pike's Boston Extension along the right-of-way of the Boston & Albany rail corridor. As we shall see, the facts of the Pru and the Pike were closely intertwined. In this chapter, we will see how the pairing of the Prudential Center and the Turnpike extension into Boston was an important part of the political process that allowed the Prudential project to succeed. In Chapter 4, we will view the interplay of the Pru and the Pike from the standpoint of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority and of the larger historical and social interplay between urban redevelopment and highway transportation. And, finally, in Chapter 5, we will examine the ways in which the Pru's inextricable links to the Pike determined the architecture of the Prudential Center and, more generally, the physical transformation of the city.

Informal agreements. William F. Callahan, chief of the Turnpike Authority, had eyed the Boston & Albany right-of-way as the most efficient route for an urban extension of the statewide turnpike since planning for the project began in 1952. In 1955, the state legislature amended the Turnpike's charter to authorize the extension, and Callahan quickly moved to annex the Boston & Albany property. This move alarmed Prudential,

then actively considering a large project in the Back Bay. The *Boston Herald* reported on this predicament:

Use of the B. & A. route would imperil a \$20-million office building project for the Back Bay which the Prudential Insurance Company has planned to construct. Valentine Howell, executive vice-president of Prudential, said that Prudential might not develop the Boston & Albany rail yard site if the toll road is brought through the area. 'I don't see how bringing a highway into the area on stilts is going to enhance the value of the property,' Howell said.³⁶

Mayor Hynes remained optimistic: "I hope we can have both the turnpike and the office building," he told the *Herald*. "I don't want to sacrifice one for the other."³⁷ Hynes organized negotiations between the Pike, Prudential, and the City of Boston that culminated in an agreement that guaranteed the Pike an easement through the site for the Boston Extension and two railroad lines that were projected to remain in operation. Fred Smith alluded to these complex mediations when he announced Prudential's purchase of the rail yards in 1957. He praised the city's Chamber of Commerce, which had organized a mission to lobby for the Prudential; Mayor John Hynes; and the chief of the Turnpike Authority, William F. Callahan. "Mr. Callahan," Smith declared, "is the most stubborn and yet the most wonderful gentleman I've ever come in contact with. I love him." But Smith carefully hedged on his allegiance to the turnpike extension, which was itself a controversial project: "We have a contract with the Turnpike Authority for an easement when and if it is needed, and if and when the highway is constructed along the main line of the railroad."³⁸

³⁶ "Last-Minute Objections Snag Toll Road Extension," *Boston Herald*, July 19, 1956.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Stratton, "Hynes Plan 6000-Seat Auditorium," B-11.

The turnpike issue was only the first of Prudential's key concerns. It was Fred Smith's job to convince city administrators that the public benefits of the Prudential Center justified a major tax concession—specifically freezing the tax assessment of the property for a period of years. In 1958, Prudential produced a pamphlet that introduced the Prudential Center in grand terms and outlined the case for a tax concession. It was “the most immense construction project ever attempted by Prudential. The most important single civic project in the history of Boston. And the largest enterprise of its kind in the country.” Moreover, planning for the turnpike easement introduced costly engineering difficulties to an already expensive project. “The engineering's problems can be resolved: But even Prudential's resources are not large enough to contemplate taxation at Boston's present and probable levels.” Prudential believed that their proposed development was important enough to Boston to justify “a very favorable—even unreasonable—concession.” The insurance company was willing to accept an informal agreement with the city, trusting that future administrations would honor the plan. This was a risk: “The basis of this hazard, we realize, is pressure from other taxpayers who may choose to ignore the civic aspects of this project.” For this reason, Prudential had not asked for an “unreasonable” concession, merely a fair one that would hold up in the future.³⁹

The basis of this claim was that the Prudential Center was a civic enterprise. The Prudential building in Chicago was essentially just a large office building with additional space to lease, “which is a sound and not unusual economic risk.” But Boston's Prudential Center was different. As Prudential put it, “At least one-third of the total cost

³⁹ “Discussion of the Taxing Procedure of Prudential Center,” PA 10–43, Event Files 1950s.

is chargeable to civic improvement.” Only 25% of the land would be used for revenue-producing buildings, with the remaining 75% developed as a landscaped park or used for transportation facilities and parking “to relieve local traffic.” Prudential Center’s site and scale was intertwined with broader infrastructural improvements to the city, including the road and rail easements, a ring-road that circumnavigated the site, and the long-term integrity of the foundations themselves, which would be built on a nineteenth century land-fill with a high water table. The costs of these “civic requirements” were so high that “the true economic value of this development reflects only a small part of the actual cost.” Both the City of Boston as well as Prudential would have to compromise: the former on tax receipts, the latter on profits.⁴⁰

Equipped with this pamphlet, Fred Smith met with the key players—including John Hynes (his presence an indication of the high priority that the mayor placed on the project), members of the city’s Board of Assessors, and representatives of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority—on March 18, 1958. Smith stressed the “extra values” that Prudential’s investment would bring to the city, including the enhancement of nearby property values. Smith also asserted that a project of the quality that Prudential intended to build—something “as attractive as possible”—would cost 50% more than a conventional or “utilitarian” facility on the same acreage. Prudential’s designers and engineers had devised a method to mitigate local traffic impacts by encircling the site with a ring-road, an added investment that was framed as a public improvement. Prudential was willing to engage in a very expensive undertaking on a site with innate difficulties—the easement and costly foundation work—and in one fell swoop transform

⁴⁰ Ibid.

an unpleasant and economically unproductive rail yard into a gleaming new multi-purpose urban district. Prudential would construct a massive, steel and concrete substructure to house a parking garage and allow transportation facilities to pass underneath. The technical imperative of a unified substructure and base emphasized the utility of maintaining the project under single ownership and management, as opposed to speculating on the site or selling off smaller parcels in an ad hoc fashion. Mayor Hynes judged the unified, planned quality of Prudential's proposal as an inherent advantage over piecemeal development.⁴¹

Fred Smith argued that a standard tax arrangement, one determined as a proportion of the assessed value of the property, was unfair to Prudential because it ignored the positive external impacts implied by a development of this size, expense, and distinction. Smith proposed an income-based approach to Prudential's property taxes and requested an assurance that the tax would not exceed 20% of gross revenues for a period of ten years after the completion of construction, to be followed by a mutual reassessment of the situation. Prudential estimated a total income of \$15 million and agreed to pay \$3 million a year in taxes. But Prudential needed time to get its feet on the ground and therefore requested a fixed, escalating land tax for the anticipated seven years of construction. Hynes and his assessors provided their informal consent to this proposal, and the assembled participants signed a memorandum confirming this understanding. "It was fully understood at the meeting that this kind of agreement . . . would have no legal or binding validity," Hynes recalled. "Despite this awkward contingency, the Prudential

⁴¹ "Memorandum of Conference Held March 18, 1958 at the Sheraton-Plaza Hotel in Boston," Mass Turnpike Authority Archives (hereafter cited as MTAA) 01220, 2.

was willing to accept the agreement in the belief that it would be officially honored by any future city administration.”⁴²

Prudential’s proposal challenged Boston’s long history of extortionist tax policies on downtown commercial properties, dating back to the Curley years. Mayor Hynes himself bemoaned the existing system, but seemed powerless to challenge the status quo. Real estate developers, from Boston or elsewhere, were loath to undertake new projects in the city, and landlords were hesitant to make improvements for fear of increased assessments. The John Hancock Insurance Company’s experience after the completion of their home office building in 1947 lingered unpleasantly in the collective memory of the real estate community. In that instance, a prominent local corporation made a big urban investment only to be rewarded with an unexpectedly high tax bill. Real estate interests were fed up with the city’s idiosyncratic, inefficient, and institutionalized “abatement racket” that governed the correction of excessive appraisals. The status quo arrangement cultivated a vicious real estate cycle where property owners deferred maintenance and modernization of old buildings and new buildings were considered risky investments. In their official history of the development of Prudential Center, the authors from Prudential’s public relations department claimed that Prudential wanted to fix the Boston’s tax structure for the good of the city as a whole, to “set an example for commercial structures to attract capital,” and not only for their own narrow purposes.⁴³ This informal tax agreement satisfied Prudential and in the early spring of 1959 the

⁴² Hynes, “How Hynes Steered the Pru.”

⁴³ Roger Heinen, “The Development of Prudential Center,” revised 1978 by Elizabeth Menk, Prudential Public Relations, PA 10–42, Reports 1956–58, 12.

contractors drove the first of 144 steel and concrete caissons to the bedrock 145-feet beneath the rail yard site.

“Less lofty reasons”: *local resistance to a tax deal*. Even as work on the foundation commenced, a dismayed subset of local businessmen cried foul and threatened to challenge Prudential’s informal tax agreement in court. “There were those who believed that the concord was in contravention of constitutional principles and, for less lofty reasons, believed that the Prudential should be granted no tax incentives of whatever kind,” Hynes later recalled.⁴⁴ There was good reason to suppose that the unofficial pact between Boston and Prudential would not hold up in court. In fact, Prudential’s 1958 agreement was a reprise of an equivalent effort from three years prior, when John Hynes sought legislative approval for a tax concession for the identical site. The direct recipient would have been Roger Stevens, who represented the Back Bay Center, but the benefits would have applied to any developer. State lawmakers drafted a bill that asserted the public’s interest to develop a large project on the Boston & Albany rail yard. The proposed law was based on the premise that the prevailing tax structure made it unlikely that private capital would develop the site on its own and that the yard would degrade into “an area of economic blight and a potential breeding place for criminal and juvenile delinquency and will therefore adversely affect the value of adjacent properties.”⁴⁵ Without tax relief, lawmakers assumed, private enterprise could not afford to “undertake orderly and integrated development.” The orderly, integrated, and thus *planned* nature of a proposed project was instrumental to establishing its public

⁴⁴ Hynes, “How Hynes Steered the Pru,” A-25.

⁴⁵ *Opinion of the Justices*, Massachusetts General Court, 332 Mass. 769, 770.

purpose, for “the public interest requires development in accordance with a broad plan, including transportation connections, a street system, parks, parking facilities, and a convention hall or civic auditorium.” These provisions amounted to a set of “public purposes” that made special tax treatment both “desirable and necessary.”⁴⁶ The legislative act authorized a “Back Bay Development Commission” to acquire the land through eminent domain. The Commission was responsible for generating an overall plan and guaranteed that the private developer would execute the public uses indicated in the plan.⁴⁷ As was common practice with constitutionally suspect new laws, the state senate submitted the bill to the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts for review in 1955.

To the immense satisfaction of local business interests who opposed this isolated tax dispensation, the court rejected the bill. Political scientist Cynthia Horan explains the court’s rationale: “Unlike the legislature, the court did not view the project as generating significant benefits for the city, but rather concluded that the promotion of economic growth through a tax concession to a private company merely furthered private profits, not the public interest, and was thus not a suitable basis for a tax concession.”⁴⁸ In its advisory opinion, the state’s highest court opined that a tax deal did not meet the constitutional requirement of “proportional and reasonable” assessments because the law

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ My impression is that it was during this time that Mayor Hynes or his staff conjured the idea that a municipal auditorium should be included in the site plan to accentuate the public character of the overall development.

⁴⁸ Cynthia Horan, “Organizing the ‘New Boston’: Growth Policy, Governing Coalitions and Tax Reform,” *Polity* 22, no. 3 (1990): 501.

charged the corporation “less than its share of the public expense.”⁴⁹ Other taxpayers had to pay taxes each year on the full value of their property, notwithstanding income or profit. Why should a singular corporation be treated differently? The court rejected the legislature’s articulation of the public interest.

The state’s proposed “Back Bay Development Commission” was an early model of an urban redevelopment agency designed to implement a “public purpose” by facilitating the development of blighted land. In their 1955 ruling, however, the Supreme Judicial Court opposed public subsidies for private development: “Public money cannot be used for the primary purpose of acquiring either by eminent domain or by purchase private lands to be turned over or sold to private persons for private use.” This was true even if the private developer planned to include a variety of public uses, such as open, landscaped plazas. Moreover, the court was also unwilling to concede that the rail yard was blighted or had become a *slum*. “There is only an apprehension lest it become one,” the court held. Declining property values did not, in themselves, define a blighted area. The possibility of an *indirect* public benefit by virtue of an increase in the value of adjacent taxable property also failed to qualify as a “public purpose.”⁵⁰ The court suggested that less direct means to facilitate development of the site, such as amending zoning and building regulations, might be acceptable. But the court ruled out a tax concession for a private developer considering the Back Bay rail yard site in 1955.

⁴⁹ *Opinion of the Justices*, 332 Mass. 769, 779.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 783.

Given the court's 1955 opinion, the tax question hung over the Prudential project like a low-hanging cloud: why should Prudential's tax agreement of 1958 be treated any differently by the courts?

If some opponents of a tax concession for Prudential genuinely believed that such a concession for a wealthy private corporation did not represent sound public policy, those harboring "less lofty reasons" were more concerned with protecting their own financial interests against the threat of the Prudential Center. The Back Bay site was only one mile west of the central business district, but it was considered foreign turf to downtown property owners. "Downtown businessmen and financiers feared that this new-fangled development was simply one more move that would only add to the frightening stampede already drawing too many paying customers out of the central city and into the suburbs."⁵¹ When disgruntled downtown boosters threatened to challenge the eventual tax agreement in court in 1959, a wary Prudential halted construction until a more secure tax arrangement could be secured.

In 1953, when George Oakes and Roger Stevens approached Prudential with the notion of developing in the Back Bay, the Boston & Albany rail yard site appealed to Prudential's strategists like Westcott Toole and Valentine Howell. The parcel satisfied every principle that Prudential had established for an ideal RHO site. The rail yards were located in the city—affirming the company's commitment to urban real estate—but the site comprised a vast area that Prudential could control and plan as a unified district. "We immediately saw the potential advantages of the property," Toole told a gathering of

⁵¹ Thomas H. O'Connor, *Building a New Boston: Politics and Urban Renewal, 1950 to 1970* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 101.

the Massachusetts Savings Bank Association in 1957.⁵² A tall building on the site could be framed to command views and would function as an architectural landmark. The visual prominence of an attractive tower generated the “extra dividends” of advertising and public relations value that Toole championed. The site was accessible, too. It was well served by mass transportation facilities, including subways, street cars, buses, and commuter rail. “Equal in importance to mass transportation is private transportation,” Toole added. Prudential’s location at the western fringe of the city was poised to intercept downtown-heading traffic along major arterial streets, like Huntington Avenue. Prudential had granted an easement through the site for an urban extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike and Toole said that a highway connection would be favorable, though not essential: “Should the proposed toll road and other highway facilities now under consideration by the Turnpike Authority go through, they will certainly add to the locational advantages of the site.”⁵³

Toole would have bristled at any suggestion that Prudential Center portended a flight to the suburbs. In Toole’s view, Prudential’s administrative decentralization was an expression of his company’s faith in cities, including Boston. He sought to reassure local business leaders of this fact in his 1957 talk. First Toole explained Prudential’s desire to choose “dramatic and strategic” locations for its RHOs. He also emphasized “that in no case have we gone outside the city limits for a site for one of our regional home offices. The Prudential believes strongly in the future of the downtown city.”⁵⁴

⁵² S. Wescott Toole, “Decentralization Dividends,” address before the Savings Banks Association of Massachusetts, June 11, 1957, PA 04–123.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 9.

Yet Toole may have made the downtown Boston bankers even more nervous when he extolled the virtues of Prudential's Back Bay location, accentuating the fact that the proposed Prudential Center marked an independent business district with distinct advantages over the CBD. Toole's vision of the future downtown city was very different from the one shared by Boston's established business interests.

This pointed to the paradox of Prudential's "city-within-a-city" in Boston. On the one hand, it was completely self-sufficient, its own isolated midtown business district. And yet Toole extolled the virtues of an urban location for a company like Prudential:

Among the reasons for this are the good labor markets which the cities provide and the accessibility to banks, other financial institutions, legal firms, advertising agencies and business libraries. In addition, there is the availability of specialized business training for adults, good stores, good hotels and recreation facilities.⁵⁵

To Toole, Prudential's Back Bay site *was* a part of Boston's downtown business district. It was certainly *within* the city, as opposed to a suburban location. But to Bostonians, the Back Bay was a very different place from the central business district. Toole's broad perspective on Boston's urban geography conflicted with the local vision, which saw quite clearly the subtle, micro-geographical differences within city limits.

Merger: the Pike and the Pru. Fred Smith recognized that some Bostonians were restive about the tax agreement he had reached with Mayor Hynes and that real estate interests were organizing to thwart the plan. "Some Boston groups wanted Prudential to restrict the height of its main office tower to only 26 stories, and to promise that no recruiting for office space in it would be sought among Boston commercial tenants in other buildings," the *Globe* reported. Meanwhile, Prudential executives wanted a secure

⁵⁵ Ibid.

tax deal with legislative backing. Lacking that, Smith asserted, they were prepared to “pack up and get out.”⁵⁶ But in 1960 a new plan emerged that conjoined the Prudential Center with the Boston Extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike that promised to satisfy the Pru’s concerns.

Initially, William F. Callahan might have been happy to scuttle Prudential’s deal for the Boston & Albany rail yards. But by the spring of 1960, Callahan had shrewdly come to see the Prudential project as the vehicle through which he might promote his own highway plans to the city of Boston. And so Callahan recommenced talks with Fred Smith over the future of the Prudential Center site. Eager to formally link his turnpike extension with the development of Prudential Center, Callahan proposed that the Turnpike Authority claim the entire site through eminent domain and lease the air-rights to Prudential. The theory was that the Pike, a tax-exempt entity, would own the property, thus protecting Prudential from real estate taxes. This solution appealed to Prudential, which had not reached a binding tax agreement with the city on its own. An internal Turnpike Authority memorandum prepared for Callahan on April 9, 1960, discussed the negotiations between the Pike and Prudential. It alluded to several uncertain issues relating to the management of the Prudential Center, which would legally be owned by the Turnpike Authority. Who would control the garage and public plazas? Who would be responsible for policing the site? Furthermore, the most important issue was still in question: “Can the Authority indemnify the Prudential against the imposition of local

⁵⁶ Plotkin, “Merger of Toll Road-Prudential Center Planned in \$300 Million Package Deal,” *Boston Globe*, April 29, 1960, 4.

real estate taxes?”⁵⁷ The Pike and the Pru were entering uncharted legislative waters, but they were willing to give them a try.

On April 29, 1960, the *Boston Globe* stretched an eight-column headline across the front page that hailed a “Merger of Toll Road-Prudential Center Planned in \$300 Million Package Deal,” accompanied by a photograph of the deal’s brokers: William F. Callahan; Louis R. Menagh, Jr., executive vice president at Prudential who had assumed the helm of the Northeastern Home Office; the state attorney general, Edward J. McCormack; Prudential’s Fred Smith; Governor Foster Furcolo; and Mayor John Collins. Under this arrangement, the Turnpike Authority would annex the Boston & Albany rail yard, lease the air space to Prudential, and take title to the new buildings. After 80 years, title would revert to the city of Boston, which had negotiated a schedule of annual payments in lieu of taxes with the Turnpike Authority—an amount that matched the initial tax agreement between the city and Prudential. Three hundred Boston businessmen gathered at the Sheraton Plaza Hotel to learn that a special law had been drafted to achieve this result, and the Supreme Judicial Court would again be asked to weigh in on its constitutionality. Should the court approve, construction on the merged project would begin immediately. The *Globe* further reported that Prudential had agreed to buy a significant portion of the bonds that would finance the extension. In a calculated, magnanimous gesture, Prudential also announced a \$250,000 gift to the city toward the construction of the municipal auditorium. But there was an important proviso: “Unless the legislative and court roadblocks are successfully overcome, the conference

⁵⁷ “Memorandum, April 9, 1960 to Mr. Callahan, from N.T. Byrnes, Re: Prudential Center,” MTAA 01220.

was warned, Prudential will pull out.” A labor union official and board-member of the recently formed Boston Redevelopment Authority, Stephen McCloskey, voiced his concern that Prudential might renege and leave the city with a “30-acre parking space.” Attorney General McCormack also noted that losing Prudential would mark a major “psychological blow” to the city. But Prudential’s Fred Smith reassured the audience that Prudential was eager to proceed and hoped this resolution would stick.⁵⁸

With the Turnpike Authority as the lead sponsor, the charge of establishing the merged project’s public purpose now fell principally on the urban highway itself. By claiming jurisdiction over the site, Callahan also steered the project toward his allies, including the governor, a Democrat. On May 2, 1960, Furcolo issued a letter to the state legislature in support of the Turnpike’s plan to annex the rail yard. Furcolo declared that the Boston Extension was in the public interest because it would “greatly relieve the pressing demands for increased traffic facilities and promote the health, safety and general welfare of the public.”⁵⁹ Garage and terminal facilities were essential to the turnpike’s utility and would be built in conjunction with a looping interchange—the “Prudential-Garage Interchange”—planned for an adjacent parcel east of the Prudential site (fig. 3.4). These facilities were necessary for “limiting traffic hazards and handicaps and relieving congestion on public streets.”⁶⁰ But the garage would be expensive and the Turnpike Authority had an obligation to develop income-producing properties in the parcel’s air rights to generate an additional form of revenue, in addition to user-fees

⁵⁸ Plotkin, “Merger of Toll Road-Prudential Center.”

⁵⁹ Foster Furcolo to Senate and House of Representatives, May 2, 1960, MTAA 01220.

⁶⁰ Copy of unnumbered Act, MTAA 01220.

(tolls), to guarantee its bond commitments.⁶¹ Furcolo reported that Prudential had agreed to the Turnpike's plan and he was introducing a bill—drafted by his Attorney General, Edward McCormack—to the legislature that would permit the construction of both the garage and the Prudential Center. “The bill contains tax exemption and indemnity provisions which are necessary to assure the development of areas above the garage by private capital,” he explained to lawmakers. Neither the Turnpike Authority nor its chief tenant (Prudential) would pay taxes on the project, nor should they be expected to do so, the governor insisted. Together, the Pike and the Pru “will be in all respects for the benefit of the people of the commonwealth, for the increase of their commerce and prosperity, and for the improvement of their health and living conditions.” In light of these public benefits, additional taxation was unwarranted. Governor Furcolo resolved to make the bill an “Emergency Act,” effective immediately on his signature.⁶²

It appeared that the Pike had guaranteed the Pru for Boston by generating a creative solution to the tax question. But the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts quashed the deal. In an advisory opinion, the court stated that such an arrangement would be unconstitutional. While the Turnpike Authority might have special status as a tax-exempt public service corporation, the Prudential did not and could not acquire such status merely through the protective aura of the Pike. The act formally authorized the Turnpike Authority to construct a “public truck terminal” and “public garage” in Boston. The Authority's 1952 charter was amended in 1955 to allow for a road to “points within” Boston and a garage was necessary to mitigate the congestion that would

⁶¹ Conversely, this novel revenue stream would also help market turnpike bonds.

⁶² Furcolo to Senate and House of Representatives.

result from all of those cars streaming into the city. The court allowed that both the turnpike extension along with the garage and truck terminal would serve a public purpose. But the Prudential Center would exacerbate precisely those negative traffic conditions that the turnpike extension, garage, and terminal were designed to ameliorate. The judges immediately understood that the proposed law before them was a direct response to “financial problems in respect of the so called ‘Prudential center,’ now under construction in the Back Bay section of Boston.” The primary purpose of the new law remained a tax cut for a private enterprise, like the rejected 1955 bill for a tax concession on the rail yard site. The only difference was that in the new bill the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority was substituted for the Back Bay Development Commission.⁶³

But even as they turned their thumbs down on the proposed law, the justices alluded to a 1956 advisory opinion they had issued that recognized that the “problems of urban planning, development and renewal are increasingly in the area of public interests” and that “new forms for public participation in their solution may be within constitutional limits.”⁶⁴ The court elaborated the concept of an urban redevelopment corporation, which, although technically a private enterprise, was an “instrument of the commonwealth” that performed public functions:

Urban redevelopment corporations, although in a sense private corporations, perform functions for the public benefit analogous to those performed by various other types of corporations commonly called public service corporations, property owned by them and used in such service may receive favored treatment in the matter of taxation.⁶⁵

⁶³ *Opinion of the Justices*, 341 Mass. 738, 739.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 759.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 763.

The Supreme Judicial Court had thus suggested a way in which private interests, acting as quasi-public urban redevelopers, could propose projects that warranted tax concessions, so long as the proposed project was subject to some form of public oversight. To follow through on this suggestion, the state had to re-examine its urban redevelopment law, Chapter 121A, originally chartered in 1945.

Prudential as an urban redevelopment corporation. Beginning in the 1940s, several states enacted urban redevelopment laws in order to subsidize the private rebuilding of blighted urban areas, the elimination of which was considered by the state to be a public purpose. These statutes made available to private developers the state's privilege of eminent domain to acquire, clear, and market large tracts of land. The developers were also given financial incentives to play a role in slum clearance. In Massachusetts, the state legislature enacted a slum clearance and redevelopment statute, Chapter 121A of the Massachusetts General Laws, in 1945. Chapter 121A granted tax exemptions to private redevelopers proposing "primarily residential" projects. Massachusetts was one of several states to enact a redevelopment law in advance of the federal Housing Act of 1949, which opened federal coffers to local states that initiated redevelopment programs.⁶⁶ Chapter 121A entrusted the function of public oversight to the state Housing Board or the individual city's housing authority—in Boston's case, the

⁶⁶ The Urban Land Institute (ULI), among other development interests, lobbied state legislatures to create local enabling laws to facilitate large investments from insurance companies and other large financial institutions. New York passed an "Urban Redevelopment Corporation Law" in 1941, which was used by Metropolitan Life to finance the construction of Stuyvesant Town on Manhattan's Lower East Side. See Marc A. Weiss, "The Origins and Legacy of Urban Renewal," *Urban and Regional Planning in an Age of Austerity* eds. Pierre Clavel, John Forester, and William M. Goldsmith (New York: Pergamon Press, 1980).

Boston Housing Authority (BHA), which had been established in 1935.⁶⁷ The law was amended in 1953 and again in 1954 to elaborate on the undesirable conditions—including “substandard,” “decadent,” and “blighted” open areas—that justified acquisition and clearance by the BHA.

In the aftermath of the court-rejected “merger” of the Pike and the Pru, Attorney General Edward McCormack took up the task of amending Chapter 121A with the specific intention of facilitating a tax break for Prudential. This required two feats of creative legal rhetoric: 1) extending the definition of “blight” to include the Boston & Albany rail yard site, and 2) expanding the spectrum of allowable redevelopment projects to include commercial and other uses outside of the “primarily residential” clause. The result was Chapter 652 of the Acts of 1960. In its first section, the new law broadly redefined the type of project allowable under redevelopment law:

“Project” [means] any undertaking consisting of the construction in a blighted open, decadent or sub-standard area of decent, safe and sanitary residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, recreational or governmental buildings and such appurtenant or incidental facilities as shall be in the public interest.⁶⁸

Chapter 652 consolidated the administration of urban redevelopment under the newly formed Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), which would be responsible for assessing the public’s interest in a proposed project. The BRA subsumed the functions of the BHA, acknowledging the importance of a coordinated program of urban

⁶⁷ See *ibid.* Marc Weiss has argued that the Urban Land Institute did not favor the Massachusetts type of redevelopment legislation because it focused too explicitly on housing. See also Lewis H. Weinstein, “Urban Renewal in Massachusetts,” *Massachusetts Law Quarterly* 47 (1962) and Mark Gelfand, *Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933–1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

⁶⁸ Acts, 1960, Massachusetts General Court, Chap. 652, 558.

modernization. The new law also provided that an “Urban Redevelopment Corporation” embarking on such a redevelopment project would be eligible for a 40-year tax exemption. Chapter 121A specified payments to the municipality in-lieu-of-taxes, including an income-based excise tax that amounted to 5% of a project’s gross income, and an additional annual 1% tax on the assessed value of the land and buildings. Because Chapter 121A redevelopers would be “limited dividend” corporations, they were allowed no more than a 6% return on investment, with any surplus returned to the city.⁶⁹ The effect of the new law was to eliminate almost all property taxes and substitute for them the income-based approach championed by Prudential.

In Chapter 121A, the state proclaimed the public’s interest in alleviating a broadly defined group of social and physical circumstances, including “blighted open, decadent or sub-standard” areas. The key term was a “blighted open area,” which was defined as “a predominantly open area which is detrimental to the safety, health, morals, welfare or sound growth of a community because it is unduly costly to develop it soundly through the ordinary operations of private enterprise.”⁷⁰ Blight implied a constellation of negative social conditions, but its essential quality was that it was expensive to remedy. For example, arduous physical conditions such as the existence of ledge, rock, or unsuitable soil, might make redevelopment expensive. Another factor, which was spelled out in the 1960 amendment to Chapter 121A, was unusual expense “incident to building around or over rights of way through the area.” This language, of course, was tailor-made for the situation of Prudential’s Back Bay rail yard site. The 1960 act also

⁶⁹ In 1975, the 40-year exemption was changed to a 15-year period, with the possibility of a further extension, and the 6% allowable return was enlarged to 8%.

⁷⁰ Acts, 1960, Massachusetts General Court, Chap. 652, 557.

specifically declared that no project could interfere with an extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike into the city of Boston, a clear reference to the Prudential Center situation. The act specified that “inappropriate or otherwise faulty platting or subdivision” and “diversity of ownership of plots” were also elements of blight that could make “unduly costly . . . the ordinary operations of private enterprise.”⁷¹ The Act thus reflected a preference for large-scale land assemblage that superseded prior property divisions.

A “decadent” area, according to the Act, was likewise a threat to the safety, health, morals, welfare, and sound growth of the urban community, but focused more on the physical decline of an urban locale. Decadent areas harbored buildings that were “out of repair, physically deteriorated, unfit for human habitation, or obsolete.” Real estate in decadent areas could be seized for the non-payment of taxes or mortgage foreclosure. Decadent areas were seen as deserving special attention not only because of inadequate air, or open space, but also because “diversity of ownership, irregular lot sizes or obsolete street patterns make it improbable that the area will be redeveloped by the ordinary operations of private enterprise.” Echoing a concept from the description of a “blighted open area,” the law favored physical redevelopment at a grand scale—not piecemeal improvements by individual property owners—and advanced a vision of large tracts developed under single owners with relatively sparse land coverage. The definition of a “sub-standard” area overtly addressed housing conditions, and inveighed against

⁷¹ Ibid.

“dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement or design, lack of ventilation, light, or sanitation facilities.”⁷²

Section 2 of Chapter 121A exploited some dizzying, circular legal logic to assert the public purpose to eliminate the three types of urban areas described in the first section—the “blighted open areas,” the “decadent,” and the “substandard.” These areas were “a serious and growing menace, injurious and inimical to the safety, health, morals and welfare of the residents of the commonwealth and the sound growth of the communities therein.” Among their menacing qualities, blighted open, decadent, and sub-standard areas contributed to “the spread of disease and crime.” These ominous urban districts were not only economic liabilities but also breeding grounds for health problems and social malaise, and the state had every reason to facilitate private redevelopment that promised to redress these liabilities.⁷³

The press immediately understood the direct purpose of the new redevelopment statute, and began calling it the “Prudential Bill.” As one journalist wrote, the statute promised to enable the project to move forward unhindered:

The same building plans will be followed. The same tax payments will be made to the city. The same route will be followed by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority for its toll road extension—tunneling underneath the Prudential Center and into the heart of the city.⁷⁴

Senate President John Powers pushed for the swift passage of the bill and Mayor John Collins organized a rally to support the bill, featuring a talk from Jacksonville Mayor

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Acts, 1960, Massachusetts General Court, Chap. 121A, 558.

⁷⁴ Michael Liuzzi, “Prudential Center: Full Steam Builds,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 16, 1960, 1.

Haydon Burns on the positive impacts of the Prudential project in his city. But not all legislators favored the bill, fearing that it cut too broad a swath for future tax breaks to commercial developments. One legislator remarked, “It would mark a major step in the ever-widening interpretation of what constitutes the ‘public interest’—broadening it to include commercial projects even though no slum clearance is directly involved.”⁷⁵

Michael Liuzzi, the *Christian Science Monitor* reporter who closely followed the story, recognized the broader implications of the bill for future urban redevelopment: “For this is definitely a new route that’s being followed, one that is being laid down for Prudential, but open to lots of other traffic in the near future.”⁷⁶ Once again, the legislature submitted the statute to the Supreme Judicial Court for an advisory opinion. This time, the court approved the amended redevelopment law. An editorial in the *Christian Science Monitor* announced: “In an advisory opinion that was both meticulous and broad, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court has told the Legislature that its second attempt to define the big civic project as a ‘public purpose’ eligible for special tax treatment is constitutional.”⁷⁷

The court decided that a project’s public purpose was not compromised merely because most of the buildings that would be constructed there would not be dwellings. The court located the public interest principally in eliminating blight, not in the program for future development on the site: “There is no constitutional requirement that a blight, for example, if removed in the course of urban redevelopment, particularly if it is found

⁷⁵ Michael Liuzzi, “Prudential Bill: Sides Deploy,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 27, 1960, 2.

⁷⁶ Liuzzi, “Prudential Center: Full Steam Builds.”

⁷⁷ “Prudential Judged a Public Purpose,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 10, 1960, 16.

to be one not about to be eliminated by private capital, must be replaced by residential buildings.” The court was satisfied with the law’s delegation of administrative oversight and public regulation to the Boston Redevelopment Authority, which would bear the ultimate responsibility for guaranteeing the public benefit of the project. The court was sympathetic to Prudential’s plans for the rail yard site:

If the Prudential center again is used as an example, there are many public advantages to be considered. These would include the elimination of grave doubts as to the future use of a great area, now largely vacant or occupied by a nearly obsolete, unsightly, railroad freight yard; covering over a railroad right of way; improvement to neighboring properties; the encouragement of prompt action unlikely to be undertaken by private enterprise in the foreseeable future; stimulation of other building and opening a new opportunity for urban growth at what might be a time which is appropriate but of short duration; and new facilities made available to public use.⁷⁸

In its 1955 opinion, the court had not been convinced that the Back Bay rail yard constituted a blighted open area. But circumstances had changed. When it looked at the Prudential project as an example, the court noted that the Boston & Albany Railroad had been eliminating service through the site and that an idle site at the rail yards lay in the path of the growth of the city.

Lighting the Fuse: Prudential and Urban Renewal in Boston

With the consent of the court, the Massachusetts Legislature was ready to act on the “Prudential Bill” in late August 1960. The new law promised to jump-start the Prudential Center as well as a host of other urban renewal projects administered by the Boston

⁷⁸ *Opinion of the Justices*, 341 Mass. 760, August 9, 1960.

Redevelopment Authority. Michael Liuzzi of the *Christian Science Monitor* grouped the Prudential Center with the plans for a new Government Center downtown:

The Massachusetts Legislature is on the verge of enacting new laws which should nail down the two great centers around which Boston is rebuilding—the Prudential center in the Back Bay and the government center due to stretch down from Beacon Hill across Scollay Square.⁷⁹

The new law had lit a fuse for the rebuilding of Boston, which would begin to take on a new character as a modern office center: “The Boston labor force is moving steadily toward a predominance of clerks and typists, engineers and secretaries, researchers and financial specialists, technicians of all kinds.” This new employment structure also implied big physical changes to the city, which needed extensive modernization:

Grimy red-brick structures of five or six stories, built before 1900, are spread over 36 per cent of the “central business district,” according to Boston City Hall figures. A change was due, and the change will probably be drastic. The fact is, Boston has been taking on a new character for several years now—which is only just beginning to show up in the new facades and a changing skyline.⁸⁰

The new character of the city would be heading upwards, literally, in a series of new skyscrapers. The most significant new office structures being planned in the CBD were the ones that would house government activities.

A Tale of Two Centers: Prudential and urban renewal. The “Prudential Bill” represented an upheaval in established development politics, giving the BRA a larger role than urban development agencies had ever had in the past. In recognition of this enlarged role, the legislature passed an auxiliary measure that extended the terms of membership of the BRA for five years. At the same time, state lawmakers were considering a bill that

⁷⁹ Michael Liuzzi, “Boston Fuse Lit for Building Boom,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 24, 1960.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

authorized the construction of a state office building at the proposed Government Center in Scollay Square. The Prudential Center and Government Center, both under the auspices of the BRA, had been joined in public and political consciousness.⁸¹

On September 2, 1960, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that the “Light is Green for Hub Centers,” referring to both the Prudential and Government Center, the former now worth \$150 million and the latter weighing in at \$100 million.⁸² The state legislature had enacted the revised Chapter 121A along with another piece of legislation “authorizing a complex of four state buildings costing \$50,000,000 as part of the government center.”⁸³ These “two hub projects” now fell under the auspices of the Boston Redevelopment Authority.⁸⁴ In September 1960, John Collins announced a \$90 million redevelopment plan for Boston, with Government Center at its core.⁸⁵

Despite the buoying news of the new redevelopment law, all was not well at the Prudential Center site in the Back Bay. On August 24, 1960, Prudential had turned off the de-watering pumps at their Back Bay construction site, flooding the recently completed concrete foundation poured over the steel pilings. The press dubbed it the “Prudential Lake,” Boston’s newest body of water.⁸⁶ Prudential officials insisted that they had flooded the site to prevent the erosion of the foundations. That may have been true, but the Prudential Lake was a sign that the court’s advisory opinion was only the

⁸¹ Edgar M. Mills, “Center Bill Near End of Gantlet,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 30, 1960.

⁸² “Light is Green for Hub Centers,” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 2, 1960.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ “What’s Ahead for Boston?” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 8, 1960.

⁸⁵ “Collins Blueprint for Rebuilding Boston,” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 23, 1960.

⁸⁶ Michael Liuzzi, “‘Prudential Lake’ Ripples in Back Bay,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 25, 1960.

first step in a long process. Prudential was unwilling at that time to move briskly forward with construction until its proposed development was formally approved by the BRA. Flooding the site may also have been a strategic move to create an atmosphere of urgency around the project.

Speaking for the public. In early September 1960 the Governor of Massachusetts signed the new piece of redevelopment legislation, and the acting chairman of the BRA urged Prudential to promptly submit its application to develop the Back Bay rail yards “in conformance with the provisions of Chapter 121A.”⁸⁷ In January 1961, Prudential formally submitted its application, tailored to the language of the amended bill. Prudential made the case that its project area, the rail yards site, constituted a blighted open area, “unduly costly to develop . . . soundly through the ordinary operations of private enterprise,” and described in detail the precarious physical conditions that impeded redevelopment of the Back Bay site.⁸⁸ The application asserted the extreme expense of engineering any type of construction on the geologically unstable site. The entire Back Bay district, including the rail yard, was filled on a marshy swamp with a dangerously shallow water table. Prudential proposed to construct a coffer-dam around the site to maintain the integrity of the wood pilings that supported most of the other buildings in the Back Bay, and would sink steel and concrete foundation caissons 145-feet deep into the bedrock. (Some of this work had already been executed by Prudential.) An

⁸⁷ Joseph W. Lund, Chairman of the Boston Redevelopment Authority to Louis R. Menagh, Jr., Executive Vice President of the Prudential Insurance Company of America, September 8, 1960, Papers of John Collins, box 397, folder “Prudential 1960,” Boston Public Library.

⁸⁸ I am quoting here from a June 1961 amended version of “Prudential’s Application for Approval of Project under Chapter 121A of the General Laws and Chapter 652 of the Acts of 1960,” Boston Redevelopment Authority Archives (hereafter cited as BRA) #621.

additional obstacle was the provision for a railroad and highway easement that diagonally split the site. Prudential proposed the construction of a large, substructural cage that housed the easement, capped with a plaza that covered most of the project area. The sum of these factors, the application argued, made a compelling case for Prudential's unified, integrated proposal and the "coordinated architectural and engineering planning for the construction of all improvements therein be undertaken at one and the same time."⁸⁹

In its function as the public sponsor of the Prudential project, the BRA held a public meeting to review Prudential's application on March 22, 1961. The meeting was essentially a public confirmation of the Prudential Center by a long list of boosters. The transcript of the meeting reveals a theatrical recitation of the merits of the Prudential Center, with little evidence of genuine public participation. Nine illustrious Bostonians appeared before the BRA, an ensemble of business and political luminaries, to advocate the project and urge its swift development. Prudential also produced thirteen "expert" witnesses on behalf of the project, including its architectural designers, engineers, and an array of city planners and consultants from around the country. Only six citizens of Boston spoke in opposition to Prudential Center, with varying degrees of influence and persuasiveness. Overseeing this highly stacked hearing was the appointed chair of the BRA, Monsignor Francis J. Lally, a close aide to Boston's influential Cardinal Cushing. The assignment of Lally to the unsalaried chairmanship of the BRA was a clear nod to the influence of the Catholic Church in Boston. Lally was, in essence, a political

⁸⁹ Ibid., 18.

figure—but he endowed the BRA and its public meetings with an aura of religious sanctity.⁹⁰

The Attorney General, Edward McCormack, announced the support of state government behind the Prudential project and reminded the audience that the Supreme Judicial Court had already sanctioned this avenue of urban redevelopment. He explained that it was now the BRA's job to serve as the authority that ruled on the public benefits of the Prudential Center, and to determine if the project area indeed constituted “a predominantly open area which is detrimental to the safety, health, morals, welfare or sound growth of a community because it is unduly costly to develop it soundly through the ordinary operations of private enterprise.”⁹¹ Many of the statements were short and forceful. Governor John Volpe urged the board to endorse “the greatest proposed development in Boston's history. . . . This mammoth building and development project means a rebirth for Boston and the State.” He called it a “shot in the arm for the Massachusetts economy.”⁹² State Senator John Powers, a frequent candidate for Mayor of Boston, offered the backing of the entire legislature and urged the project's swift approval. Powers mused on the difficulties of urban development in Boston, which seemed to be more extreme than in other places: “Will somebody start building? . . . Let's get this thing on the road, please,” he exhorted the BRA board. Powers was

⁹⁰ *Architectural Forum* quipped in 1964: “Boston is not only the most Irish city in the nation but the most Irish Catholic. Where else would the chairman of the redevelopment board be a priest? . . . As chairman of the BRA, Monsignor Lally is among other things a valuable buffer. When he presents a redevelopment plan to a hostile audience—whether it is the City Council or a neighborhood gathering—they are likely to listen to him more respectfully than to Ed Logue.” See “Boston,” *Architectural Forum* 120 (1964): 86.

⁹¹ Public Hearing, March 22, 1961, BRA #579, 12.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 5.

surprised by the relatively sparse turnout for the public meeting. He thought that many thousands of people should have paraded to the hearing in a righteous outcry to advance the Prudential Center project: “Here is the most important thing that happened in my time, or, Monsignor, in your time,” Powers asserted:

Let’s start to build and put people to work and rehabilitate this city. I say that to your Board and everybody concerned. We are not going to be charged with irresponsibility or dragging our heels. This is a non partisan matter; this is the future of this city. We can’t afford to lose it.⁹³

Prudential’s lawyer, Henry H. Meyer, introduced several officials from Prudential, starting with S. Westcott Toole. Toole explained that Boston was an obvious choice for Prudential’s NEHO; the challenge was finding a site that allowed for a “large building such as the Prudential constructs.” In the past, Prudential had to assemble smaller sites to form a large one, making the pre-assembled site of the rail yard parcel in the Back Bay particularly enticing: “It was large enough for us to do something really dramatic which would revitalize the entire city.”⁹⁴ Prudential’s in-house engineer, Alfred Linkletter, who was the executive general manager of the Home Office Buildings and Plant Department, spoke about the physical challenges of developing the site, and outlined in detail the “complex subterranean soil conditions” on the site that had necessitated expensive testing and foundation work.

The architect Charles Stanton represented Charles Luckman Associates (CLA), the architect for the project (see Chapter 5). The architects had “advised Prudential that only an overall and integrated development should be considered for highest and best utilization of land vs. any piecemeal approach to development,” Stanton explained. To

⁹³ Ibid., 16.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 24.

further its overall plan, Prudential had acquired the Mechanics Building—an adjacent parcel—“to guarantee long-range values” of the site.⁹⁵ This integrated approach required covering the tunnel that would house the transportation easement with a “slab” or “lid” to level the building plane: “It created a base from which the superstructures could rise and on which pedestrians could circulate easily and safely.” This tactic also allowed for the construction of a garage, “so necessary to any urban project today.”⁹⁶ Prudential had forfeited additional building space to design a ring road around the site to mitigate traffic congestion, which Stanton believed was “mandatory in the interest of sound long-range planning.”⁹⁷ In Stanton’s narrative, the conditions of the parcel triggered architectural reactions; the overall design emerged as the result of an in-depth analysis of the site. Stanton’s testimony rationalized Prudential’s proposal as a logical, master planning solution, not an idiosyncratic or ideological design.

After presenting the physical details of their proposed project, Prudential officials paraded before the BRA an impressive group of real estate and city planning experts. These witnesses were Prudential’s way of reminding the local audience of the extraordinary opportunity represented by this proposed investment in Boston. Though Prudential appeared before the BRA as a supplicant, perhaps some Bostonians did not realize that the city needed Prudential more than Prudential needed Boston. Henry Meyer first introduced Joseph Skinner, a Boston real estate appraiser who presented a detailed assessment of Prudential’s project area. Skinner offered a broad historical overview of

⁹⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 50.

the Back Bay rail yard site, explaining how it was formed between two intersecting railroad viaducts in the 1830s. In Skinner's view, this inauspicious founding had set a negative course for what became a blighted area. The area had become a "no man's land" between the Back Bay district and the South End, halting the westward expansion of the Back Bay at Copley Square.⁹⁸ Skinner felt that only the integrated Prudential project could turn the area around.

Charles Blessing, the director of planning for Detroit, who had studied architecture, planning, and civil engineering at M.I.T., also spoke out against piecemeal planning. Cities across the nation had "begun to recognize the fallacy of proceeding on a piecemeal, haphazard, narrow approach to their eventual renewal." Blessing directed urban renewal projects in Detroit and advocated a broad, comprehensive approach under the auspices of a singular redevelopment authority. Blessing was confident in the "soundness of the concept of a continuing partnership of public and private initiative in the rebuilding of a great city."⁹⁹ And Theodore Hazlett, the general counsel for the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh, likened Prudential's project to the Gateway Project in his city, financed by the Equitable Life Assurance Society. In both cases, a large insurance company had stepped in to redevelop derelict railroad facilities and correct their adverse affects on the expanding business district.

Henry Meyer also called on James Downs, the founder and chairman of the Chicago-based Board of Real Estate Research Corporation, to testify on Prudential's behalf. Downs's firm had produced a study of the rail yard site for Prudential: "When

⁹⁸ Ibid., 67.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 98.

we were asked to examine the potentials of the Back Bay Yards in 1956, I must say for the City and community of Boston, in all truth, that I saw here a much more impressive opportunity than I did for the Prudential.”¹⁰⁰ Cities competed with one another to attract “vital job-giving facilities,” Downs explained, and had to advance proactive policies to entice investors, including tax incentives: “It more than justifies the use of public powers which are here envisaged—not to serve a vested interest, but to bring economic dynamism and security to the people who make up this urban area.”¹⁰¹ Between them, Prudential’s guest-witnesses articulated a national consensus behind the basic precepts of urban renewal—public subsidy of private development for the greater good—and chastened Bostonians to consider themselves lucky to have drawn Prudential’s interest.

Those citizens who raised objections to Prudential’s application did not contest the project itself, but lamented its association with the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority’s plans to construct a Boston Extension along the B&A railbed. These opponents were placed in an awkward position of having to resist the Prudential Center in order to stop the road. The first of these speakers was Daniel Rudsten, a former State Senator from Boston and General Chairman of the Massachusetts Citizens Committee, a group organized to resist the Turnpike extension. Rudsten assured the hearing that he was “for the Prudential Center.”¹⁰² But Rudsten and his Massachusetts Citizens Committee could not stomach the highway that had been coordinated with the Prudential Center: “I, myself, and this group which I represent are vitally and vigorously opposed to

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 124.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 147.

the 8-lane toll road that is coming into the Prudential Development and under it, and that is designed to branch out into Copley Square with cloverleaves and ramps. We feel that is the most irresponsible kind of city planning in the world. No City Planner of any intelligence will condone it.”¹⁰³ Good planning, Rudsten believed, would adhere to the 1948 Master Highway Plan, in which a “Western Expressway” would extend from Route 128 only as far as an Inner Belt. Rudsten saw this matter as a question of *urbanism*—the confluence of the city’s social and physical qualities—and feared the reconstruction of Boston as a bland suburb:

The thing we must ask ourselves—and you, yourselves—is, what kind of a City are we building for Boston’s future? Are we building a suburban shopping center with a lot of automobiles, or building a city of people who are working and playing together, of the homes and shops and business firms of industry, of theater and restaurants and playgrounds and esplanade concerts. Is not this the kind of a city we want, or are we just going to build a monstrous or monolith of buildings and surrounded with an 8-lane toll road that will be like a moat with the rest of Boston becoming a village, deteriorating around the back of it.¹⁰⁴

The new toll road would bring so many cars into Boston that they would never be able to build enough parking spaces for them, until “no more cars would come to Boston because there would not be enough left of Boston to come to.”¹⁰⁵ For Rudsten, the turnpike extension was an affront to sensible city planning and he bemoaned the fact that Callahan had managed to intertwine the two projects.

But Rudsten recognized the awkward implications of his position: “It has gotten to a point where anyone who resists this type of planning has been put in a position of

¹⁰³ Ibid., 148.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 151.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

being against Prudential—we are not. We want the Prudential, but want it with sensible planning.”¹⁰⁶ He had solicited a letter from the newly elected president of Prudential on the question of the highway, and Louis Menagh had responded:

During the recent highway discussions we attempted to make it absolutely clear that the Prudential has taken no position whatever in what kind of a road goes through our area or whether there is any road at all. We are obligated to provide the easement to the Turnpike Authority. . . . Our position was merely that before proceeding with our Development we had to know what was going to happen.¹⁰⁷

As was their policy, Prudential executives distanced themselves from the internal wrangling of Boston’s particular political battles. For his part, Rudsten offered to take the issue directly to the citizens of Boston: “I call to your attention, I offered to have my Committee support and take an impartial poll of the people of Greater Boston—two million of them—to verify my charge that 99 per cent of them want the Prudential but do not want an 8-lane toll road into the center of town,” a comment which drew applause from the audience. The BRA board patiently tolerated Rudsten’s comments, but James G. Colbert, of the board, stressed the fact that the question of highway planning was “not within our province.”¹⁰⁸

Lawrence Ryan, an attorney for the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, spoke after Rudsten, and hoped to disarm the former senator’s comments. He explained that engineers from the Turnpike and Prudential had worked for many months to integrate their plans. “I am amazed at the position taken by the previous speaker, because any change at this eleventh hour in those plans of the Prudential would, for example, nullify

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 152.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 153.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 154.

this hearing.”¹⁰⁹ But the BRA board was unwilling to engage in a debate over the turnpike extension. James Colbert cut Ryan short: “You know we have no control over where the highway goes, so why don’t you confine yourself to this Application.”

Monsignor Lally, the chairman, chimed in: “Stick to the issues, please, Mr. Ryan.”¹¹⁰

But the question of the Pike and the Pru were not as distinct as the BRA might have imagined. Herbert Gleason, an attorney and member of the Ward Five Democratic Committee in Boston, read from a statement from the Committee that expressed its support for the Prudential Center. But he did not stop there:

The Committee also wishes to record its profound regret, however, that the Center has become tied in with the extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike beyond the proposed Inner Belt in Brighton. While favoring a freeway over a toll road from Weston to Brighton, the Committee takes particular issue with the extension of a huge private traffic facility into the heart of the already congested downtown area. Representing as we do so many people whose comfort and property will be demolished by the toll road, we must protest this sacrifice of the welfare of the city to private interests.¹¹¹

The private interests in this case were not Prudential’s, but the Turnpike Authority’s.

Gleason believed that the railroad right-of-way should be preserved for transit facilities.

Rudsten, Ryan, and Gleason each recognized what the BRA board was unwilling to admit: that the Prudential Center and the turnpike extension had become a singular piece of urban infrastructure and approving the former almost certainly sanctioned the latter.

Other members of the audience at the public hearing intuitively grasped this, as well. An unnamed man, late to the meeting, spoke up from the floor:

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 156.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 158.

(FROM THE FLOOR:) Mr. Chairman, I am speaking against the land taking.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are you speaking in favor of the Application?

(FROM THE FLOOR:) I just got in here. I am for the Prudential but I am not for this indiscriminately taking land property, and my property is on the route of which the land-taking is supposed to be.

THE CHAIRMAN: On the Prudential site?

(FROM THE FLOOR:) No, but it's on the line, on Mountfort Street.

THE CHAIRMAN: That is not the issue. Before us is the Prudential Application. We are not able to hear anything on that question; we are here to discuss the Prudential site. We are not here for taking or redistricting, like Stuart Street and Copley Square. That will be heard at another time.

(FROM THE FLOOR:) Can we be heard? I am a property owner. Can we be heard?¹¹²

Robert Knowles, another Boston resident, likewise did not want to impede the Prudential Center, but objected to the turnpike ramps projected for the eastern side of the project. He felt that the looping ramps would destroy the Copley Square area. "Why couldn't these ramps that are going into the Prudential be eliminated?" he asked. Chairman Lally would not entertain this question: "The ramps of the toll road are not under our jurisdiction at all. That is the Mass. Turnpike Authority and they will have to make a decision on that."¹¹³

A somewhat eccentric view came from Mrs. Dwight Strong, who objected to the Prudential Center on philosophical terms: "I sit here now registering disapproval of the Prudential project in view of the fact that it is quite apparent to me that it is a monolithic

¹¹² Ibid., 160.

¹¹³ Ibid., 178.

example of materialism.”¹¹⁴ But the most eloquent opponent, willing to attack the Prudential Center on its own terms, was Joseph Lee, a prominent Beacon Hill patrician. Lee systematically rebutted the claim that Prudential’s application to redevelop the rail yard could be justified under the definition of “blight” as defined in Chapter 121A. Lee insisted that the area under consideration was not, in fact, “detrimental to the safety, health, morals, welfare or sound growth of the community.”¹¹⁵ Lee rejected Prudential’s claim on each of these points:

Is the area detrimental to safety? No. Well, is it detrimental to health—will it disease people? No. Is it detrimental to morals—a lot of criminals living out that way? No. Is it detrimental to the welfare of the community? No. The welfare of the Commonwealth is not the slightest bit injured by this open area. On the contrary this area has given a house-jammed, traffic-jammed city a little respite from congestion. Can you find the area detrimental to the sound growth of the community? No. The area has aided in the sound growth of the community; that is pretty well shown by a great metropolis which has grown up around that area, a metropolis of some three million in the last three hundred years, which doesn’t seem to be very detrimental to sound growth.¹¹⁶

If the technical challenges of building on the Back Bay site made this area too expensive for private enterprise to develop, Lee argued, it followed that the same could be said for nearly every inch of Boston, much of which was also built on nineteenth century land-fill. Never before were special concessions necessary to cultivate private investment; why should the city start now? In this manner, Lee rejected the very premise of Chapter 121A. He was questioned by a deferential yet incredulous member of the BRA board:

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 171.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 162.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 162–163.

MR. MC CLOSKEY: Assuming it was not the Prudential, it was any other company, you have to have some incentive to get this type of project here. There is no question on that, is there, Mr. Lee?

MR. LEE: Yes, there is every question on that. If the incentive is important enough to extend to a Johnny-come-lately, it should be important enough to extend the same incentive to the businesses that are here now. I dare say if the same concessions were granted to present Boston business, our businessmen would take part to a point where this City would be one of dazzling prosperity.¹¹⁷

Lee did not believe that Prudential should be granted special status: “It isn’t playing the game. Here is a cry-baby corporation that wants to play the game if it is given an 80 per cent reduction in the taxes that everybody else pays. Now, if you are going to start handing out reductions, let’s hand them out evenly and proportionately.”¹¹⁸

The most biting attack came from a citizen named William P. Foley, who attacked the nature of the hearing itself and called it out as a sham. Foley did not think that this public hearing qualified as “citizen participation” in the redevelopment process:

This is not a citizen participation public hearing; this is a newspaper participation public hearing. This is not a vested interest citizen participation public hearing. This is a public hearing where financial interests have established a public hearing to conform with a law that was to benefit people in this type of government, . . . The Constitution states clearly that no one should be allowed to establish a kingdom. This is becoming a kingdom.¹¹⁹

But Foley was stifled by the presence on the BRA board of Monsignor Lally. His allegiance to the church conflicted with his opposition to Prudential:

I am telling you in my way, in a public way, how this Prudential is affecting me. I do not like to discuss this matter and have to clash in a heated argument with a member of the Clergy. I prefer that a member of

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 170.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 170–171.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 173.

the Clergy were not sitting on that Board and that these people here have something to do with the church.¹²⁰

But Foley could not contain himself: “The Prudential is receiving unfair and unnatural tax concession. I used the word ‘unnatural’, again, because it establishes a kingdom.”¹²¹

Foley may have damaged his credibility by his whimsical reference to a “kingdom,” yet he rightly recognized what the BRA board was unwilling to discuss: that the Prudential Center project was linked with the turnpike extension and thus implied an auxiliary set of land takings that threatened local property owners. The board insisted that Foley and others confine their comments to the Prudential Center project, a project that few wanted to resist.

A final legal test. In November 1961, Prudential orchestrated a “friendly” court test of the project’s viability under the new urban redevelopment law. This test case, *Dodge v. Prudential*, served as Prudential’s final legal assurance before moving forward with the Prudential Center. The case tested the legitimacy of a contract between Prudential and one of the Prudential Center’s principal tenants, the New England Merchants Bank of Boston, which planned to establish its main offices in the Prudential Center. Robert Dodge was a partner in the Boston law firm of Palmer, Dodge, Gardner and Bradford. Dodge was appointed by Prudential to serve as an agent to hold the leases made between Prudential and the bank. His court petition “seeks to ascertain whether or not the project has advanced to such a state as to warrant the agents turning these leases over to the Prudential Company.” The law suit was a formality, though it did reassert the principles behind Chapter 121A; if the individual lease was legitimate, it would imply “a

¹²⁰ Ibid., 174.

¹²¹ Ibid.

sufficiently dominant public purpose in the entire project to protect it from being declared illegal in a subsequent suit.”¹²² The court ruled affirmatively in December 1961, validating the lease between Prudential and the New England Merchants Bank, and, thus, the terms of the urban renewal contract between Prudential and the city of Boston. “This was the ‘last green light’ everyone had been waiting for,” the *Christian Science Monitor* reported.¹²³

¹²² “Court Weighs Pleas on Prudential Center,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 8, 1961.

¹²³ Michael Liuzzi, “Court Says ‘Yes’ to Prudential in Boston,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 20, 1961.

Chapter Four:

A Closed Loop: The Pike and the Pru

At first, the Pike and the Pru were rivals. Each prized a piece of Boston's deteriorating rail infrastructure as the armature for modernization and development. The Boston & Albany Railroad provided a convenient right-of-way for the Pike's Boston Extension. The railroad's path cut across a 30-acre switching and storage yard that Prudential wanted for their Northeastern Home Office (NEHO) development. It seemed like the two projects were mutually exclusive. But the two parties eventually came to see the utility of teaming up and plotted a joint venture that linked the highway and the Prudential Center. This way, the Prudential was guaranteed swift automotive access to its site and the Pike could bind its project to the Prudential Center, which in turn was tied to the city's hopes for an economic revival. What began as a rivalry evolved into a mutually contingent partnership in which the success of one insured the other.

As built, the Pike and the Pru formed a massive urban interchange: a looping exit ramp from the Boston Extension delivered cars to a three-level parking garage that formed the base of the Prudential Center. The unified spatial logic of the Pike and the Pru mirrored the railroad system it replaced: just as tracks led to a yard, so too must the urban highway lead to a central depository, the parking garage. But the coordination between the Pike and the Pru encompassed more than physical and even political aspects. In 1962, with the Pike struggling to raise money, Prudential pledged to purchase a quarter of the \$180 million bond issue that financed the construction of the Turnpike extension.

Chapter Three reviewed the ways that Prudential influenced Boston's local redevelopment policies. The insurance company secured a tax break because the Prudential Center was viewed as a legitimate expression of the public interest. Like Prudential, the Turnpike Authority positioned its project as a manifestation of the public interest to bolster the future of Boston. In this chapter, I discuss the history and politics of the Pike and its Boston Extension, the difficult choices and conflicts that it faced at the end of the 1950s, and how the balance between clashing interest groups was finally tipped by an outside influence: the Prudential Insurance Company and the forces of urban development that it brought with it.

Planning a New Road

In the spring of 1957, the main line of the Massachusetts Turnpike opened: 123 miles of limited-access superhighway that ran from the New York border to the outskirts of Boston. To celebrate the event, and to promote the continuation of the highway building project, the Perini Corporation—one of the Pike's main contractors—produced a cartoon on the back page of its quarterly *Perini News*, a magazine circulated internally and in the road building and civil engineering communities (fig. 4.1). In the cartoon, a “Turnpike Pilgrim” galloping down the Pike must rear his horse to a halt at the Route 128 beltway. There the highway's path abruptly ends. The Pilgrim's forward progress is impeded by the urban density that lies before him. The Pilgrim is not alone. On both highways, cars are marooned in gridlock, their drivers cursing and honking in desperation. One driver speculates: “Maybe they use helicopters from here—er sumpin.” The Pilgrim himself is

sweating with exasperation. His thought-bubble displays a vision of the Massachusetts Statehouse, that iconic “hub of the solar system,” as dubbed by Oliver Wendell Holmes, which represented the ultimate central city destination. How could the Pilgrim reach the object of his desire? In fact, he didn’t have to look far for inspiration—the answer was in plain view. The cartoonist has clearly rendered the passage cut by the Boston & Albany Railroad. The road to Boston was endowed with a ready-made right-of-way.

The text of the cartoon intoned: “Some folks know more than others where, when, and how to build a road. How, when, and where to now?” This question alluded to the well-known views of the Chairman of the Massachusetts Turnpike, William F. Callahan. At the dedication ceremonies, Callahan declared that the turnpike “will not be completed until we take it into downtown Boston. It will be the salvation of Boston. My intention is to do everything within my power to bring this road into downtown Boston.”¹

As early as 1953 Callahan and his team of consulting engineers had identified the Boston & Albany right-of-way as the path of least resistance to the central city. Moreover, the junction of the Pike’s main line and the metropolitan beltway, Route 128, had purposefully been designed to enable this future alignment. But Callahan’s plan to extend the Pike along the B&A route into Boston had become controversial. Callahan and other Turnpike advocates faced a series of obstacles: first, from the Prudential Insurance Company which sought to claim a piece of the B&A infrastructure for its own purposes; second, from advocates of a freeway system that contested Callahan’s stranglehold on road-building politics; and, third, from suburban politicians who resented

¹ Albert D. Hughes, “Autos Stream Over New Pike; Extension Into Boston Pushed,” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 16, 1957, 10.

the imposition of the Turnpike through their towns. To understand how the Pike reached its crisis point in the late 1950s, we need to examine its political and organizational underpinnings—the public authority model that it adapted, the place of Callahan and the Turnpike Authority in Massachusetts political culture, and the relationship between road-building and urban development.

The public authority model. In 1952, just five years before the Mass Pike opened, the Massachusetts legislature chartered a new body, the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, to construct a road from the state’s western border with New York to a point “in the vicinity” of Boston. Toll roads had been common institutions in the early American republic. In the postwar era politicians and highway planners returned to the concept of an independent turnpike authority as an efficient institutional arrangement for building roads that the state could not otherwise afford. The idea for the Turnpike Authority came from William F. Callahan, who was already the Chairman of the Department of Public Works and had many friends in the legislature. The Turnpike Authority, whose chairmanship Callahan promptly assumed, consolidated Callahan’s control over the road-building enterprise in Massachusetts.

The Turnpike Authority was modeled on “public benefit corporations” like the Port Authority of New York and the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, which sought to organize and modernize a region’s transportation and port infrastructures. These authorities were given broad legal powers and proprietary funding sources, such as the right to float revenue-bonds and collect tolls, to finance large-scale projects that were intended to support the economic growth of the city and region as a whole. The Port Authority model was an institutional innovation that could be applied to the challenges of

providing transportation, infrastructure, and housing. These projects required huge capital investments that the private sector could not, or would not, make on its own. The Port Authority model also crystallized the tension between rational planning, which saw the region's infrastructure in what were seen to be objective terms, and the supposedly corrupt practices of the political establishment. Turnpike authorities, organized by states, were one form of public benefit corporation intended to construct the infrastructure for the modern metropolis.²

Though they were creations of a political system, public authorities of the Port Authority type were ideally insulated from political meddling. Transportation specialist and toll road advocate Charles Dearing explained in 1961 that public authorities were created to redress the failings of government. Special authorities were “created to compensate for the failure of the conventional and established forms of administrative organization, procedure, and finance, to satisfy ‘effective’ demand for the provision of public services such as roads, bridges, tunnels, and airports.”³ In the 1940s and early 1950s, many highway planners supported the public authority model of financing, planning, and constructing major road projects in the form of turnpikes. With a seemingly limitless demand for new roads but uneven sources of government funding,

² Jameson Doig, “Joining New York City to the Greater Metropolis: The Port Authority as Visionary, Target of Opportunity, and Opportunist,” *The Landscape of Modernity, New York City, 1900–1940*, eds. David Ward and Oliver Zunz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) and *Empire on the Hudson: Entrepreneurial Vision and Political Power at the Port of New York Authority* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage, 1975); Louise Nelson Dyble, “Paying the Toll: A Political History of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1923–1971” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2003).

³ Charles Dearing, “Turnpike Authorities in the United States,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 26, no. 4 (Autumn 1961): 741.

the turnpikes promised quick financing on the bond market. Although bodies like the Port Authority and the Triborough Bridge Authority were characterized as “public” or “quasi-public” corporations and drew political strength through legislative backing, they were in fact very closely linked to private financing by virtue of the bond market. Private financing on the bond market, repaid with toll revenue, implied that turnpikes were market-driven inventions that had to sell their future success based on traffic demand.

However, not all turnpikes were created equal. A turnpike’s success relied on the other pieces of transportation infrastructure that would feed the road and the popularity of the destinations it connected. The New Jersey Turnpike, completed in 1951, was an extremely successful operation because it connected key pieces of regional transportation infrastructure. “Don’t ever confuse the New Jersey Turnpike with any other toll road,” warned Paul Troast, Chairman of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority:

There is no other toll road that lies between the first and third largest cities in the country; there is no other toll road that could be projected that is fed by such facilities as the George Washington Bridge, the Holland Tunnel, the Lincoln Tunnel, the Pulaski Skyway, Newark Airport, our own Edison Bridge to the shore, Burlington-Briston, Tacony-Palmyre, Camden-Philadelphia Bridges, and the Delaware Memorial Bridge.⁴

Troast’s comments had important implications for planning the Massachusetts Turnpike. Like New Jersey’s Troast, the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority’s Callahan envisioned the Pike as knitting together a set of existing and proposed transportation assets. These included the Central Artery through downtown Boston, in construction by 1952, the Sumner Tunnel that further connected the Central Artery to East Boston and Logan

⁴ “Excerpt from an Address by Hon. Paul L. Troast, Chairman of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority,” included with a letter from Wm. R. McConochie of DeLeuw, Cather & Company to William F. Callahan, February 13, 1952, Massachusetts Turnpike Authority Archives (hereafter cited as MTAA) 02333.

Airport, and Route 128 with its budding technology industries. Each additional link enhanced the strength of the system as a whole, and turnpike planners believed that an urban extension of the Pike to Boston would exponentially amplify the utility of the system.

Unlike a toll bridge or tunnel, which was often an unavoidable funnel for traffic, a toll road did not monopolize the market for roads. Indeed, when the New Jersey Turnpike was being planned, New Jersey Governor Driscoll promised that the turnpike would always be paralleled by free facilities and that these free facilities would be improved constantly. To advance in this competition, Troast formed a public information department and launched an aggressive press campaign that “dramatized our every act. . . . It was one of the most successful programs of public relations ever undertaken, as is witnessed by our first full month of operation.”⁵ He argued that demand for a turnpike could be produced through advertising and public awareness. The Massachusetts Turnpike Authority followed suit by establishing its own public relations department that issued a nearly constant flow of press releases and eventually produced several short television films about the Pike.

The Massachusetts Turnpike Authority: An expanding kingdom. The New Jersey Governor’s guarantee to his constituents that free roads would not be abandoned was also a pledge to his political allies. Leaders of state highway-building agencies viewed toll roads as competitors. Turnpikes bypassed the conventional circuits of highway financing and thus threatened the authority state public works agencies. Toll road advocates like Charles Dearing defended turnpike-style financing, however, because it accelerated the

⁵ Ibid.

capitalization of the road-building enterprise without the racket of political patronage. Bond-revenue financing could “get the roads built quickly where needed on the basis of traffic demand, and . . . the users are willing to pay in tolls for having these facilities available today rather than ten years hence.”⁶ Turnpike authorities appealed to Dearing because they were designed as temporary agencies that performed a specific job before they were retired and their assets subsumed within the state bureaucracy.

When the Massachusetts legislature chartered the Turnpike Authority in 1952, the intent was to create such a temporary, “self-limiting” authority.⁷ The enabling legislation, Chapter 354 of the Acts of 1952, charged the Turnpike Authority with providing for the “construction, maintenance, repair and operation of a self-liquidating express highway.”⁸ The charter permitted the new public authority to issue bonds, charge tolls, and to use eminent domain to acquire land, rights of way, and easements for the road. The law’s intent was to entrust the management of the highway to an independent agency, free of the constraints of state government, until the road was completed and its bonds retired.⁹ In an effort to insulate the Turnpike Authority from political pressures, Chapter 354 established eight-year terms for the Authority’s three board members, who were appointed by the Governor and had to represent both political parties. But the charter had a “sunset clause”: when the road was built and the bonds retired, the charter specified that the Authority would transfer ownership of its facilities to the state.

⁶ Dearing, “Turnpike Authorities in the United States,” 751.

⁷ The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General, “The Massachusetts Turnpike Authority: Self-Preservation at the Expense of Taxpayer Interests” (October 1991), 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

In 1991, the Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General, led by Robert Cerasoli, issued a vitriolic report that claimed the Turnpike Authority had “lost sight” of the original intent to limit the agency’s life span: “As this Report shows, the Authority does not wish to understand, and has no commitment to deal with, the original intent of its enabling legislation.”¹⁰ In fact, just the opposite occurred. William F. Callahan’s vision for the Pike exceeded its original constraints. Callahan was not satisfied merely to build the road stipulated in the 1952 charter. The Authority consistently sought to expand its portfolio of transportation assets, to issue new bonds and extend its indebtedness, and, in general, to preserve its institutional longevity.

A critical step toward increasing the scope of the Mass Pike was Callahan’s effort to construct an extension of the highway from Route 128 to the heart of Boston. Callahan vigorously lobbied the state legislature for the legal right to build the extension. He was gratified in 1955, when the legislature enacted Chapter 47 of the Acts of 1955. This statute amended Chapter 354, which authorized the Authority to build and operate a toll “from a point in the vicinity of the city of Boston,” by adding, after the word “Boston,” this clause: “or from point or points *within* said city.”¹¹ This simple addendum was enough authority for Callahan to begin planning what was soon called the “Boston Extension.” But that was not all. In 1958, the Legislature authorized the Turnpike Authority to acquire the Sumner Tunnel, which connected Boston to East Boston and the Logan Airport, and to construct a second Boston Harbor tunnel, to be named the Callahan Tunnel (after William F. Callahan’s son, Lieutenant William F.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Acts, 1955. Massachusetts General Court, Chap. 47, emphasis added.

Callahan, Jr., who was killed in World War II). In 1963, the Legislature passed Chapter 505, again amending Chapter 354 to allow the Authority to lease air rights for development over the Boston Extension. All of these new legislative acts expanded the scope of Turnpike Authority operations and created an insular network controlled by that body. And while none of them preempted the “sunset clause” specified in the original charter, the Turnpike’s horizon-line seemed to fade unceasingly into the future.

Chairman Callahan: “He gets things done.” In his study of the Port Authority of New York, Jameson Doig stressed the importance of examining individual leadership in analyzing the workings of large, bureaucratic institutions. Bureaucracies cultivated a collective culture within an expansive hierarchy of decision-makers, but the motivations of individual leaders could have a great impact on this culture.¹² This observation is true in the case of William F. Callahan and the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority.

When he became the Turnpike Authority’s first chief executive in 1952, William F. Callahan already had a wealth of experience developing infrastructure and building roads. Callahan (1891–1963) was a self-taught engineer. In the 1920s he ran a dredging company and later owned a marine-engineering firm that specialized in the construction of dry-docks and port facilities. In 1934, Massachusetts Governor Joseph Buell Ely appointed Callahan as an associate commissioner of the state’s Department of Public Works (DPW). In 1936, Ely’s successor, James Michael Curley, promoted Callahan to the chief of the DPW. Callahan quickly recognized that DPW appointments were vulnerable to political trends. His tenure at the DPW was based on the ascendancy of the

¹² Doig, *Empire on the Hudson*. See also Jean Riesman, “The Maharajah of the Macadam: William F. Callahan and his Fight for the Road to Boston” (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1991).

Irish-Democratic political machine, and when Republican, Yankee-blueblood Leverett Saltonstall won the Governorship in 1939, Callahan was dismissed and replaced by a future rival, John Volpe.¹³ During wartime, Callahan returned to the private sector to build dry-docks and other marine projects around the world. But Callahan was restored to the chairmanship of the DPW in 1949 when Democrat Paul Dever became Governor and he held that position until 1953 when he resigned to focus his energy on the newly founded Turnpike Authority.

Callahan was a state-wide political figure, supported by broad network of Massachusetts lawmakers. *New York Times* reporter Anthony Lewis wrote in a 1965 profile of Callahan:

The bond of affection between the Legislature and Mr. Callahan is one of the phenomena of Massachusetts politics. . . . Along with the motto “He gets things done,” a popular saying is that “He’s never lost a vote in the Legislature.” In 1951 a Republican legislator said Mr. Callahan was “more powerful than any elected official in the state.”¹⁴

Callahan’s cozy relationship with state representatives was not surprising. The road-builder was in a position to award many millions of dollars in construction contracts and to make decisions about the routes of important new roads. What rural Massachusetts representative did not want his town connected by a gleaming new highway? What politician did not have his own list of preferred contractors to support with no-bid contracts? The prospect of such hefty patronage was more than enough to cultivate the affections of state legislators. Lewis estimated that over his long career in the DPW and

¹³ Volpe represented Italian-American political power that sought refuge in the Republic party when elbowed from the Irish-dominated Democratic Party.

¹⁴ Anthony Lewis, “Boston Strong Man: William Francis Callahan,” *New York Times*, June 20, 1961, 14.

with the Turnpike Authority, Callahan had nearly \$1 billion in public funds to dispense, which amounted to a “club of patronage.”¹⁵

There were those who felt that Callahan’s cult of personality transcended both the DPW and the Turnpike Authority. He ran a secretive institution outside of legislative purview. Anthony Lewis noted that “the legislation creating the Turnpike Authority does not allow any state official to look at the Turnpike’s books, and the Legislature has ignored suggestions that it give the state auditor access to them. Nor does the Turnpike legislation require competitive bidding on authority contracts.”¹⁶ In 1960, Callahan was implicated in a bribery scandal. The prosecutor, Elliot Richardson, attacked Callahan’s undue influence in the state’s political culture:

The most dangerous aspect of Callahan’s operations is simply his attitude . . . He’s a master at manipulating the machinery of government—jobs, pressures, patronage, fund-raising for the Democratic party. It’s as if he were saying, “Look, I didn’t invent this system. My concern is building roads. To do that, I have to try to get through the clumsy constitutional machinery of the Commonwealth. I came up through a school that taught me how to win friends and influence people and I’ve played the game harder and better than anyone else.” At some point, however, society pays too high a price for results. The ultimate effect of accumulated obligations is to get in the way of the state’s legislators. Their obligations to Callahan are greater than to the public.¹⁷

There was a broader issue at stake that transcended individual scandals. To whom did Callahan answer? How much graft could be justified in the name of achievements for the public’s use? Was Callahan merely playing the game of political patronage for the sake

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Harold K. Banks, “Mr. Callahan of Massachusetts: A Series on William F. Callahan,” *Boston Sunday Advertiser and Record American*, September 9–22, 1962, 5, quoted in Riesman, “The Maharajah of the Macadam.”

of the people? And could this be achieved despite his ability to corrupt the politicians who sustained his empire?

When Callahan was called to stand trial for corruption, the prosecutors accused him of running an idiosyncratic agency where great wealth was mediated by personal and political contacts. One example that came to light was the fact that Lou Perini, who owned the large construction company that built the Prudential Center and many sections of the Pike, was related to Callahan through his daughter's marriage. A reporter noted Callahan's simple response to these accusations: "He has never denied that, whenever the circumstances properly permit, he throws business to his friends. 'Would anyone expect me to give it to my enemies?' he asks."¹⁸

Callahan justified his actions and dismissed his critics. "Some people like to climb over your back politically. You've got to have critics. But usually they're people who haven't accomplished anything in their lives. I call them grocery-store philosophers, pen pushers."¹⁹ Callahan frequently referred to "pen pushers" and "grocery-store philosophers," pejorative terms that he applied to whomever stood in the way. The pen-pushers and philosophers were linked in Callahan's mind with do-nothing city planners who fussed over ideal schemes without achieving concrete results. Callahan insisted that his highway plans were devised by expert engineers who responded to hard data. He prided himself as a hard-charging builder who could get the job done. "There is a certain

¹⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁹ Lewis, "Boston Strong Man."

pride in building bridges, building roads,” Callahan said. “One thing in life—I want to finish some of these jobs. Then I don’t care.”²⁰

Some of his contemporaries paired Callahan with New York’s “Master Builder,” Robert Moses, who was also seen as dictatorial. Like Moses, Callahan obtained different state appointments that augmented his power base. In 1958 he was made chair of the Massachusetts Parking Authority, which was then planning the \$9 million garage under the Boston Common (itself a controversial project). Callahan also headed the three-member commission in charge of erecting the state office building at Government Center, the centerpiece of Boston’s urban renewal initiatives. But more than any other part of his portfolio, the Turnpike Authority gave Callahan a political and financial base that allowed him to sidestep the ordinary democratic processes of taxation and budgeting.

Roads and development. Callahan believed that the Pike was essential to Boston and New England’s economy. This belief was based in large measure on his experience with another groundbreaking road project, Route 128. In his 1930s stewardship of the DPW, Callahan helped conceive of the circumferential highway that was at first dubbed by critics the “Road to Oblivion” or “Callahan’s folly.”²¹ Critics could not comprehend the utility of a road that ran in an arc—approximately twelve miles from Boston at any given point through the largely undeveloped countryside—without connecting any meaningful destinations. Construction on the road began in 1936 but stalled during World War II. The road had the imprint of a “make-work” project during the Depression, a convenient way to distribute monies and put people to work. But the road was also

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Tony Hill, “The Man Who Drove Hard to Build Roads,” *Boston Globe*, August 25, 2002, D-1.

groundbreaking in terms of its style and engineering standards. Using an older, two-lane state highway as its guide, Route 128 was designed as a six-lane limited-access expressway with looping interchanges and a landscaped mall dividing traffic. Only eight miles had been constructed by 1947 when several bond issues and hefty state appropriations accelerated the project. Callahan made the road a priority when he rejoined the DPW in 1949 and the beltway opened in 1952.

One function of Route 128 was to serve as a grand bypass around Boston that allowed a driver to travel from Providence to Portland without facing downtown traffic. But in addition to providing such a bypass, the road would become the region's most important armature for land development in the 1950s. In 1955, *Business Week* lauded Route 128 as “a classic example of how a new road can change the traffic pattern of a metropolitan area—and completely remake the face of the landscape around it.”²² By making suburban tracts more accessible to car and truck, Route 128 unearthed the latent demand for industrial and commercial space on land abutting the “super-road,” and facilitated the development of residential property in towns near the road. The old-line real estate company Cabot, Cabot & Forbes developed many of the industrial tracts near Route 128's suburban interchanges. They built low-slung, horizontal campuses for a growing electronics and aerospace sector that had been incubated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and spawned in nineteenth century red brick lofts, warehouses, or garages in Cambridge. In 1956, *Architectural Forum*, reporting on Boston's development prospects, wrote that manufacturers were moving to these new industrial

²² “New England Highway Upsets Old Way of Life,” *Business Week*, May 14, 1955, 188.

parks, “following the new highway system as industry followed rivers and railroads a century ago.”²³

In May 1954, the Turnpike Authority successfully marketed \$239 million in revenue bonds to cover the costs of constructing the Pike. In November of that year, the *Christian Science Monitor* excitedly reported Callahan’s expectation that “rich treasures of vast industrial expansion and increased tourist trade will be tapped when Massachusetts completes its 123-mile toll road from Greater Boston to the New York state line.” Construction on the new “highspeed, limited-access highway” was set to begin and the *Monitor* reporter looked back to “Callahan’s folly” as a positive indicator: “[I]f the experience of the new Route 128 is borne out by the toll road, hundreds of millions in new industrial development will spring up in the vicinity of the turnpike.” Route 128 had opened up a crescent of Boston’s outskirts as attractive industrial locations and had vastly increased land values in the area. Before work on the Turnpike had even begun, land values near its 14 planned interchanges had already increased in value. Callahan also predicted that the Pike would augment New England’s truck-oriented trade. The Pike would bring “Massachusetts hours closer to the Midwest markets, as it will connect with a spur of the New York Thruway.” Callahan also saw the Pike playing an important role in New England’s tourist economy, evoking the notion of pleasure-driving that was a key element of 1920s parkway planning. In particular, the Mass Pike would open up the scenic Berkshire Mountains to visitors from eastern Massachusetts.²⁴

²³ “Renewing Our Cities,” *Architectural Forum* 102 (1956): 13.

²⁴ Edgar M. Mills, “Bay State’s Toll Road to Boom Industrial Growth,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 26, 1954.

To carry out the Turnpike project, Callahan drafted many of his key aides from the state's Department of Public Works, including the DPW's former chief engineer, Philip H. Kitfield. Kitfield and Callahan collaborated to design the ultra-modern road:

Into the road is built every possible safety device to make the road safe for 70-mile-an-hour speed. To combat driver fatigue, the road is being varied through gentle curves, through the separated opposing lanes of traffic sometimes being so widely separated that drivers traveling in opposite directions will not see one another. At other points, the opposing traffic lane will be separated only by a wide grass plot.²⁵

The road was engineered to allow easy grades, a feature that was especially important to truck drivers. "Heavy trucks will be able to travel from one end of the toll road to the other without shifting gears even in the Berkshire Hills area."²⁶ To insure the unimpeded flow of traffic, toll plazas were located off the main road at each of the fourteen interchanges, with the exception of the western and eastern termini. The motorist was handed a ticket upon entering the turnpike and surrendered it upon exiting, paying to a uniformed turnpike attendant a cash toll based on the number of miles traveled. The highway opened on May 15, 1957, with a complementary three-hour free period in the afternoon, allowing a long queue of curious drivers, including many trucks, to experience the road before attendants began collecting tolls. The early results were positive and toll attendants reported heavy use of the new road, including many drivers from nearby states.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hughes, "Autos Stream Over New Pike," 10.

The Boston Extension

Callahan always intended to extend the turnpike to Boston and he believed that the city's economic future depended on the Pike's ability to bring both goods and people into the city. Route 128 and the mainline of the Pike had opened up the suburban area to industrial development and were important arteries for truck-based freight. Certainly these trucks needed to access Boston. However, Callahan also believed that the future of Boston as a commercial center would turn on the positioning of the Pike as a method of daily commuting into the heart of the city. For example, he pointed to Boston's languishing retail establishments: "I suggest a survey be made to see how many stores have had to reorganize or have wound up in financial trouble in the last five years."²⁸ These stores were languishing, Callahan believed, because they were no longer accessible to suburban consumers, who preferred large shopping centers with ample parking.

There were critics who charged that Callahan's efforts to construct the turnpike extension represented a significant expansion of his dominion. The turnpike, extension, central artery, and harbor tunnels would all be linked in a single system controlled by one man. But Callahan insisted that his interest in the Boston Extension was a magnanimous effort to revive the city's economy, not driven by personal political ambition. "It will not make any difference to me, personally, whether there is ever a road built into Boston and I am not interested in the politics."²⁹ But the gruff road builder had little patience for those who did not share his conviction that a highway should be built to Boston or who

²⁸ William F. Callahan, "For Future Press Release," undated, MTAA 01321, Community Relations, Press Releases 1961-71.

²⁹ Ibid.

doubted that the city's survival as an economic entity depended on highway access. In his typically flamboyant style, Callahan declared in a Turnpike press release that "if a road wasn't built into Downtown Boston . . . they better look up Chief Chickatawbut's descendants (he is the Indian Chief from whom Gov. Winthrop purchased Boston) and arrange to give downtown Boston back to the Indians."³⁰

The enabling legislation that chartered the Turnpike Authority stipulated a "self-liquidating" enterprise that paid for itself with toll revenue. To maximize toll revenue and thus to expedite self-liquidation, the Extension sought to capture the most vigorous traffic movements in the state—those from Boston's western suburbs to the center city. If the Pike could capitalize on the desire to drive from the surrounding area into Boston, these "local users"—including daily commuters driving from the suburbs and exurbs to work in Boston—would greatly increase toll revenue. The Pike had to persuade potential bond buyers that there was demand, and hence fiscal viability, for the road. The Pike hired a group of transportation consultants and engineering firms to furnish the traffic demand statistics that could, in turn, rationalize the new road.

Engineering demand. In 1953, the Chicago-based transportation consulting firm DeLeuw, Cather & Company (DeLeuw) produced one of the first traffic projection reports for the Turnpike Authority. The report's succinct title, "Estimated Traffic and Revenues" revealed the essential logic of the turnpike: the more traffic it attracted, the more money it would earn, and the more likely that bond-holders would be quickly rewarded. Other reports investigated the costs of acquiring rights-of-way and of the

³⁰ Ibid. The parenthetical statement is Callahan's, not my own. He seemed intent on demonstrating his awareness of colonial history.

construction itself. DeLeuw produced a separate report that guided the development of Authority-managed concession areas on the side of the road and another that recommended highway maintenance policies. But the principal goal of the “Estimated Traffic and Revenues” document was to estimate traffic demand, recommend the locations of traffic interchanges that provided access to the turnpike, and devise an optimal toll schedule.³¹

The DeLeuw consultants had at their disposal a set of traffic statistics drawn from prior studies. They had access to the origin-and-destination studies used to produce the 1948 Master Highway Plan for Metropolitan Boston. Similar reports had been created for the state’s other large cities, including Springfield and Worcester. For its 1953 report, DeLeuw conducted its own origin-and-destination surveys with a sample of approximately 300,000 motorists at 31 different stations along the major roads across the state. The traffic engineers used these interviews to determine the most common traffic movements. Following the practice established in the 1948 Master Highway Plan, DeLeuw charted “desire lines” to represent traffic patterns. Predictably, the most desire was charted between Boston and everywhere else, but especially Worcester, Fitchburg (a nineteenth century industrial center along the Nashua River in north-central Massachusetts), and the suburban areas near Boston west of Route 128. All of this data emphasized the premise of the 1948 Master Highway Plan: the most useful road in the state would satisfy the desire of drivers to access Boston from the west.

³¹ DeLeuw, Cather & Company, “Estimated Traffic and Revenues, Proposed Massachusetts Turnpike,” July 1953, MTAA 02333.

The traffic engineers premised their traffic projections for the Pike as a whole on an anticipated urban extension of the Pike. The further into Boston the extension penetrated, the higher the traffic potential. In addition to connecting the state to its capital city, the Massachusetts Turnpike would also be “integrated with a comprehensive system serving many of the eastern states and promising to connect with Chicago and the Middle West within a few years.”³² Highway planners consciously evoked the systematic nature of their proposals. Each new link in the chain amplified traffic demand across the system as a whole. But some links had a greater impact than others. In Massachusetts, the highest overall demand for road facilities was in the Boston region and, in particular, for roads that brought commuters to the downtown business district. The Central Artery had been designed to deliver these cars to the CBD. But the value of the Central Artery, planned as part of the 1948 Master Highway Plan, was dependent on its connection to a metropolitan system of highways. By promoting a turnpike link to the Central Artery, Callahan sought to supercede the 1948 plan and replace it with his own system. Callahan wanted to position the Pike as the region’s essential commuter highway.

The Pike was designed to function like a frictionless, well-oiled machine, and its advocates accepted this ideal as fact. As a primary measurement of their work, the DeLeuw consultants wanted to establish the time savings generated by the proposed Turnpike. This was a tricky task, because the Pike had not been built. The driving time on the non-existent Pike had to be estimated and compared with the measurable amount of time then required to travel by existing roads. Thus the estimated time of making a

³² Ibid., 4.

trip was based on an idealized conception of turnpike travel. The road theoretically allowed for the uninterrupted flow of traffic at an average speed of 55 miles per hour (50 for trucks), “excluding time for lunch and refueling stops.”³³ Time savings could be translated into monetary savings and the toll schedule was designed to allow drivers to make a “profit” by saving time: “The proposed rates are such that the tolls will be approximately one-half of the value of the savings in time and distance that will accrue to the users of the turnpike in various vehicle classification groups.”³⁴ The route of the Pike shortened the distance between Route 128 and Albany by fourteen miles. But time savings would be even greater because of the higher speeds allowed—and enabled—by the new road. In terms of safety, the DeLeuw engineers pointed to the accident record of existing roads, and claimed that a controlled-access highway like the Turnpike would improve on this record. “The life saving characteristics of toll roads are a matter of record,” the report asserted without substantiation.³⁵

The Pike had another edge over conventional roads, one that enhanced both the safety as well as the aesthetic experience of driving: the elimination of abutting commercial establishments as well as the signs and billboards that cluttered the roadside environment.³⁶ The Pike did not allow billboards, which were not only distracting and thus a safety hazard but also an offense to the natural beauty of the countryside traversed by the road. But motorists would get hungry and they needed to refuel. The Turnpike

³³ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁶ On the “billboard war” and highway beautification, see Catherine Gudis, *Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Authority planned to build and manage its own concession areas at designated areas. The Pike would also maintain its own “Highway Safety Patrol” to regulate traffic, aid broken-down motorists, and dispense first aid when necessary.

In sum, the Turnpike Authority proposed to construct a massive, insulated landscape that it could wholly control in accord with its own perceptions of best practices. This was a very different model from that of existing state roads that cut across lands held by various private property owners who could do what they saw fit with their abutting land. The Pike made the case for a road designed in the public interest as defined by speed, safety, and convenience for the motorist.

“*An unimpeded surface.*” Starting in 1956, the Pike’s efforts to construct the Extension were tied closely with Prudential’s contemporaneous plans to develop a large project on the Boston & Albany rail yard. At first, the two sets of plans were at odds with each other. In July of 1956, Mass Pike officials were meeting with representatives of the New York Central, which owned the B&A, to discuss the acquisition of the railroad corridor. Early reports suggested that the Back Bay segment of the Boston Extension would be designed as an elevated highway on girders, like the Central Artery. At the time, Prudential held an option to buy the 28-acre rail yard through which the tracks passed. Valentine Howell, speaking for Prudential, felt that the plans for a toll highway would jeopardize his company’s plans.³⁷

The B&A roadway was not the only route being considered for the location of the Boston Extension, but it was clearly favored by Callahan and his engineers at the

³⁷ Robert C. Bergenheim, “Toll Road Entry to Hub Seen Via B&A Line,” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 17, 1956, 1.

Turnpike Authority. A second proposal involved a route that followed the Charles River and required two river crossings before coming into Boston. This route was not as threatening to Prudential. Mayor Hynes did not take a public position on the route of the Extension, though he was adamant that he wanted both the Pike and the Pru to go forward. “I hope we can have both. We need both. I don’t want to have to sacrifice one for the other,” the Mayor said. Hynes suggested that even if the B&A did go through Prudential’s rail yard site, there would still be enough usable land for Prudential to develop. But he also recognized that “the company will not want to erect a 20 million dollar office building on ‘an island surrounded by highways.’”³⁸

Prudential insisted that it was only interested in the B&A site and no other in Boston. Fred Smith, Prudential’s representative in Boston, was also reluctant to abandon Boston for another city. He claimed that Prudential was considering five other New England cities that were “statistically as good as Boston, but not emotionally as good.” Prudential’s concern was that a highway would ruin the B&A site and make an integrated development impossible there. The Pru’s representative in Boston, Fred Smith, announced that both projects could work only if an “unimpeded surface” was left at the B&A yards. In that event, Smith said, Prudential would go ahead with its proposed development.³⁹ The Pike and the Pru, along with the city and representatives from the New York Central, engaged in talks to reconcile the two projects.

One compromise position was to terminate the Boston Extension at the proposed Inner Belt Highway, a key element in the 1948 Master Highway Plan for Metropolitan

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

Boston, which was then in planning stages by the state Department of Public Works (DPW). “Prudential officials say this plan to end the toll highway before it gets to the B&A yards would leave them completely free to go ahead with their plans.”⁴⁰ However, this possibility raised a new set of concerns involving the coordination between the Pike and the DPW. “It would cause chaos if the turnpike were finished before the highways [were ready] to absorb the traffic [heading for] Boston.”⁴¹ Prudential was principally concerned with a speedy resolution of this development snafu. The company had begun the rebuilding of its home office in Newark and needed to quickly rehouse its Northeastern Home Office staff.⁴² Things came to a head in the summer of 1956, with the approach of the August 10 effective date of the Prudential’s \$5,000,000 purchase agreement of the B&A site from the New York Central. It appeared that if the Pike followed through on its plan for an elevated extension into the city, the Pru would abandon the purchase agreement. But under the pressure of the impending deadline, there was a flurry of activity and an apparent resolution.

On August 1, 1956, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported on the agreement that had been reached. The Boston Extension would come into Boston via the Boston & Albany Railroad tracks through the Back Bay yards and on to South Station without jeopardizing Prudential’s proposed development. The Pike agreed to abandon its plans for an interchange at the B&A rail yard site and instead secured an easement that cut

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² As a corollary to the Regional Home Office plan, Prudential also replaced its 1892 headquarters building in Newark with a modern office tower in 1960.

through the site.⁴³ Prudential would erect a “shell” over the turnpike right-of-way through the site with supporting columns that would not interfere with the highway or railroad tracks. A park-like mall would rest on top of the shell at street level.⁴⁴ The basic architectural concept of the Prudential Center had been reached: the idea of a large substructure that straddled the turnpike and was capped with the plinth. The substructural shell allowed Prudential the unimpeded surface it required for its development by creating a new, unified ground surface above the right-of-way.

Opposition in the suburbs. Prudential was not the only institution interested in Callahan’s proposal to use the B&A rail corridor as the route for the turnpike extension. Residents of the city of Newton were also concerned that the Turnpike’s plans would adversely affect their city. In August 1956, not long after the Pike and the Pru reconciled their plans, the Newton Board of Aldermen established a Citizens Toll Road Committee to consider the city’s interests, “recognizing the far-reaching, permanent and detrimental implications for the City’s future and the potential damage to homes, property and the general welfare of the community.”⁴⁵ There were two pressing factors from Newton’s perspective: the taking of land and homes by eminent domain from residents of four of Newton’s “villages” that were along the path of the B&A (Auburndale, West Newton,

⁴³ It was later decided that the interchange would be moved to a site directly east of the Prudential Center.

⁴⁴ Robert C. Bergenheim, “Prudential Unaffected: Toll Road to Follow B&A?” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 1, 1956, 1.

⁴⁵ “First Report of Mayor’s Citizens’ Committee on the Toll Road,” October 23, 1956. Newton Historical Society Archives at the Jackson Homestead (hereafter cited as NHSA), Massachusetts Turnpike.

Newtonville, and Newton Corner); and the fear that the road would dislocate the B&A's commuter rail service between Newton and Boston.⁴⁶

A strong contingent of Newton residents and politicians challenged Callahan's extension because they feared that it would interfere with commuter service from the west into Boston. The chief engineer for the Turnpike, Philip Kitfield, reminded critics that decisions about curtailing rail service were up to the railroad, not the Pike. When Newton residents complained that a highway would cut their city into two parts, Kitfield insisted that the city was already cut in two by the railroad.⁴⁷ Callahan did his best to separate the issues of the turnpike extension and the future of commuter rail service from the suburbs to Boston. In an undated Turnpike memorandum, he tried to clarify the issue:

There has been some misunderstanding as to the Turnpike's part in connection with the curtailment of service by the New York Central Railroad. Possible discontinuance or curtailment of service by the railroad is a matter entirely up to them and any public agency which has jurisdiction over the matter. The Turnpike, if it comes into Boston over the railroad right of way, will interfere in no way with the railroad's operation as there are provisions in the Turnpike plans for sufficient space to retain two tracks along side the highway for its entire length from Route 128 into Boston.⁴⁸

The B&A line, which was sunk below ground level through much of Newton, did in fact already represent a gash through the city's physical fabric; but a turnpike entailed a

⁴⁶ Robert C. Bergenheim, "Toll Road Via B&A and Building Too?" *Christian Science Monitor*, July 26, 1956.

⁴⁷ Albert D. Hughes, "Toll Road Bloc Gains Edge," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 13, 1957.

⁴⁸ Undated, untitled memorandum, MTAA 01563, Federal Aid.

broader swath of linear land takings, as well as much additional land at the traffic interchanges.⁴⁹

Newton's Mayor Howard Whitmore supported the alternative Charles River route that traced the border between Newton and Waltham. A Charles River route would use mostly unoccupied land publicly owned by the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC). The Citizen's Committee went so far as to suggest re-engineering the Charles River itself: "Where space is insufficient, the river can be put into a conduit with the expressway on top."⁵⁰ The Committee had an additional concern: they did not feel that Newton citizens should have to pay tolls to drive into Boston. The Newton group voiced its strong feeling that, regardless of the route, a freeway would be preferable to a toll road.⁵¹

Freeway or turnpike? The chairman of the Citizens Committee's sub-committee on public relations was Robert Kretschmar, who was also the Executive Secretary of the Massachusetts Division of the American Automobile Association (AAA). In his capacity as the Citizens Committee's publicist, Kretschmar urged that alternative road proposals be well publicized. And in his role with AAA, Kretschmar came out strongly against a toll road and in favor of freeways. He believed that a "Western Expressway" as defined in the 1948 Master Highway Plan was superior to Callahan's turnpike.

By the end of 1956, a more generalized resistance, on both political and practical terms, to Callahan's proposed turnpike extension was developing around the national

⁴⁹ A. S. Plotkin, "Where Toll Road May Pinch Four Newton Villages," *Boston Globe*, November 22, 1956.

⁵⁰ Undated press release, Newton Citizens' Committee Studying Toll Road Extension, NHSA, Werner Gumperts Papers.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

“freeway” movement. The 1956 Interstate Highway Act had created a new method of financing expressways that made toll roads seem like an obsolete and untenable concept. This fact was reflected in the “slowdown in financing of new toll turnpikes” in 1957, as reported in the *New York Times*. In 1956, very few new turnpike projects floated bonds for financing. “Plans for building more than 1,500 miles of tollways in ten states were shelved last year, many for good.” Investors no longer looked at turnpike bonds as good investments. “Toll-turnpike securities suffered severe price declines during the year,” the *Times* reported. One reason was that all fixed-interest securities had declined in value due to a tight money market. But another reason was that many turnpikes were not performing well; they were not earning as much as their planners had expected.⁵² The *Monitor* reported that “an end to the toll-road era is in sight” because of the trend toward federally aided interstate highway construction.⁵³

AAA was a major supporter of the Interstate Highway Act and believed that a system of toll-free expressways would encourage the greatest overall automobility, which was their mission to expand. AAA came out in favor of systematic highway planning as a progressive counterpoint to Callahan’s style of piece-meal construction. Robert Kretschmar insisted, “Bay State motorists shouldn’t be made to pay a toll to commute to Boston when they can have a free road.” With the Federal Government offering to pay 90% of the cost of a freeway, motorists were “entitled to a free public road.”⁵⁴ Motorists were already paying for road improvements with their gasoline taxes. AAA viewed a toll

⁵² Paul Heffernan, “Toll ‘Pike Issues Losing in Favor,” *New York Times*, January 6, 1957, 1.

⁵³ “The Toll Road Era is Fading,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 5, 1956.

⁵⁴ Press Release from Massachusetts Division AAA, “AAA Bill Proposes Suburban Freeway Along Charles River from Route 128 into Boston,” NHSA, Werner Gumperts Papers.

road as an odious form of double-taxation that ran against the interests of the car-driving public.

In an editorial, the *Boston Herald* wrote: “The Massachusetts Turnpike Authority . . . has taken over the planning of major freeways. There is nothing in Boston history that quite compares with this calm assumption of public planning by Chairman Callahan of the Authority.”⁵⁵ The *Herald* argued that Callahan’s Authority had usurped the DPW’s public planning power and hampered the its ability to plan a free Western Expressway in conjunction with the Inner Belt. In a series of editorials, the *Herald*—which saw its base as Boston’s working and lower-middle classes—complained that Callahan represented an investor-class and not the people at large: “We are now to have a highway system to serve not the public but the turnpike investors.”⁵⁶ If Callahan insisted that a highway to Boston was necessary to secure the city’s economic viability, the *Herald* asked, would not a freeway serve the same purpose? Yet Callahan seemed bent on “hanging a toll road” like a noose around the neck of Metropolitan Boston by monopolizing traffic to and from the west.⁵⁷ An editorial in the *Herald* in July 1956 announced that suburban commuters from the west of Boston would become “second-class citizens” should the turnpike extension go forward, forcing them to pay for access to the city when it should be free.⁵⁸

The *Herald* objected both to Callahan’s power-mongering as well as to his urban planning. At issue were two different visions of the spatial role of the Central Artery in

⁵⁵ “A Shot in the Dark,” *Boston Herald*, March 20, 1957.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ “Hanging a Toll Road on Us,” *Boston Herald*, December 6, 1956, 38.

⁵⁸ “Our Western Gateway Squeeze,” *Boston Herald*, July 17, 1956.

Boston. The toll road would link directly to the Central Artery as a single highway piercing central Boston. But the 1948 Master Highway plan saw the Central Artery as part of a loop around and through the city completed by the Inner Belt (fig. 4.2). The *Herald* echoed the concern of some transportation planners who worried about the traffic impacts of a direct connection between the Pike and the Central Artery without the Inner Belt to distribute traffic evenly throughout the central city area:

The Master Highway Plan for Metropolitan Boston, with its Inner Belt Route tying in the radial expressways, was an integrated and balanced whole. Then Chairman Callahan . . . scrambled the plan with his projected toll road into the South Station. The result will be the abandonment of the Inner Belt circuit if Mr. Callahan has his way.⁵⁹

Some Boston city planners were more interested in the Inner Belt than the routing or financing of a western highway to Boston. “Boston municipal planners say that either a freeway or a tollway into the city would be acceptable,” one reporter said, “but that they do not regard the toll highway as a substitute for the more essential Inner-Belt route around the city.” The Boston Planning Board believed that the Inner Belt was “required” because it unified the suite of radial highways that connected the region to Boston and distributed that traffic evenly around the urban core.⁶⁰

In February 1957 representatives from Newton and other opponents to the toll road attempted to stop Callahan’s plan for a turnpike extension by presenting bills to the state legislature that would have rescinded the 1955 amendment to the Pike’s enabling law that permitted the construction of an extension. But these bills failed to gain traction in the Callahan-friendly legislature. Callahan stressed the urgency of building a highway

⁵⁹ “Unscrambling the Highway Egg,” *Boston Herald*, March 20, 1957.

⁶⁰ Albert D. Hughes, “Inner Belt Roadway Held Boston ‘Must,’” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 16, 1957.

to Boston and insisted that a toll road could be constructed much more quickly than a freeway. The Turnpike chief was unconvinced that federal highway funds could be successfully marshaled to provide for all the roads required by the Boston region. “Remember, I know something about *Federal Aid* after 25 years,” Callahan wrote in a memorandum in preparation for a state house hearing on the extension. “The Public has been fed the greatest propaganda on this Federal Highway money,” Callahan insisted. “I know how much money is available for the next 3 years. Government money for Interstate—approximately \$104,000,000.” Callahan tallied a list of state highway projects promised by the DPW and concluded that federal aid would fall short. If the DPW proposed to construct the western freeway to Boston, the agency would have to make some sacrifices—a fact that concerned lawmakers from western Massachusetts. “If the DPW will tell me what projects they will abandon; what year they will start and where the money is coming from, I will be guided accordingly,” Callahan sneered. “I will gladly step aside and let the DPW build a freeway into downtown Boston, if they can prove they can. In the meantime, I intend to keep on with my study.”⁶¹

Callahan wanted to move forward with a bond offering to finance the extension. His position was bolstered by the testimony of Robert Weeks, a partner in a Boston investment firm, who believed that the bond market would be very favorable to a turnpike extension offering.⁶² But the market for turnpike bonds would not cooperate with Callahan’s plans for the extension. Two efforts to market the turnpike extension bonds in 1958 and 1959 failed. One reason was that the Pike was underperforming. In

⁶¹ “Notes for Future Press Release,” undated, MTAA 01563, Federal Aid.

⁶² Hughes, “Toll Road Bloc Gains Edge.”

October, *Business Week* magazine reported that the Pike had earned only 54% of its estimated revenue.⁶³ In December 1959 the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce requested that the Massachusetts DPW move forward with plans for a Western Expressway, claiming in a letter to DPW Commissioner Anthony DiNatale that “the general condition of the revenue bond market precludes the early construction of a toll express highway.”⁶⁴

A failed merger. While the Pike was struggling to launch the extension project, Prudential was floundering with its efforts to secure a tax concession from Boston. In April 1960 the two parties announced an alliance to merge the two projects in a “\$300 million package deal.”⁶⁵ The *Globe* reported that Prudential had proposed the merger, though Fred Smith of Prudential credited Massachusetts Attorney General Edward McCormack with devising the solution and brokering the deal between parties. This resolution, which required special legislation that McCormack would draft, greatly enhanced the Turnpike Authority’s powers as an urban development corporation. As noted above, the Pike would assume ownership of the B&A rail yard through eminent domain and construct the extension along the rail bed from Route 128 to the Central Artery. At the rail yard, the Pike would build a vast, three-level, underground garage for 2,500 cars plus an interchange with access ramps from the highway to the garage just east of the site near Copley Square. The Pike would lease the air rights to Prudential, which

⁶³ Albert D. Hughes, “Cloud Seen on Hub Pike Link,” *Christian Science Monitor*, October 29, 1958, 2.

⁶⁴ Albert D. Hughes, “DPW Urged to Speed Expressway to West,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 14, 1959, 2. Though he was Commissioner of the DPW, Anthony DiNatale was an ally of Callahan’s and later joined the Turnpike Authority as a member of the board.

⁶⁵ A. S. Plotkin, “Merger of Toll Road-Prudential Center Planned in \$300 Million Package Deal,” *Boston Globe*, April 29, 1960.

would build the Prudential Center on a platform above the garage though the Pike would technically hold title to the buildings. The Turnpike's status as a public corporation made the entire project tax exempt and the Pru was sheltered by the Pike's sponsorship. The Pike agreed to pay the city \$3 million a year in lieu of taxes—the same arrangement, rejected by the state supreme court, that Prudential had made with the city in 1958. The garage was used as the legal basis for the project's constitutional standing, fulfilling the requirement of “public necessity” by reducing traffic congestion.⁶⁶

Prudential had already begun sinking foundations for the project that allowed for the turnpike easement and this legal agreement did not scuttle those construction plans. The *Boston Globe* ran an image of the “Prudential Garage-Interchange” that accentuated the physical communion between the Pike and the Pru (fig. 4.3). As part of the agreement, Prudential agreed to buy “a substantial amount” of the turnpike extension bonds once the issue was floated. Callahan was optimistic about the prospects of a forthcoming bond issue. “Now we are in the black . . . We are absolutely sure that we can sell the bonds.”⁶⁷ However, the failure of the Pike and Pru merger—it was rejected by the Supreme Judicial Court (see Chapter 3)—rejuvenated opposition to the turnpike, as freeway supporters redoubled their efforts to vex Callahan's plans.

Getting there first. In January 1961, Republican John Volpe was elected Governor of Massachusetts. He made an inaugural vow to unseat Callahan's plan for a turnpike extension and to build a western freeway to the city instead: “You will never

⁶⁶ Michael Liuzzi, “Furcolo Carries Prudential Ball,” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 2, 1960, 1.

⁶⁷ Plotkin, “Merger of Toll Road-Prudential Center Planned.”

see a toll-way if a freeway is started. It's a question of just getting there first."⁶⁸ Volpe insisted that his desire for a freeway was not part of a political "test of strength," but the press could not resist the personality drama. For example, the *Globe's* transportation reporter analyzed the "Pros, Cons of Volpe-Callahan Hassle on Highways," and cast the lead characters as rivals:

The hassle represents more than a personality clash between Volpe and his arch-foe, William F. Callahan. Mixed up with political cross currents is a basic clash in road-building philosophies. The biggest question is: How to pay for it?

Volpe and Callahan's shared interest in road-building diverged at the "philosophical" issue of financing. Callahan reiterated his concerns that federal money for highways would "dribble in too slowly" and maintained that "it would be long years before the job could be finished."⁶⁹ Callahan believed motorists were willing to pay a toll for a fast road to Boston if it could be built quickly and he bristled at Volpe's efforts to scuttle his plans and challenge his authority. With customary braggadocio, he remarked:

I've only designed and built, including the Turnpike, approximately \$800,000,000 worth of roads in this State but I suppose the pen pushers or grocery store philosophers, who never built anything in their lives, are better able to plan and say how and where roads should be built. People like these are the cause of the decline of Boston.⁷⁰

But John Volpe was not a grocery store philosopher. He was the democratically elected governor of the state and he believed that he had Boston's best interests in mind. He was a building contractor by trade; a former head of the Massachusetts Department of

⁶⁸ S. J. Micciche, "Volpe to Speed Freeway Link, Race Callahan," *Boston Globe*, January 11, 1961, 1.

⁶⁹ A. S. Plotkin, "Pros, Cons of Volpe-Callahan Hassle on Highways," *Boston Globe*, January 13, 1961.

⁷⁰ "Notes for Future Press Release," MTAA.

Public Works; and the first Federal Highway Administrator, appointed by Dwight Eisenhower to coordinate the emerging Interstate Highway system.⁷¹ Volpe resented Callahan's effort to ram his highway down Boston's throat at the expense of the 1948 Master Highway Plan. Volpe thought that Callahan's idea of running the Turnpike directly to the Central Artery would overtax the elevated urban highway and exacerbate downtown congestion. Callahan, on the other hand, cast Volpe as a dickering planner, whose preoccupation with an idealized road system might prevent the construction of anything at all. Callahan only wanted to build. "We have proven our competence as builders," read one Turnpike press release:

"We had a 123 mile toll road to build and we built it. . . . Now we have a highway to build . . . to and from Boston, and we are building it. Mr. Volpe's long range plans for Boston should be quietly buried. . . . Let the dreamers plan and plan and plan some more; but if you want something done, get a workman."⁷²

Prudential in the Balance

Looming behind the showdown between Volpe and Callahan was the Prudential, whose plans for the Back Bay development appeared to favor the turnpike extension:

The big insurance company has planned all along for the 'pike extension to cut through the foundation of the \$150 million Back Bay project. . . . Prudential has spent a lot of money already for engineering design, based on leaving room for road and tracks. To change this design now would be costly and time-consuming.⁷³

⁷¹ Frederick H. Guidry, "Volpe to Head U.S. Road Program," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 12, 1956, 2.

⁷² Undated press release, MTAA 01321, Community Relations and Press Releases.

⁷³ Plotkin, "Pros, Cons of Volpe-Callahan Hassle."

But in public, Prudential's Fred Smith hedged on his company's commitment to the turnpike. Smith was most concerned with a swift resolution of the highway issue, which he regarded as an internal political battle. The critical issue was that Prudential required highway access to its site—the major avenues were no longer adequate guarantors of automobile access: “Prudential says it doesn't care whether it's a toll road or a free road. But it does want assurance soon that some kind of major access to Boston's expressways will be built.”⁷⁴ Fred Smith said that it was “very important to the city and to our project” for the Prudential Center to have a “superhighway” connection in order to deal with the Pru's anticipated traffic.⁷⁵ He wanted “somebody in authority” to solidify the plan, “since we have so much money riding on it, we would like to know what the solution is going to be.”⁷⁶ Smith's statement spurred State Senate President John E. Powers, from South Boston, to insist that he would “personally lead the fight” against Volpe's freeway proposal should it delay the Prudential Center, which was “too important to the City of Boston to jeopardize.”⁷⁷

Volpe's overture. Governor Volpe scrambled to integrate Prudential's demands into his freeway plans and called for a Western Expressway that stopped at the Inner Belt, about half a mile west of Prudential's Back Bay site. The governor claimed that his plan was compatible with the Prudential Center: “I would not have proposed the freeway plan

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Micciche, “Volpe to Speed Freeway Link.”

⁷⁶ S. J. Micciche, “Come Toll Link or Freeway, Prudential Going Up,” *Boston Globe*, January 12, 1961.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

if I thought it would disrupt Prudential's project."⁷⁸ Volpe pledged to build a special access road from the Inner Belt to the Prudential Center, possibly by improving Huntington Avenue for the short span. But Volpe would not bring the freeway downtown. The governor was adamant that the freeway terminate at the Inner Belt, the loop highway that he considered the keystone of the region's highway plan and necessary to achieve "proper distribution of traffic" in metropolitan Boston.⁷⁹

In answer to Callahan's charge that federal financing was not forthcoming, Volpe floated a plan to borrow \$100 million to jumpstart both the Western Expressway and the Inner Belt Highway. Volpe hoped to secure the loans with short-term notes because they required a simple majority in the legislature as opposed to the two-thirds approval necessary for a bond issue. But Democratic lawmakers in Callahan's camp were quick to denounce Volpe's scheme: "Massachusetts needs to borrow \$100 million like it needs a hole in the head," said Secretary of State Joseph D. Ward. Ward accused the governor of seeking to reward his own cabal of favored contractors and supporters instead of Callahan's. The *Globe* assumed that in ideal financial terms, Volpe's freeway was superior to Callahan's turnpike. But Callahan's turnpike was "shovel ready"—how quickly could a freeway be planned and engineered? How long would it take the federal government to reimburse the state's loan to pay for the highway? And would the Prudential Center be further delayed in the process?⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Micciche, "Volpe to Speed Freeway Link."

⁷⁹ S. J. Micciche, "Won't Bring Freeway Downtown: Volpe Plans Road from Prudential to Inner Belt," *Boston Globe*, January 13, 1961.

⁸⁰ "Collision of Titans," *Boston Globe*, January 11, 1961.

Prudential was sitting on a stalled construction project. The site was abandoned in August 1960 after foundations were poured when Prudential halted work because of the mutual uncertainties of the tax issue and the highway project. On August 25, the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote about the “Prudential Lake” rippling in the Back Bay after the insurance company ordered the water pumps turned off and the site flooded—in part to save money, but also to protect the foundations from frost and erosion.⁸¹ When Volpe met with Fred Smith in January 1961 to pitch a “connector” road from the Inner Belt to Prudential Center, the press treated it like a diplomatic summit with the future of Boston hanging in the balance. In principle, Prudential might have accepted Volpe’s proposition of a purpose-built access road. Prudential publicly insisted that it had no strict loyalty to one road or another. “What is highly desirable is a direct link from the Center to a major highway” said Fred Smith.⁸² But Volpe had neither the money nor a working plan to build the freeway. The Department of Public Works had not produced technical plans for such a road. Engineers at the DPW—perhaps unsure of their loyalty to Volpe or Callahan—were working under the assumption that the Turnpike Authority was going to build the highway. Volpe agreed to back off his fight with Callahan and allow the turnpike chief a chance to sell his bonds.

The bond market. The bond market had already proved “unfavorable” to the Turnpike’s issue in the 1950s.⁸³ The *Globe*’s A. S. Plotkin waxed poetic on this point: “The market for these bonds seems to be like a beautiful woman’s favor: delicate and

⁸¹ Michael Liuzzi, “‘Prudential Lake’ Ripples in Back Bay,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 25, 1960.

⁸² Arthur Stratton, “Road Collapse Puts Prudential in Peril,” *Boston Herald*, April 12, 1961, 27.

⁸³ Michael Liuzzi, “Ice Broken on Boston Boom,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 1, 1961, 10.

fleeting.”⁸⁴ But the 1960s brought new hope for the turnpike bonds. Investors still looked at turnpike offerings with a “jaundiced eye,” but revenues were rising with the increasing automobile traffic as the federal interstate highway program lagged with slow progress.⁸⁵ Many investors insisted on state credit backing for turnpike bonds, but Massachusetts refused to extend such credit. As one reporter put it, “Institutional investors are watching carefully to see how the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority’s proposed \$175,000,000 bond issue will fare in the market without state credit backing.” Insurance companies made up a large component of potential investors and observers of the bond market expected Prudential to play a big role in the Pike’s Boston Extension:

Wall Street bondmen expect the Prudential Insurance Company of America to act as “sponsor” for the bonds of the roadway extension that will serve its \$100,000,000 Back Bay Boston redevelopment project. The Prudential’s “sponsorship,” expected to take the form of buying a large block of the proposed Massachusetts Turnpike issue, will be a key factor in the bonds’ salability in the absence of a pledge of state credit, it is felt.⁸⁶

When the Turnpike Authority attempted to sell the bonds in April 1961, Prudential reiterated its pledge from 1960 and publicly committed to purchase \$40 million of the \$175 million offering. But Prudential’s “sponsorship” was not enough to overcome the cloud that hung over the turnpike bonds, which flopped on the market. Prudential quickly hedged on its commitment to construct the Prudential Center:

The Prudential Insurance Company of America said it still wanted to build its \$200,000,000 development in the Back Bay, but expressed apprehension that the maze of uncertainties into which it had been plunged

⁸⁴ Plotkin, “Pros, Cons of Volpe-Callahan Hassle,” 58-A.

⁸⁵ Juan Cameron, “Toll-Road Backers Spy Green Light,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 5, 1960.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

by the toll road abandonment might prove too costly and too time-consuming.⁸⁷

In the spring of 1961, an impatient Prudential postponed their application for the Prudential Center to the Boston Redevelopment Authority. There were two issues. First, Prudential had designed a tunnel through the project for the embattled Turnpike. And second, Prudential viewed a highway connection to the Prudential Center as crucial. A Prudential executive, probably Fred Smith, wrote to the Chairman of the BRA, Monsignor Francis Lally: “Our statement that it is immaterial what kind of a road, or whether any road at all proceeds *through* the project, has been interpreted widely to mean that we have no substantial interest in an access road *to* the project. This is not the case. The project will not be practical . . . unless special access is provided to this area from a major artery.”⁸⁸

Prudential’s announcement created a crisis atmosphere in the city. Turnpike supporters charged that a faction in Boston that opposed both the Pike and the Pru had sabotaged the bond sale. One turnpike supporter told the *Herald*, “The same people who ruined the toll road now are rolling up their sleeves to ruin Prudential.” An unnamed Prudential source alluded to a nebulous “group” that sought to sink the Pike and the Pru one fell swoop: “That group went underground for a time, but now is gloating it scored a great victory.”⁸⁹ The “group” had sabotaged the Turnpike Authority’s \$175,000,000 bond issue by circulating a document to 100 financial firms across the country attacking

⁸⁷ Arthur Stratton, “Road Collapse Puts Prudential Center in Peril,” *Boston Herald*, April 12, 1961, 1.

⁸⁸ Unsigned memorandum to Monsignor Francis J. Lally, Chairman, Boston Redevelopment Authority, May 2, 1961, PA 10–42, emphasis added.

⁸⁹ Stratton, “Road Collapse,” 27.

the projected earning power of the Boston Extension. The report scared off many potential investors who passed on the bond issue.

The mysterious “group” was the Massachusetts Citizens Committee, which released the document—“A Critical Review of the Boston Extension Project of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority”—to the press and to potential turnpike investors to dissuade them of the value of such an investment. The “Critical Review” of the extension drew from an economic analysis of the Extension produced by three transportation experts from Harvard and M.I.T.—Martin Wohl, Charles Haar, and A. Sheffer Lang. The three professors claimed that the Pike was based on fatuous overestimations of traffic demand and underestimations of maintenance costs. The “Critical Review” concluded, “The Boston Extension project is a dubious economic venture and an undesirable method of meeting the expressway requirements of the Boston metropolitan area.”⁹⁰

The professors’ report questioned the professional integrity of the consulting firms who furnished the Turnpike Authority with traffic statistics. The transportation engineers, DeLeuw, Cather & Co. and Coverdale & Colpitts, produced traffic and revenue projections for the Extension’s that seemed unreasonably high, far outstripping a list of the country’s most heavily trafficked toll roads, including the segment of the New Jersey Turnpike which connected suburban New Jersey to New York City. Moreover, the Pike’s consulting engineers did not have a good track record. They had vastly

⁹⁰ “A Critical Review of the Boston Extension Project of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority,” BRA #3658.

overestimated the popularity and income of the Calumet Skyway in Chicago, for example.

The three professors also attacked the Pike Extension from a planning perspective because it contradicted the basic principles of the 1948 Master Highway Plan: “A turnpike extension largely ignores and downgrades the importance of the Inner Belt Highway. Without the Inner Belt Highway, the entire metropolitan highway program will become unworkable.” Echoing John Volpe’s concerns, the “Critical Review” claimed that Callahan’s piercing Extension would “create chaos in the South Station area by dumping large volumes of traffic on the Central Artery and surface streets.” The transportation academics represented a consensus position amongst city planners that a western “gateway” highway had to stop at the Inner Belt and proceed no further. In 1960, the Boston City Planning Board came out against the toll Extension, claiming that it was against the objectives of the “General Plan for the Central Business District.” The Turnpike Authority, the professors said, threatened to dismantle the long-term planning goals of the entire regional highway system in favor of accruing the most revenue for “the projects under its jurisdiction.”⁹¹

Prudential was not among those investors who accepted the critics’ assessment of the Boston Extension. The insurance company made its own investigation, rejected the negative report, and agreed to purchase \$40,000,000 of bonds. State Senator John Powers, vocal proponent of both the Pike and the Pru, saw Prudential’s choice as a decisive commitment: “Imagine, the second largest investment firm, Prudential, which invests \$15,000,000 a day, feels it is a good investment, and they certainly know what

⁹¹ Ibid., 7.

they are doing,” he told the *Boston Herald*. Powers believed that a shadow force had colluded in an effort to sabotage the Prudential Center and, by extension, the city of Boston. “This has every indication of a plot against the city. This sort of thing, the unexpected rejection of a large bond issue like this, does not just happen.”⁹² The professors insisted that they were not part of a plot, but were merely performing a public service. Charles Haar evoked his public role as a disinterested intellectual: “We did this as part of our public function to supply technical information for the public benefit.”⁹³

Creative financing. Callahan attempted to sweeten his Extension bonds by requesting that the state legislature raise the maximum interest rate from 5% to 5¼ per cent, but Governor Volpe refused to bring Callahan’s message to the state house.⁹⁴ Undeterred, Callahan made his next attempt to market Extension bonds in June 1961. But this effort was once again stymied when the Pike could not secure underwriters for the entirety of the \$183 million issue.⁹⁵ A third attempt in November 1961 also failed to gain traction. The Pike’s public relations director, Gordon McLean, reported, “Nothing is happening. Everything is quiet now.”⁹⁶

But the Turnpike Authority’s luck changed on January 22, 1962, when the Pike was finally able to place \$180 million of Boston Extension bonds with a syndicate of three New York investment banking houses. The underwriting firms—Allen & Co., Merrill Lynch, and Tripp & Co.—bore the responsibility of marketing the bonds to their

⁹² “Professors Explain Warning to Bankers on Pike Bonds,” *Boston Herald*, April 12, 1961.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ John H. Fenton, “Highway Delayed in Massachusetts,” *New York Times*, May 20, 1961.

⁹⁵ “Turnpike Bond Plan Fails in Bay State,” *New York Times*, June 21, 1961.

⁹⁶ Michael Liuzzi, “Massachusetts: Toll Bonds Fail,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 30, 1961.

ultimate buyers. Conservative Boston financiers were startled by the Pike's strategy, which stretched the meaning of the word "sold." The three underwriting firms guaranteed the sale of the bonds, yet the ultimate buyers had not been identified.⁹⁷ The bond issue was organized into two parts: \$100 million "Series A" bonds bearing 4 ¾ per cent interest, and a second "Series B" issue of \$80 million that started at 4% but would jump to 5% when the Authority's original 1954 bonds were retired. *Boston Globe* business reporter Peter Greenough explained that this innovative structure created security for investors by promising the accelerated retirement of the original bonds. "Boston bond houses felt that this issue would reach a broader audience, one more receptive to taking calculated risks," Greenough said, and he predicted that the country's biggest insurance companies—Prudential, New York Life, and Equitable—would be at the top of the list to purchase these bonds.⁹⁸

True to its word, Prudential announced that it would buy at least \$40 million in bonds.⁹⁹ The state supreme court had recently confirmed Pru's status as a Chapter 121A redevelopment authority and the insurance company was ready to build. Fred Smith said the highway "give[s] us an immediate access road which we have wanted."¹⁰⁰ But Callahan was the star of the story. The *Times* said, "the sale of the bonds was seen as a

⁹⁷ A. S. Plotkin, "Hub Toll Road Assured; Work to Begin at Once," *Boston Globe*, January 23, 1962, 1.

⁹⁸ Peter B. Greenough, "New Deal and Faces Assure 'Pike Bond Underwriting,'" *Boston Globe*, January 23, 1962, 23.

⁹⁹ Robert B. Hanron, "Ask Speed on Toll Extension," *Boston Globe*, January 23, 1962, 11.

¹⁰⁰ A. S. Plotkin, "Road Marks High Point in Callahan's Career," *Boston Globe*, January 23, 1962, 11.

political triumph for William F. Callahan.”¹⁰¹ John Powers hailed the Turnpike chief: “If ever there was a vindication of a public spirited man, this is it.”¹⁰² Callahan shared his victory with Boston: “The City of Boston is well on its way on a comeback that will again put it in the forefront of great metropolitan cities of the world,” he told the *Boston Globe*.¹⁰³

Creative destruction. On March 5, 1962, Callahan pressed a plunger to ignite the construction of the Boston Extension, as he triumphantly declared: “I only wish some of my critics and enemies were sitting on that ledge.”¹⁰⁴ He stood on a dais with Fred Smith and Lou Perini, the lead contractor for both the Pike and the Pru (fig. 4.4). *Roads and Streets* magazine called the Extension a “Contractor’s Dream Project,” worth \$91 million. There were 36 months to build 12 miles of highway under a single contract that brought together three of the world’s largest builders: the Perini Corporation, which managed the project, Morrison-Knudsen, and the Kaiser Company.¹⁰⁵

The Extension promised to reshape traffic patterns in the western suburbs and Boston. Though it followed the path of the depressed B&A roadbed through Newton, the Pike entailed a strip of destruction that altered many neighborhoods—in West Newton, for example, where a long-standing African American community was rent asunder by a

¹⁰¹ John H. Fenton, “Massachusetts Turnpike Body Places \$180,000,000 of Bonds,” *New York Times*, January 23, 1962.

¹⁰² Hanron, “Ask Speed on Toll Extension,” 11.

¹⁰³ Plotkin, “Road Marks High Point,” 11.

¹⁰⁴ “Callahan’s Blast Opens Toll Road: A Wry Wish and a Whoosh!” *Boston Herald*, March 6, 1962, quoted in Riesman, “The Maharajah of the Macadam.”

¹⁰⁵ Gordon McClean, “Mass. Turnpike Work Gathers Speed,” *New England Construction*, April 1, 1963, 60.

wide-swinging turnpike ramp. In a press release soon after the bonds were sold, Callahan justified the trade-off:

We are fully aware of the hardships they will have to endure, no matter what the price may be; however, the public is paying an even greater price in death, injuries, inconveniences and inefficiencies because of sub-standard and dangerously overcrowded roads and streets that fail to properly serve the biggest segment of our metropolitan population.¹⁰⁶

Callahan's comments echoed the famous mantra of Robert Moses: "You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs."¹⁰⁷

Callahan also indicated that he expected the Inner Belt highway, which he never formally opposed, to go forward: "Engineering reservations will be made to provide from connections with the Inner Belt to integrate through, interstate traffic with Greater Boston traffic." But the Inner Belt was never built. One of the reasons was the Turnpike Authority's none-too-gentle handling of eminent domain proceedings, which were described as hostile and condescending. The experiences of the *other* public, those who were displaced by the Pike, would haunt the future of highway building in Boston. Plans for the Inner Belt were thwarted in the mid-1960s by a diverse, cross-class coalition that led to Governor Francis Sargeant declaring a "moratorium" on highway construction in 1970.¹⁰⁸ Additional pieces of the 1948 Master Highway Plan, such as the Southwest Expressway, were also scrapped. In the final analysis, the Mass Pike's Boston Extension effectively scuttled more ambitious plans for a regional highway system. Instead, the Pike and the Pru built a single highway that pierced through the urban core along the path

¹⁰⁶ Press Release, January 22, 1962, MTAA 01321, Community Relations/Press Releases '61-'71.

¹⁰⁷ Caro, *The Power Broker*, 218.

¹⁰⁸ Alan Lupo, Frank Colcord, and Edmund P. Fowler, *Rites of Way: The Politics of Transportation in Boston and the U.S. City* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971).

of least resistance. In 1962, the Pike and the Pru carried the day, insinuating a vision of the public interest—and the future of Boston—that reflected their own image.

Chapter Five:

Designing the Center: The Business of Architecture

In mid-September 1956, the architect Charles Luckman received a call—“out of the blue,” as Luckman later remembered—from Carrol Shanks, the president of the Prudential Insurance Company, explaining that his company had an option on a large parcel in Boston’s Back Bay. “How would you like to do the master planning and a feasibility study for us?” Shanks asked. As Luckman later recalled it, he met with Shanks in Newark the next morning and the two of them flew to Boston that afternoon to inspect the site.¹ Soon thereafter, Prudential hired Luckman’s firm as the architect for the Prudential Center. Prudential’s decision was not only an embrace of Luckman, a former corporate executive who had come to architecture as a second career, but also an implicit rejection of a group of Boston’s most distinguished architects, including Walter Gropius and Pietro Belluschi, who had already prepared a plan for the same parcel of land—then known as the Back Bay Center—complete with motel, shopping mall, and a distinctive lozenge-shaped office building.

This chapter discusses the design and construction of the Prudential Center. A central theme will be the contrast between the high-style approach of the Boston Center Architects, whom the Prudential rejected, and the more pragmatic and corporate approach of Luckman, who got the job.

¹ Charles Luckman, *Twice in a Lifetime: From Soap to Skyscrapers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 327.

The Back Bay Center

Prudential was not the first to consider a large development project on the site of the Back Bay rail yard. When the New York real estate developer Roger Stevens bid to develop the site in 1953, he hired a group of distinguished Boston-based architects to consider site planning and architectural design for a speculative project called the Back Bay Center. The team included Walter Gropius, who had come to Harvard in 1937 after fleeing Germany, and members of the firm that Gropius started in Cambridge in 1945, The Architects Collaborative (TAC). Gropius and TAC were joined by other local luminaries, including Pietro Belluschi, then dean of the architecture school at M.I.T.; Carl Koch and Hugh Stubbins, both of whom studied at Harvard with Gropius; and Walter Bogner, an Austrian-born and Harvard-based architect and planner who was the informal leader of the group that called itself the Boston Center Architects (BCA). Roger Stevens also engaged two outside consultants to conduct special studies: Kenneth Welch evaluated the economic draw of the new commercial center and Wilbur Smith produced a transportation plan. The Back Bay Center was more than an architectural design. It was a statement of the economic and social functions of a new mid-town district for Boston.

“A cure for the ailing heart of Boston.” Stevens unveiled his proposal on September 11, 1953 (fig. 5.1). In a long report on the Back Bay Center, *Architectural Forum* distilled its urban strategy to a list of “six big ideas”:

1. Attract the automobile back downtown from suburban shopping centers by providing superb traffic and parking facilities.
2. Once the traffic has arrived, store it in cellar parking. Above, float a 28-acre raft solely for pedestrians.

3. Add big-city excitement and power to the rural-shopping-center concept by building not just a castle of stores (840,000 sq. ft.) but also office buildings (1,400,000 sq. ft.), a convention hall (seating 7,500) and a 750-room hotel.
4. Arrange these buildings *municipally* around plazas and promenades. Instead of just letting the intervening spaces between buildings fall where they may, design the spaces first, then the buildings, and thus bring the Greek idea of the open central city core back to enrich urban life.
5. Subdivide the big plot for development horizontally, not vertically. Slice it into strata, not building lots.
6. Do it all with private money (\$75,000,000 of it) aided not by federal support, but only by the cooperation of the city government.²

The proposal embodied a revolution in the established mode of urban development.

Traditionally, a builder erected a discrete building on a lot or set of lots that were organized by existing surface streets. The Back Bay Center was a wholesale insertion of a new piece of urban infrastructure on a tabula rasa site with its own internal system of streets and a parking garage. The architects envisioned the Center as a superblock complex that gave high priority to car circulation and created self-contained pedestrian enclaves.

Stevens believed that the Back Bay Center had the power to reposition Boston as New England's most important business location. He saw the project as a stop-gap to the suburbanization of the city's economic functions: "The automobile runs on a two-way street," Stevens told *Architectural Forum*. "The motor that brings the city to the country can also bring the country to the city. By providing better facilities, our cities must bring

² "A Cavity in Boston—To Be Filled with Six Ideas," *Architectural Forum* 99 (1953): 103.

back the patronage they have lost.”³ Kenneth Welch, the economic consultant, predicted that the Back Bay Center would successfully compete with suburban shopping centers, reasserting Boston as the region’s commercial focus. The planner Walter Bogner announced, “The Back Bay Center is a cure for the ailing heart of Boston.”⁴ It would revive the city by pumping life again through its physical, economic, and social spaces. The project reflected Walter Gropius’s conviction that the core of the nineteenth century city had to be rebuilt for the people of the twentieth century by segregating modes of transport and providing pedestrian plazas that enriched civic life. Mayor John Hynes actively courted the privately financed project. Ultimately, however, Roger Stevens failed to launch the Back Bay Center because he could not guarantee enough “cooperation” from city government by way of a tax concession.

Design for accessibility. A central goal of the proposed Back Bay Center was accessibility, both to people and—perhaps most of all—to their cars. As traffic expert Wilbur Smith declared, “Accessibility is requisite for marketability.”⁵ The centerpiece of the project was a lozenge-shaped office tower, whose broad façade looked toward the cars approaching Boston from the west. The tower was surrounded by a convention center, shopping center—described as a “castle of stores”—office buildings, and a 116-room motel (fig. 5.2). For *Architectural Forum*, the structure that epitomized the project was the motel, where a visitor could check in from the car and park in front of his room. The motel was the endpoint of a traveler’s “sociological trek.” Increasing numbers of

³ Ibid., 104.

⁴ Ibid., 107.

⁵ Wilbur Smith and Associates, “Report on Traffic—Transportation—Parking for Back Bay Center Development, Boston, Massachusetts,” December 1953, Boston Redevelopment Authority Archive (herein cited as BRA), BRA #655.

travelers were coming to cities by car rather than by train, and they needed lodging not only for themselves but also for their vehicles. The overall effect, *AF* suggested, was suburban: “A melange of city efficiency with suburban dash.”⁶ The suburbs made shopping easy by providing highway access and plentiful parking, and the Back Bay Center would compete with the suburbs on those terms.

Features that made the Back Bay Center accessible included the ring road Smith designed to channel traffic from city streets into the Center, and the large garage that would collect the parked cars (fig. 5.3). The multi-level garage was split at its lowest level by an easement for the railroad (the Turnpike extension had not yet been proposed) and was capped with a 28-acre “raft” of concrete that hosted the Center’s structures. It would be the world’s largest enclosed parking garage with room for 5,000 cars. “When they first showed me the site I didn’t believe it could be done,” Smith reported. “But now we know it can be done. You will be able to bring a car in there, park, and be upstairs in ten minutes.”⁷ Smith engineered the road to handle peak traffic, unimpeded by direct crossings, traffic signals, or stoppages of any kind. It would be a constantly streaming rotary, a great collector and distributor of cars. When Smith devised his plan, in 1953, a Turnpike extension had not yet been envisioned. But the Back Bay Center’s location at the western fringe of the city was strategically placed to “intercept” downtown traffic.

The design for traffic circulation distinguished the Back Bay Center from Rockefeller Center, the project to which it was inevitably compared:

⁶ “A Cavity in Boston,” 104.

⁷ *Ibid.*

The key difference: circulation will not be by regular through-city streets, which make Rockefeller Center an extension of the horizontal traffic flow of the city around it. Instead, in Back Bay Center, people will enter at the base from a ring road and then move *up*.⁸

Some criticized the plan in which the Center would “sit behind its ring road somewhat like a castle city behind a moat.” But as the *Architectural Forum* editors acknowledged, “how else could the auto traffic be so deftly handled?”⁹

Giving back to pedestrians their right of way. Walter Gropius made no apologies for the spatial conceit of the Back Bay Center. If the Center was “an island in an ocean infested by automobile sharks,” it was for the best. Gropius believed that social spaces for people should be removed from the street:

In the modern city a plaza for pedestrians may be more important than ever before. The pedestrian has been pushed against the wall in our cities. We have a beautiful net of highways for automobiles, but in the city we also have to give back to the pedestrian his right of way.¹⁰

The trick was getting the scale of the plaza right. It had to be just large enough to hold the peak hour rush crowds, but not so large as to dwarf the individual person. In Gropius’s view, the urban plaza represented a new core for community life.

The Back Bay Center was an opportunity for Gropius to implement the urban ideas that he had been developing, along with other modernist architects affiliated with the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM), since the 1920s. CIAM town planning ideas were codified in the 1933 “Athens Charter,” principally authored by Le Corbusier, which advocated strict zoning of the four urban functions: dwelling, work,

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 112.

¹⁰ Ibid., 114.

recreation, and transportation. The challenge was to foster community life within this new, segmented landscape. It was a challenge taken up in a number of CIAM documents, including *The Heart of the City: Towards the Humanization of Urban Life*, published in 1952 and edited by Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, CIAM president Jose-Luis Sert (who was for many years the dean of the Graduate School of Design at Harvard), and Ernesto Rogers. In his lead essay, Sert wrote: “One of the first requisites of all of these centres of community life is the separation of pedestrians and automobiles.”¹¹ The Back Bay Center exemplified what Sert and Gropius hoped for the city as a whole.

The Boston Center Architects did make at least one effort to connect the project to the city. The architects designed the signature, six-sided office tower with small, staggered fenestration as an homage to Boston’s brick-style residential architecture.¹² It was the modernists’ gesture at recognizing regional culture in what was otherwise a steel and glass campus in the “International Style.”

The Pru turns thumbs down to the Boston Center Architects. On October 11, 1955, the Boston Center Architects assembled at the offices of The Architects Collaborative in Cambridge to discuss the outlook for the project. Roger Stevens was bowing out. He had been unable to secure a tax concession from the city, without which he could not afford to launch the project. But an unnamed insurance company had emerged as a potential sponsor and solicited a scheme for a large office building. Fifteen days later, the architects were in Newark to meet with Prudential executives. Walter Bogner, Walter Gropius, and Pietro Belluschi, accompanied by Roger Stevens, made

¹¹ Jose Luis Sert, “Centres of Community Life,” *The Heart of the City: Towards the Humanisation of Urban Life* (New York: Pellegrini and Cudahy, 1952), 11.

¹² “A Cavity in Boston.”

their way up the corporate hierarchy, from preliminary discussions with Valentine Howell to the office of Wescott Toole, who headed the Regional Home Office program. Prudential's initial response to the Back Bay Center plan was skeptical. It appeared, as described in Walter Bogner's notes, that the modernists' vision of urban revitalization was in conflict with the Pru's own conception of its Northeastern Home Office project.

Prudential viewed the Boston Center Architects' plan for a shopping center in the complex as too ambitious. "Prudential does not seem interested in stores, etc. as income producers," Bogner wrote in his notes from the meetings. Prudential believed that "any large development must be carried out in stages, rather than on big blocks." Prudential was interested in the overall visual impact of the project, reflecting Wes Tooles's preoccupation with creating landmarks. "Prudential wants a show piece in its insurance building," Bogner wrote, "seen by greatest number of passing motorists. Therefore believes removal of Mechanics Building essential to create impressive view from Huntington Avenue." In terms of design, Valentine Howell advocated a "building with wings and a high tower as show piece"—along the lines of Prudential's previously built RHO buildings—"rather than square building, believes our lozenge shape to be expensive."¹³

I have not found any documents explaining the Pru's final decision not to go with the Boston Center Architects and instead to hire Charles Luckman, who was at that time perhaps more notable as an administrator than a designer. But we can make some educated guesses based on the available information. Prudential was accustomed to

¹³ Walter Bogner notes, October 26, 1955, Walter Bogner Collection, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Graduate School of Design.

working with proven commercial architects and established firms. The Boston Center Architects were perhaps too visionary for comfort. The Pru had a particular sort of corporate culture, and people like Shanks and Toole could relate to Luckman. In addition, Bogner recalled, Prudential was afraid the Back Bay Center plans would cost too much. The insurance men seemed to fear that the Boston Center Architects, despite their distinguished reputations—or perhaps because of their reputations—would promote their modernist ideas without due regard for cost. Luckman, in contrast, was known for cost control and administrative efficiency. Prudential was apparently less concerned with architectural distinction than with a special sort of symbolism—the towers that loomed over extended downtowns, with “Prudential” emblazoned on them. Should it be surprising that the insurance company would gravitate to an architect who once achieved distinction by designing soap displays for grocery stores?

From Soap Salesman to Architect: Charles Luckman

In his memoir, Luckman inserted himself into the earliest stages of planning the Prudential Center, and he positioned himself at the ear of Prudential’s chief: “I persuaded Shanks that if Prudential announced a dramatic redevelopment project, as we proposed, it would have a ripple effect. Other builders and developers would buy up the adjacent seventy-five acres and the whole area would blossom.”¹⁴ But it wouldn’t be easy, Luckman emphasized. Prudential had purchased a difficult site from the

¹⁴ Luckman, *Twice in a Lifetime*, 328.

perspective of land development. For one thing, the two major streets that bordered the site, Boylston and Huntington, sloped in opposite directions, requiring major earth moving to establish a building plane. Moreover, the entire Back Bay district was made of filled-in land that could not sustain the foundations for such a large project. “Until we did the soil borings, we would have no idea how deep we would have to go to hit solid rock,” Luckman later wrote, as if he had been unaware of the previous plan for the Back Bay Center and had to start from scratch.¹⁵

Autobiographies are acts of self-invention, and Charles Luckman’s is no exception. Published in 1988 when he was nearly 80 years old, *Twice in a Lifetime: From Soaps to Skyscrapers* is full of jocular half-truths, loosely remembered quotations, and picaresque anecdotes of his dual careers: from his swift ascent to the helm of Lever Brothers, the soap company, to the principal of a large architecture firm that bore his name. Though he was trained as an architect, architecture was his second career, and what had come before always influenced his attitudes and actions in that profession. A brief look at Luckman’s career in business will help us to understand his place in postwar architectural culture.

Boy Wonder. In 1946, *Time* magazine introduced Charles Luckman to readers as a blue-eyed “boy wonder” who quickly rose from a toothpaste salesman in Depression-era Chicago to be president of the industrial soap production giant, Lever Brothers, a subsidiary of the Dutch-Anglo corporation Unilever, at the age of 37 (fig. 5.4). From the company’s headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Luckman controlled a key node in Unilever’s global “Empire of Soap.”

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 327.

In the press, Luckman was an all-American success story. A 1947 advertisement for *Fortune* magazine featured the young executive: “\$300,000 a year at 37—up from a \$25-a-week soap salesman to the top boss of Lever Bros. Time: 15 years flat.” The press hungrily picked up on Luckman’s winsome, Horatio Alger-like story. He was the irrepressible Kansas City newsboy who dreamed of becoming an architect—and trained as one at the University of Illinois at Champaign/Urbana—but took a detour to the world of sales when jobs for architects were scarce in the 1930s. Luckman won the hearts of small drugstore proprietors by designing signs and displays that helped move their soap inventories at a time when consumers were watching their wallets. He had an intuitive grasp of advertising and the power of media. To peddle Lever’s Irium brand toothpaste, for example, Luckman hired the rising star Bob Hope to peddle *Irium to Mirium* on radio and, later, television.

But Charles Luckman was more than just an average corporate chieftain and pitchman. He was an ambitious man-of-affairs. A 1950 *Fortune* profile confirmed that by then Luckman had arrived as a public figure. He was presented as a progressive industrialist, a prolific speechmaker, and an articulate exponent of the American free enterprise system. Reflecting his wider recognition as a leader of industry, Luckman was asked to chair President Truman’s Citizens Food Committee, a Marshall Plan program that sought to persuade Americans to save grain to send to Europe. Luckman was decorated by the French and Italian governments for his role on the Committee, recognizing him for combating the specter of Communism by helping to feed the hungry masses of war-torn Europe.¹⁶

¹⁶ “The Case of Charles Luckman,” *Fortune* 41 (1950).

Luckman and Lever House. Luckman was a master of the art of merchandising and public relations, and he applied these skills to corporate architecture when he recommended that Lever move from Cambridge to a new office building on Park Avenue in Manhattan. A new space was needed to consolidate Lever's expanding array of subsidiary companies. But, beyond that, a new building would also stand as an advertisement for the soap company. Luckman hired Skidmore, Owings & Merrill to design the building. But he later took most of the credit for devising the architectural concept:

As a licensed architect who also happened to be the client, I could tell the architects what I wanted, and see that I got it. I spent many weekend hours walking up and down Park Avenue, trying to envision the kind of building I dreamed of seeing there. . . . Gradually, from somewhere in the depths of what I had learned in architectural school, a concept of a new kind of office building began to take shape in my mind.¹⁷

That concept drew on the most up-to-date building technologies—a steel structure glazed with a very thin curtain wall of large glass panels. Luckman also wanted the entire ground-plane to be “open to the public,” an open-air extension of the sidewalk. At first, Unilever was alarmed by Luckman's proposal to construct a small structure that eschewed street-level retail, “wasted” valuable land by not building to the limit, and that was not large enough to accommodate tenants other than Lever itself. But Luckman was able to persuade the Unilever directors of the long-term value of his approach—that “giving back to the street” would enhance Lever's standing.¹⁸ And he was right. Lever House opened in 1952 and is widely considered to be one of the most important examples

¹⁷ Luckman, *Twice in a Lifetime*, 241.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

of postwar modernist architecture, marking corporate America's adoption of International Style design principles.

Returning to architecture. Before Lever Bros. could occupy the new building on Park Avenue, Luckman fell suddenly from his corporation's grace. Near the end of 1950 he agreed to step down from the helm of Lever. Observers speculated that his brash management style clashed with the principles of conservative stewardship championed by Unilever's European directors.¹⁹ This marked the close of the first chapter in Luckman's career. He was tempted by many offers to continue in business, but was lured by a different sort of offer from the architect William Pereira, a former classmate at the University of Illinois. Pereira and Luckman formed a partnership in Los Angeles, and Luckman happily returned to his first love—architecture—at the age of 41.

Pereira and Luckman made a good team, and each architect consciously adopted a distinct role: Pereira was the talent, Luckman the charismatic salesman. Pereira wore the smock; Luckman brandished a pipe (fig. 5.5). "There was no possibility that I would ever become the 'smock' kind of architect," Luckman wrote. "I would stay with my no-jacket, rolled-up-shirt-sleeves, man-at-work attire."²⁰ The combination appealed to patrons, who saw Luckman as a fiscally responsible peer. Luckman used his business experience as a selling point for the firm, and announced as much to potential clients. He used to tell them: "Pereira will be the architect. I'll be the businessman."²¹

¹⁹ There was also some evidence that Lever Bros. profit margin was declining, and that it looked increasingly unlikely that Lever's relatively new synthetic soap products would catch up with those already on the market from Procter & Gamble or Colgate.

²⁰ Luckman, *Twice in a Lifetime*, 277.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 279.

The firm quickly attracted high-profile clients, aided in part by Luckman's high-powered Rolodex and his extensive contacts in both government and the corporate world. In 1953 the firm was asked by CBS chief William Paley to design a "Television City" in Hollywood, the first studio complex designed expressly for television production (fig. 5.6). Pereira & Luckman's work for Paley and CBS led to the establishment of a New York City branch office of the architecture firm. The firm became known for solving big architectural problems, and addressed a series of unprecedented programmatic challenges. Pereira & Luckman carried out the planning and design for the modernization of the Los Angeles International Airport and a series of large military projects for air and naval bases, including NASA's manned-spacecraft center in Houston—known to every American as "mission control."

Architecture IS a business. Despite their success, Bill Pereira grew disillusioned with his partnership with Luckman. He was turned off by Luckman's drive to expand the firm. He thought architecture could not be managed in a bureaucratic fashion, but should be rendered with craft by the architect. For Pereira, the architect was a renaissance man; but for Luckman, the architect was a team-leader at the top of a corporate hierarchy. Pereira & Luckman parted ways in 1958 and each formed his own firm.²² In a press release announcing the dissolution of the Pereira & Luckman firm, William Pereira made this statement: "It is my conviction that I should limit the number of projects which my

²² William Pereira's insistence on a more "artistic" practice has recently been rewarded with an emerging reputation for inventive modernist architecture. See James Steele, ed., *William Pereira* (Los Angeles: Architectural Guild Press, 2002).

associates and I hope to undertake to those which we can contribute the most and which we can follow through personally from beginning to end.”²³

Luckman reported that only two designers and one project architect chose to go with Pereira. Luckman organized Charles Luckman Associates (CLA) by making each associate a “stockholder,” entitled to a profit share. CLA assumed responsibility for many of Pereira & Luckman’s larger commissions, including the Prudential Center. The first vote of confidence for the new firm came when the president of the California Federated Bank Corporation asked Luckman to design a new office tower on Wishire Boulevard. In 1968 *Business Week* declared that he *sold architecture the way he sold soap*: in bulk. Yet each project bore the CEO’s imprimatur. Luckman was clear on this: “No project can be shown to a client before I’ve seen it and approved it,” he said.²⁴ Luckman saw himself as an architect with an intuitive sense of space and style, not merely an executive. He noted in his autobiography that he was personally registered as an architect in more than 17 different states.

But Luckman’s principal architectural responsibilities were as the front-man, making business contacts and soliciting new projects. His blatant self-promotion, and the sheer volume of his firm’s production, tended to dilute Luckman’s cultural capital. In his book *The Favored Circle: The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction*, the sociologist Garry Stevens, drawing from the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, writes that the architectural profession has a vested interest in asserting the autonomy of its field, to pretend that it somehow exists outside the practical world of real estate development,

²³ Luckman, *Twice in a Lifetime*, 332.

²⁴ “He Sells Architecture the Way he Sold Soap,” *Business Week*, October 28, 1967, 78.

business practices, or fluctuations in the political economy.²⁵ Yet Luckman unflinchingly embraced these constraints on architecture; he even flaunted them.

In the early 1960s, CLA received a commission from the Pennsylvania Railroad to produce a new terminal as part of a larger urban development project on the railroad's West Side Manhattan property. Preservationists bitterly protested the destruction of McKim, Mead & White's landmark 1910 terminal building, but the railroad went forward with its ambitious plans to capitalize on its West Side real estate holdings by building an office tower, theater, and sports arena on top of a new passenger terminal. A big part of the job was to coordinate its construction without interrupting the railroad's operations. When it was finished, the *New York Times* architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable called the theater at the new Madison Square Garden "pleasantly unpretentious and handsome," noting its "simple, direct solutions with rational and appropriate details." The overall effect, she wrote, was "neither avant-garde nor high architectural art." Yet it was a grand space, designed "to serve popular pleasures for a great many people, on a vast scale, with efficiency and comfort." Madison Square Garden, Huxtable allowed, "deals, legitimately, in mass art. . . . Twenty-thousand hockey fans will undoubtedly love the new Garden, and 20,000 hockey fans need not be wrong."²⁶

Indeed, Luckman's work was *mass*, not *class*. Some people thought he had no taste. In 1962, *Time Magazine* ran another profile of Luckman, and noted: "The critics grumble that he is more a businessman than an architect. 'He is successful,' says one top

²⁵ Garry Stevens, *The Favored Circle: The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998).

²⁶ Ada Louise Huxtable, "Architecture: Felt Forum, New House is Sensible and Quietly Attractive," *New York Times*, November 27, 1967.

Chicago architect coolly, ‘because he produces anonymous architecture in a prescribed time and at the least cost and fuss to his clients.’” Luckman was non-plussed. “Luckman denies only the ‘anonymous’ part of that charge.” This type of censure never bothered Charles Luckman. *Time* asserted that “competitors cluck that Chuck Luckman could never sit at the same drawing board with a Mies van der Rohe or a Corbusier—or half a hundred top architects for that matter. Luckman airily dismisses such criticism. ‘Unquestionably,’ says he, “other firms work as ably as we do, but they don’t do it in the way we do.”²⁷

And what was that *way*? Was there a method behind Luckman’s prolific architecture? *Time* called it “mass production,” with designs coming off the “assembly lines.” Luckman himself expressed a professional philosophy during a 1954 interview with a reporter from the *New Yorker* magazine for a “Talk of the Town” piece. Luckman said:

I am firm in my belief that architecture is a business, and not an art. . . . I handle the programming of a job. I organize it. What is the problem? What is the client trying to achieve? If we do a project that is mostly engineering, I staff it with engineers. If it is mostly architectural, I staff it with architects.²⁸

Architecture, for Luckman, was the art of allocating human resources. He organized his firm as a multi-divisional corporation, with planning, engineering, architecture, interiors, and research divisions. There was even a group dedicated to “design visualization,” which exclusively considered the “look” of a building. Luckman initiated strict budget-auditing with a cost-control department consisting of 14 engineers, whose sole function

²⁷ “Corporations: The Second Time Around,” *Time*, March 20, 1962, 81.

²⁸ “Repeat Performance,” *New Yorker*, August 28, 1954, 16.

was “to see that nothing goes on the drawing board that will put the project over the budget.” At first, his designers resisted this economizing, Luckman said, complaining that their creativity was being hemmed-in. But they soon changed their tune. Luckman said: “They found that in order to design within a budget they had to be *really* creative.”²⁹

In 1962, Luckman was selected to design the United States pavilion for the 1964 World’s Fair in New York’s Flushing Meadow-Corona Park. Luckman presented 28 different schemes for the U.S. Pavilion to Norman K. Winston, the United States Commissioner responsible for the project, who eventually chose a long, low, hollow square, raised 18 feet above the ground on concrete supports. Luckman’s tactic of creating many choices for a client was indicative of his style as an architect. Luckman wanted to show all the possible options and empower the client to choose from amongst them. This technique revealed Luckman’s aesthetic pliability. He had no design agenda, championed no style. He was more interested in satisfying the customer than he was in advancing a strict vision of good architecture. Luckman’s design for the U.S. pavilion fit with a broader pattern for federal architecture in the early 1960s of “modern, floating pavilions,” including State Department architecture overseas, like Edward Durrell Stone’s New Delhi Embassy.³⁰ The 84-foot-high U.S. pavilion at Flushing Meadow was

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ada Louise Huxtable, “A Fair U.S. Pavilion,” *New York Times*, January 26, 1963. See also Ron Robin, *Enclaves of America: The Rhetoric of American Political Architecture Abroad, 1900–1965* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

“enclosed in translucent walls made of thousands of pieces of colored glass. It will seemingly ‘float’ 18 feet above the ground on four supporting columns.”³¹

In 1968, Luckman was a featured speaker at the American Institute of Architects conference in New York, where he insisted that “Architecture IS a Business,” and chided his colleagues for marginalizing the profession by focusing too much on design aesthetics: “If our profession is to survive in today’s kaleidoscopic society, we must make our aesthetic contributions within the framework of business-like procedures and systems,” he said. Architectural design was only one component of building production, and the designer had a bad name with many of the large patrons of construction, including government and corporations. Luckman continued:

In the total team effort which the architect must lead, there is no room for dilettante daydreamers, for eccentric ego maniacs in any of the disciplines which constitute the process of building. We are builders. We want to build. We want both the beautiful and the best. This is the cause for which I plead today.³²

Luckman thought that architects played too small a role in overall construction activity and that the built environment had suffered because of it. The architect had to reclaim his rightful position atop the building hierarchy; therefore, he had to become a *generalist*, “capable of coordinating the work of many specialists.” Luckman noted that a few of his illustrious peers had made similar suggestions, including Walter Gropius, “one of the great masters,” who had long advocated the “collaborative approach.”³³ Gropius,

³¹ “U.S. Pavilion at N.Y. Fair Will ‘Float’ on 4 Columns,” *New York Times*, January 22, 1963.

³² Charles Luckman, “Architecture IS a Business,” April 17, 1968, Charles Luckman Papers (hereafter cited as CLP).

³³ *Ibid.*

too, lamented architecture's alienation from building. Yet Luckman went the furthest in forging a relevant architecture practice along the lines of a business model.

Charles Luckman took his business model to its ultimate stage in 1968 when he sold his firm to a large conglomerate, the Ogden Corporation, and formed a new real estate subsidiary, the Ogden Development Corporation. Ogden was principally a scrap-metal and shipbuilding company, with interests in a variety of other firms, including food businesses, restaurant chains, and transportation systems. The newly formed Ogden Development Corporation, with Luckman at its helm, planned an aggressive foray into real estate. One of Luckman's first projects with Ogden was Broadway Plaza, an urban redevelopment project in downtown Los Angeles. To Luckman, his role as a developer animated his conviction that the architect was the most qualified leader of the city-building process, and represented a leap forward for the architect's role in urban development and his position in society at large. And yet the editors of *Progressive Architecture* expressed some concern: "So here we are," wrote Jan Rowland. "The road has been traveled all the way: The architect becomes a team, the team becomes a corporation, and the corporation becomes a subsidiary of another corporation. In the shuffle, what happened to the architect?"³⁴ The implication was that the architect was somehow compromised by incorporation. Luckman would have disagreed: the architect was compromised from the start. He was simply loath to admit it.

Master plans that are "Do-Able." Though he foregrounded the importance of business in architecture, Luckman was also an advocate of "design." He told a group of UCLA students that "we will be set back one hundred years unless we integrate the word

³⁴ Jan Rowland, untitled editorial, *Progressive Architecture*, 1968.

‘design’ into architecture.” At its most superficial, “design” reflected the whims of an aesthete. Luckman railed against those dilettantes who were “boxed in by the narrow viewpoint of the what-does-it-look-like school to whom the ‘image concept’ is the beginning and end of all architectural wisdom.” But good design had to be brought into the “total concept” of architecture, which also included engineering, construction, and economics. The architect had to lead the process of large-scale urban planning challenges, tackling complex, interrelated challenges that went beyond a narrow conception of “design.” This meant dealing with complex political milieus and a myriad of specialists involved in the urban development process.³⁵

Luckman, the pragmatist, dismissed utopian city planners who invented ideal scenarios for what the city “should be” instead of what it “could be.” “Those plans could be fruitful only if the cities were to be obliterated by war. Is that to be the limit of our genius?” Luckman acknowledged that many cities were “sick,” and that a doctor must apply “therapy.” But “when he is through he has the same patient with the same personality—only healthy instead of sick. The disease has not been permitted to kill the patient.”³⁶

In Luckman’s view, planners who were preoccupied with utopian urban visions ignored the actual work of building the metropolitan physical environment. Instead, urban development had been left to incompetent, short-sighted private interests and resulted in unplanned disasters. Luckman offered a trenchant critique of the postwar American landscape:

³⁵ Charles Luckman, “The Architect as Designer,” February 23, 1961, CLP.

³⁶ Charles Luckman, “Planning for People,” November 17, 1960, CLP.

It is no wonder we have for some time now been witnessing the mad race to Suburbia. Stimulated by the F.H.A. and the V.A. mortgages, denuded by the bulldozers, many housing units have been scattered about the periphery of our cities, catch as catch can, like dice on a gambling table, miserably unplanned and architecturally unblessed, bought by eager, yet pathetic young couples unwarned that a Real Estate Promotion is not a Community. These periodic extravaganzas in mediocrity, conformity, and banality are the first bitter fruits of non-planning by our cities.³⁷

That said, Luckman was not convinced that the physical legacy of the nineteenth century city was correct for twentieth century man: “The question then arises whether the large city as it has been inherited from the nineteenth century, with its chaotic intermingling of functions, should not be allowed to die a natural death.”³⁸ His answer was that older cities, built with obsolescent infrastructural systems, required well-planned urban redevelopment projects targeted to specific neighborhoods. Luckman pointed to his firm’s work in the Bunker Hill section of downtown Los Angeles, where CLA produced the master plan that guided the “transformation of a 136 acre semi-slum area in downtown Los Angeles into a modern center providing functional and aesthetic accommodations for living, working, shopping and recreation for more than 60,000 people.”³⁹

Luckman believed in master plans, but eschewed “revolutionary master plans.” “I am opposed to ‘dream-able’ plans,” he said. “I am in favor of ‘do-able’ plans.” Luckman quoted an article from a “Manual on City Planning,” in which the author exhorted readers, “ ‘Are we to be forever satisfied with mere improvement? Shall we not instead completely rebuild our cities? Can we not ignore present obstacles and dream big

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Charles Luckman, “Humanation of Cities,” March 1960, CLP.

³⁹ Ibid., 9.

dreams?” Luckman dismissed such foppery: “End of quote. End of paragraph. End, I hope, of such marijuana inspired day dreaming.” Luckman predicted tremendous building activity during the 1960s: “The United States this year will embark upon the greatest building boom the world has ever seen—as part of what will rightfully be called the Spectacular Sixties.”⁴⁰ Luckman wanted the professional architect to lead this charge.

From “Humanization” to “Humanation.” Despite his rejection of planners who were “dreamers” rather than “doers,” Luckman was not closed to modernist approaches to architecture and urban development. He was influenced by modernist ideas, but he gave them his own pragmatic spin. For example, Luckman took the idea of the “humanization” of American cities, as championed by Siegfried Giedion and other modernists, and transformed it into his own brand of “humanation.”

Giedion, for many years the Secretary General of CIAM, shared an interest with Gropius, Sert, and other modernist architects in *humanizing* the core of the modern city. In a 1951 essay called “The Humanization of Urban Life,” Giedion sounded his concern for humane spaces tailored to the pedestrian experience in the midst of the busy, chaotic city. The architectural historian insisted that the pedestrian must be returned to a place of dignity in the urban core:

Today this right of the pedestrian—this human right—has been overridden by the automobile, and so the gathering places of the people—the places where people can meet together without hindrance—have been destroyed. Today one of our hardest tasks is the reestablishment of this human right, which is not merely imperiled but has been destroyed altogether.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Luckman, “Planning for People,” 3.

⁴¹ Siegfried Giedion, *Architecture You and Me: The Diary of a Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), 128.

Giedion's answer was to "humanize" cities, and in a 1956 essay he pointed to the Back Bay Center as an ideal illustration, where "a large area was consciously created for the sole use of the pedestrian, a protected zone within which he can wander free from danger." Giedion acknowledged that as a consequence, "the center no longer faces upon the street." But this was a small price to pay: "At last the pedestrian regains the right he had lost since antiquity, to move freely within a center of collective life."⁴²

Luckman echoed Giedion's concerns for a humane urban environment. He stressed this theme in many of his invited lectures and public talks, putting his own spin on the notion of "humanization":

We as architects must and will devote more attention to the people who occupy our buildings. This is what I term "the humanation of architecture." We must fulfill their human needs and aspirations—we must enable them to live and work with happiness and dignity.⁴³

"Humanation" was Luckman's bowdlerization of "humanization," and his vision of urban space shared much with the leading modernist intellectuals.

Luckman talked about Lever House as a formative experience in shaping his spatial imagination. He pitched his idea for an open plaza at street level to the dubious directors of Unilever in 1950:

The final straw that broke the back of their belief in my sanity, was when I said I wanted the entire ground floor on Park Avenue left open so that people could walk in and feel a part of Lever; so that there might be a very human feeling at the ground level to contrast with the kind of slick and gleaming tower which I felt would properly reflect a soap company. To their everlasting credit, they gave me exactly what I asked for!⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., 172.

⁴³ Luckman, "Humanation of Cities," 4.

⁴⁴ Luckman, "Architecture IS a Business," 22.

Luckman believed that the Lever House principle could be applied to large urban projects to create more suitable environments for people. And once he took on the Prudential Center project, Luckman pointed to it as a model for the “humanation of cities”:

The scope and complexity of this \$100 million project are implicit in the fact that it will be the world’s largest integrated business, civic and residential development—a city within a city. One of the many to have been publicized, one of the few to be built!⁴⁵

For Luckman, the *city within a city* would not be overbuilt. It was designed for people by allowing them plenty of open space, which both Luckman and Prudential viewed as a civic gesture, a giving-back to the community. The result was to achieve a “freedom of space”:

We have done this by assigning 75 per cent of a 31-acre area to landscaping, reflecting pools, statuary, terraces, walkways, patios and sculpture gardens. Only the remaining 25 per cent is used to accommodate the buildings themselves.⁴⁶

People needed this “freedom of space” because it was “the proper environment, the proper distribution of those things which are presumably free—the sun and the air.” To deny the people these things would be to deny them the promises of America’s founding fathers, and what Luckman took to be the foundational goals of city planning: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Landscapes that denied the “freedom of space,” or lacked “humanation” would help preserve those American values and even ward off “the malignancies upon which socialism and communism are born.”⁴⁷ Luckman’s

⁴⁵ Luckman, “Planning for People,” 6.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 7.

assumptions about the good city thus represented a trickling-down of urban ideas from avant-garde intellectuals to commercial practitioners.⁴⁸

The Prudential Project Unfolds

In his autobiographical recollections, Charles Luckman gave the impression that the Prudential Center emerged, fully formed, from a rational consideration of the client's program and the features of the site:

Our concept required that we make a firm decision at the very start on the shape and height of every building in the project, because we had to build the foundations for *all* the structures at the same time that the plaza level and garages were being built. If we did the foundations later, we would have to break through the plaza and garages each and every time we sought to lay a foundation for a new building. The Prudential directors understood the problem, and had the courage and foresight to approve our putting in the foundations for all future buildings.⁴⁹

But despite Luckman's later recollections, these sorts of "firm decisions" for the planning and design of the Prudential Center could not possibly have been made at the outset of the project. Prudential considered pulling out of the project on several occasions—and as late as 1961—as Prudential's tax concession and the Turnpike plans were debated, negotiated, and eventually resolved. Though the foundations for the entire 31.5 acre site were established at one time, Prudential did not make final decisions about what would sit atop those foundations in the same unified fashion. In fact, Prudential viewed the Center as an ensemble of four precincts that were initiated at different times: 1) the

⁴⁸ See Stevens, *The Favored Circle*.

⁴⁹ Luckman, *Twice in a Lifetime*, 328.

central plaza, with commercial arcades, and tower, 2) the western hotel and convention center, 3) the eastern precinct with two apartment houses and a Saks department store, and 4) a “far eastern” precinct with a third apartment tower and a structure for Lord & Taylor, another department store.

Planning the site. After being hired by Prudential, Charles Luckman’s first task was to staff the project. Luckman himself was based in Los Angeles, and the Prudential Center fell under the domain of Pereira & Luckman’s New York office, led by Charles Stanton. Pereira & Luckman were dubbed the “coordinating architects,” and were paired with a local firm, Hoyle, Doran & Berry (HDB). HDB was the successor firm of Ralph Adams Cram, later called Cram & Ferguson, and was responsible for the New England Mutual and John Hancock buildings—each important pieces of the Back Bay “insurance district” that had begun to emerge in the 1930s, which had experience building for insurance companies.

When Carrol Shanks came to Boston in 1957 to announce his company’s intention to construct the Prudential Center, he was armed with several large renderings of the project produced by HDB (fig. 5.7). The ambitious images of a “skyscraper city” complemented Shanks’s buoyant message on the economic prospects of New England and its capital city. As the physical embodiment of Prudential’s broader investments in the city and region, the Prudential Center marked the wholesale modernization of a significant swath of Back Bay real estate: the obsolescent rail yard reinvented as a gleaming mid-town district, a self-sufficient enclave that was a microcosm of the city as a whole with spaces for living, working, and recreation. Designers rendered the Prudential Center as an ideal diagram, a massive, independent entity that floated in pure space, with

no reference to its urban context (fig. 5.7). The Pru referred only to itself, and its 52-story tower turned the same face in each direction like a beacon. The ring road that circumnavigated the site concretized the Center's isolation from the city at large.

This initial plan revealed how the Luckman and HDB team of architects divided the program into precincts and used symmetry to bring visual clarity to the plan (fig. 5.8). To the west was the convention center complex, with a slab hotel and saucer-shaped auditorium on axis with the tower. The center section included the tower and low rise commercial buildings, with a circular restaurant at the southern corner. The architects placed the four commercial blocks at the corners of the tower, producing four plazas that faced each side of the tower. One rendering illustrated the dramatic entrance concourses and reflecting pools that were projected for the north and south plazas (fig. 5.9). The eastern precinct of the site was for housing. Architects imagined four finger-like apartments with small square floor plates. A landscaped mall running east from the tower culminated in a low, square-plan commercial block. On the northern edge of the site, bordering the busy commercial thoroughfare of Boylston Street, Pereira & Luckman planners placed a second slab containing more apartment units (totalling 1,250). The overall effect in plan was a symmetrical resolution to the program, oriented to Boylston Street and the grid of the Back Bay, with the southern and western edges treated with monumental circular-plan (or saucer-shaped) public buildings. In a rendering that HDB provided to the *Monitor*, which noted "Glass and Steel Will Predominate," the Pru and its

pedestrian plazas appeared as a vast, pastoral landscape insulated from the life of the city (fig. 5.10).⁵⁰

Prudential soon released variations on the original scheme, and the first of these was released in May 1957 (fig. 5.11).⁵¹ The north and south entrance concourses remained, but the finger-like apartment towers were now slabs, oriented to Boylston Street, each placed on its own pad of grass. Prudential released “final working plans” on July 24, 1958. Fred Smith announced, “This is it.”⁵² The new plan coincided with Prudential’s agreement with the city over tax concessions, the informal arrangement that was eventually debunked by the state supreme court. “The physical aspects of the center are now established,” said Smith. In the July 1958 site plan, CLA planners abandoned the saucer-shaped restaurant and varied the site layout and floor plans of the apartment towers (fig. 5.12).⁵³ The commercial blocks were widened and simplified. The finger-like lobby extensions were removed and traded for broad forecourts with staircases that stepped down toward the ring road. The southern plaza was designed with a pool that could be used as an ice-rink. By this time, the drawings show the neighboring blocks. HDB prepared four different proposals for the civic auditorium, and Mayor John Hynes unveiled the city’s choice in August 1958: a boxy design with a mesh-like screen that

⁵⁰ “Glass and Steel Will Predominate,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 1, 1957. It is difficult to be certain which office—Pereira & Luckman or HDB—produced the renderings that were circulated in 1957. My instinct is that HDB, which is listed at the top of the tag as the architects, were responsible for the renderings and for many of the initial architectural ideas while Pereira & Luckman executed the broader site plan.

⁵¹ “A New View of the Prudential Center,” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 6, 1957, 2.

⁵² David Harvey, “Prudential Says ‘This is It,’” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 24, 1958, 1.

⁵³ By 1958, CLA, Luckman’s new firm, had assumed responsibility for the project following the demise of Pereira & Luckman.

faced Boylston Street (fig. 5.13).⁵⁴ In December 1958, Prudential announced that the Boston-based Hotel Corporation of America would operate the hotel at Prudential Center and that CLA would design the building.⁵⁵

Laying the foundation. In 1955, Walter Bogner reported that Prudential wanted to remove the Mechanics Hall at the southeastern corner of the site (figs. 5.14 and 5.15). As was his wont, Luckman later took credit for the idea. He claimed to have convinced Shanks to acquire a larger site by buying and razing the building, built in 1881, which he called “a sixty-year-old red sandstone monstrosity” (fig. 5.16). The Mechanics Hall housed Boston’s largest convention hall, a function that would be assumed by the municipal auditorium that would be built in conjunction with the Prudential Center. Moreover, the sprawling building would have spoiled the “open plaza approach” to the Prudential Center that anchored Luckman’s vision of the Prudential Center.⁵⁶ Prudential’s demolition of the Mechanics Hall in January 1959 was the last physical obstacle to clearing the nearly 32-acre site for the Prudential Center. This act of destruction was the “first visible sign that the city’s massive Prudential Center would actually be built as planned.”⁵⁷ The *Monitor* reported that “modernity outflanks historic brick building.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Earl W. Foell, “Hynes Unveils Plan for Auditorium,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 7, 1958, 1.

⁵⁵ “Prudential Awards Center’s Hotel Pact,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 9, 1958, 1.

⁵⁶ Luckman, *Twice in a Lifetime*, 329.

⁵⁷ “Officialdom Hails Prudential ‘Start,’” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 9, 1959, 1.

⁵⁸ Frederick H. Guidry, “Fortresslike Mechanics Building Due to Crumble Before Back Bay Center,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 31, 1957, 4.

As construction commenced, Prudential gave priority to the center section of the project and hired the George A. Fuller Construction Company to execute excavation and foundation work for the tower and commercial plazas. Fuller installed a coffer dam that isolated this area from the rest of the site to protect against water seepage. Fuller hammered the tower supports—there would be 150 of them made of steel pipe caissons 30-inches in diameter—140 feet below grade into bedrock before being capped with a 10-foot-thick raft of concrete that supported the tower’s structural steel columns.⁵⁹ A three-foot slab of concrete would cover the rest of the site and serve as the floor for the garage and the columns for the low commercial structures adjacent to the tower. April 3, 1959, marked the official ground-breaking for the Prudential Center. Mayor John Hynes shoveled dirt from the site into a lucite container to be preserved for posterity and called it “the most historic dirt removal job in the history of the city of Boston.”⁶⁰

The potential roadblock. The Pru was prepared to proceed with construction on an ambitious time-line that would have led to completion of the project by 1962. But Prudential’s ambitious construction timeline was delayed when the insurance company insisted on a formal guarantee of real estate tax concessions. One solution, announced in April 1960, was to merge the construction of the Pru with the Massachusetts Turnpike’s Boston Extension.

The Pike and the Pru, having already agreed to an easement through the site, strengthened their collaborative efforts to integrate physical plans and turn the Prudential Center into one of the hoped-for Turnpike Extension’s major interchange points. The

⁵⁹ “Begin Prudential Work in 2 Weeks,” *Boston Sunday Globe*, March 29, 1959, 1.

⁶⁰ Earl W. Foell, “Prudential Center Started,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 3, 1959, 1.

ramps were to be placed at a site just east of the Center, at the location of the B&A railroad's Huntington Avenue station that the Pike planned to acquire (fig. 5.17). It remained unclear in 1960 whether the Turnpike Extension would actually be built, however. Therefore, Prudential asked CLA to estimate the costs of preparing two alternative design scenarios: one that anticipated the Extension, which required increasing the elevation of Huntington Avenue so that the road could pass underneath, and another that assumed the absence of the highway.⁶¹

But when the Supreme Judicial Court upended the proposed bundling of the Pike and the Pru, an exasperated Prudential halted construction on the site. The project was shuttered on August 24, 1960, when Prudential ordered the “flooding” of the foundations to save the cost of pumping and to protect the completed work from the elements. Local journalists quickly dubbed the site “Prudential Pond” or “Lake Prudential,” and it stayed a watery or frozen space for nearly two years (fig. 5.18). As discussed in chapter 3, Massachusetts Attorney General Edward McCormack hurried to prepare legislation that amended the state's urban redevelopment law, Chapter 121A, to create the lasting solution to Prudential's insistence on a tax break. With the new law in place, Prudential prepared an application for the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), which had assumed administrative control of the project. The BRA's public hearing in March 1961 thus became a pivotal point in the course of the project. The BRA had to determine whether or not the Prudential Center conformed to the new redevelopment law: was it in

⁶¹ “C. W. Stanton memorandum to Record,” April 1, 1960, CLP, Pru–Plaza & Underground #860, 1960.

the public interest to grant a tax break to a private company that proposed a major real estate project for the rail yard?

Charles Stanton, who worked in Victor Gruen's New York office before CLA, represented CLA at the public hearing and offered a detailed explanation of the architects' design strategy. When his firm first looked at the site, Stanton saw that the railroad easement presented a major challenge to "orderly site development."⁶² When further consideration had to be given to the Mass Pike, the planner's job was made even more difficult. It would have been easier and less expensive to leave an open cut through the site and develop two distinct parcels. But this approach would have damaged the "long range values" of the project that would be preserved only if the land was developed in a singular, unified fashion. This required enclosing the highway easement to insulate for noise, vibration, and fumes and extending a "lid" that covered nearly the entire site. As Stanton explained, "This in effect created an elevated piece of real estate on a single level. It created a base from which the superstructures could rise and on which pedestrians could circulate easily and safely."⁶³

The ring-road was likewise conceived with long-term planning goals in mind—it would relieve traffic pressure from the surrounding streets—but meant that Prudential had willingly abandoned a large portion of buildable land at the perimeter of the site. Stanton reported that only 32% of the site would host "superstructures," with the rest of the space (including, presumably, the ring road itself) open to the public. Prudential's

⁶² Public Hearing, March 22, 1961, Boston Redevelopment Authority archives (hereafter cited as BRA) #579, 46.

⁶³ Ibid.

sacrifice asserted the company's "long range economic and civic values." Stanton's message was that the project's physical unity was itself a civic gesture:

It is in truth, one building; it's completely contiguous, foundations, and substructure, slabs and construction generally. And then the separate buildings or superstructures, if you will, then rise from this 3-story base that covers the entire site.⁶⁴

Prudential's Wes Toole, who also appeared before the BRA, agreed with Stanton's assessment that "whatever was built should be on a common plane as a single, integrated development."⁶⁵ Wes Toole explained to the BRA board that the B&A site was a perfect match for Prudential's Regional Home Office development formula. "One of the most difficult problems in connection with a large building such as the Prudential constructs, is to assemble a site in the city that will be adequate not only for our building, but for parking and landscaping. Usually, this requires the purchase of several pieces of property, and it is oftentimes quite difficult to accomplish." But Prudential was unwilling to compromise on its perception of the ideal insurance campus, complete with "parking and landscaping." The rail yard site was ideal because it was a large, unified site that could be bought in a single purchase. "It was large enough for us to do something really dramatic which would revitalize the city," Toole explained.⁶⁶

The BRA approved Prudential's application, but the company delayed construction until a "test case" of the new law had been tried, and set forth a winter 1962 restart of the project.⁶⁷ When this "friendly action" was decided in Prudential's favor, the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁷ Michael Liuzzi, "Prudential Faces a Winter Start," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 21, 1961, 11.

company was ready to restart the dewatering pumps at the site, and to restart the flow of its corporate capital toward the construction of the Prudential Center.⁶⁸ It was a watershed moment for Boston, and some writers saw the new development as an episode in a great struggle between modernity and tradition:

Old Boston, fighting to free itself from the chains of tradition, is aiming at the complete upheaval, renovation, and replacement of its ancient structures.⁶⁹

A second beginning. March 1962 marked the second beginning for the Prudential Center. Prudential hired the Perini Corporation as contractor for the center section.⁷⁰ But Prudential had scaled back its ambitions for the project and postponed planning and design for the eastern apartment precinct.

Prudential released images of a 9.5-acre parking area in the eastern sector landscaped with trees and shrubbery (figs. 5.19 and 5.20). Ground was broken for the hotel in July 1962. Steelwork on the commercial pavilions and the tower was begun in September 1962 and proceeded apace until the topping out ceremonies were held in January 1963. Perini began to install the aluminum-framed curtain wall in May 1963. With the steel frame rising to the sky, Charles Luckman helped to promote the new district he was helping to create and to spread his gospel of *humanation*.⁷¹ Humanation,

⁶⁸ “Court Weighs Plea on Prudential Center,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 8, 1961, 5; Michael Liuzzi, “Court Says ‘Yes’ to Prudential in Boston,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 20, 1961, 5.

⁶⁹ David Harvey, “Old Boston Pries Chains of Tradition as New Buildings Jab Skyline,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 24, 1961, 17.

⁷⁰ “Prudential Insurance Contract Let to Erect Boston Office Center,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 22, 1962.

⁷¹ Albert D. Hughes, “Architects Seek to ‘Humanate’ Center,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 21, 1962.

Luckman explained to a reporter, was an “architectural process to make the area attractive as a visiting place.”⁷² Luckman gave special emphasis to the Center’s eleven-acre pedestrian plaza that surrounded the central tower (figs. 5.21 and 5.22). Drawing a favorable comparison to Rockefeller Center, Luckman announced that the Pru would feature four times the open area of the New York landmark. The “Prudential Plaza” would be lined with shops and was anchored by the tower at its center. Charles Stanton described it as a “proper setting for people” as well as the foreground to enhance the visual impact of the tower itself.⁷³

A modern modern for a textured tower. If the plazas themselves were not enough to create a human-friendly setting for the 750-foot tall tower, CLA designed a slim channel of water that surrounded its base: a modern moat, transformed from the moat’s original purpose of defense to that of “aesthetic architecture” (fig. 5.23).⁷⁴ The ornamental, reflective pool was not a good fit for Boston’s cold climate, but the architects were undeterred. The architects designed a heating system so that the pool would not freeze over in the winter. Four cast-stone bridges spanned the moat from the plazas to the covered promenades on each side of the glass-walled lobby.⁷⁵ The moat set the tower back from the plazas, reflecting Luckman’s conviction that the tower needed an uncluttered viewing platform to heighten its impact. And, to give the moat a feeling of

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ W. Clifford Harvey, “Medieval Moat to Encircle Prudential ‘Castle’ in Boston.” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 13, 1962, 5.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

“warmth,” which he prized, Luckman advocated placing a sculpture within the moat’s reflecting pools.⁷⁶

For the tower, Charles Stanton aimed for a “lacy . . . textured effect,” which he hoped to obtain by juxtaposing continuous vertical lines with staggered horizontal cross-members. CLA wanted to use an aluminum-framed curtain wall for the tower, filled with panels of structural glass in several shades of blue and green. In September 1962, Stanton met with a professor from the University of Miami’s Housing Research Laboratory to inspect a mockup of the curtain wall that had been furnished by the Reynolds Aluminum Corporation.

The principal purpose of the visit was to check the general appearance of the curtain wall and to appraise the selected glass colors. The colors installed in the mockup match our latest selections. They appear to give the definite contrast between light, medium and dark tones stressed by CL at our last review.⁷⁷

The wall was made of continuous vertical aluminum members and horizontal “fill-in” members, also made of aluminum, and fabricated by Reynolds, the large aluminum company.⁷⁸ “It will not give you the impression of a straight modern glass tower,” Charles Stanton told A.S. Plotkin of the *Globe*. “It will be much ‘warmer’ than, say, the tall buildings going up on Park Avenue.”⁷⁹ The structural glass panels varied subtly in shade, creating a delicate, “lacy” quality as opposed to a more homogenous façade. The

⁷⁶ Luckman made this recommendation after examining the rendering shown in figure 20. “Charles Luckman memorandum to Charles Stanton,” November 9, 1962, CLP, Pru 860.08–Office Building.

⁷⁷ C. W. Stanton, “Inspection visit to Reynolds Curtail-Wall Mockup in Miami, Florida,” September 4, 1962, CLP, Pru–HCA Hotel–Jan. 1961.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ A. S. Plotkin, “Here’s 1962 Preview of Prudential Center As It Will Look in ’64,” *Boston Sunday Globe*, January 7, 1962.

five mechanical floors, given over to the building's electrical and HVAC systems, were faced with aluminum grill work that horizontally segmented the tower's mass. Prudential planned to identify the building with the company's name, spelled out in seven-foot high letters at the very top on the East and West side of the building.

Luckman paid special attention to the interior as well as the exterior of the tower. When he reviewed an image of the "Tower Skyroom," a restaurant at the top of the tower to be operated by Stouffers, Luckman concluded that the mood seemed "far too cold and barren. . . . I think that we should redo this interior so as to show real design and warmth" (fig. 24). Luckman wanted to inject some "design" into the architecture. Soon these images would go into publicity for the project, and he did not want to give the wrong impression.⁸⁰

The "topping out" ceremonies for the Prudential tower were held on January 30, 1963, amid renewed optimism that Prudential would go forward with the development of apartment buildings on the eastern half of the site. In August 1963, Prudential confirmed that it would move ahead with the eastern section of the site and called for two 26-story apartment buildings, each costing around \$20 million (fig. 5.25).⁸¹ The Prudential Center was dedicated on April 19, 1965, when the central and western sections—with tower, commercial pavilions, hotel, and auditorium—were opened to the public. The first two apartment towers opened in the fall of 1967, and a third was added in 1968. The original plans for commercial structures also evolved in the late 1960s. Prudential sought to attract leading department stores and lured Lord & Taylor to anchor the commercial

⁸⁰ "Charles Luckman memorandum to Charles Stanton," November 9, 1962, CLP.

⁸¹ George B. Merry, "Prudential Center to Expand," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 17, 1963, 2.

presence of the Center. In March 1968, Lord & Taylor opened in a purpose-built structure. In 1970, a second office building, initially named the South East Tower and later called 101 Huntington Avenue, opened. In the summer of 1971, Saks Fifth Avenue was open for business.

The Bureaucratic Basis of Design

The enterprise of architecture includes not only creative leaps at the drafting table but also project organization, management, and bureaucracy. The managerial side of architecture is especially salient when the architect is Charles Luckman, who unabashedly viewed architecture as a business. I was able to obtain from Charles Luckman's son, James Luckman, access to the previously unreported archives of Charles Luckman Associates' memos on the Prudential Center project. The memoranda concern a variety of themes: the levels of administrative hierarchy; the fact that, grand plans notwithstanding, the project developed piecemeal to a large extent; and the tensions that developed between constituencies, often ending just short of all-out war.

CLA's role in the project was complicated by the firm's multiple commitments to different tenants of the Prudential Center who needed their own architectural services. CLA was the primary designer—not only of the Prudential tower but also of the hotel, apartment towers, and commercial pavilions, including independent structures for the two department stores, Saks and Lord & Taylor. As the master planners for the project, CLA was also responsible for coordinating the efforts of the small army of contractors and sub-

contractors—all the while subject to Prudential’s expectation that Luckman concentrate on the insurance company’s immediate needs first, and not to dilute its attentions by hustling for other projects or devoting too much time to individual pieces. For Charles Luckman and his lieutenants, it was a juggling act, further complicated by the halting political process that occasionally cast the entire project into doubt.

The New England Merchants Bank. In October 1958, the New England Merchants Bank signed on as one of the first major tenants to commit to the Prudential Center. It was an important vote of confidence from one of Boston’s venerable financial institutions. The bank would construct a new headquarters office and flagship banking hall in one of the four commercial pavilions envisioned in the CLA master plan. Yet the bank building was conceived as an independent structure and would require additional architectural services. Detailed consideration of the new bank structure was delayed until 1962 when Prudential resumed construction of the Center. At that point, CLA secured the design commission from New England Merchants. It was a job that required special attention to interiors. In a gesture to his new clients, Luckman shifted the accounts of his Boston office from the State Street Bank and Trust to New England Merchants.⁸² In a memo to Luckman, Charles Stanton, the architect most directly involved in day to day operations, made a set of staffing proposals to organize design work for the bank:

I propose that Robert Jones handle the over-all job as project architect. He has a good background in architecture and in interiors. I further propose that we transfer to NY from the large LA office interiors staff a top designer, hopefully a man with Bank experience, or we must hire an interiors man from the outside. I believe we can utilize John Hill, who has

⁸² Charles Luckman to N. Preston Breed, Vice President State Street Bank and Trust Company, August 1, 1962, CLP, New England Merchants Bank, Pru Center.

had long experiences directly with First National Bank Architectural Dept. in N.Y. to backstop Jones.⁸³

As reflected in Stanton's recommendations, CLA generally began with building a team composed from the organization's national network of staff members. But despite the breadth of the CLA organization, the firm could not execute all the work internally and hired a group of outside consultants. For the New England Merchants project, these included the mechanical engineers Syska & Hennessy and the lighting consultant Seymour Evans. The Deibold Company was commissioned to design the bank vault doors.

But to complicate the staffing pictures, the bank president Richard Chapman had design ideas of his own. Chapman was concerned about the "character" and "atmosphere" that the bank would project. Perhaps to counter the stereotype of cold-hearted bankers, Chapman wanted his bank to radiate warmth. And he was afraid that the Center's contemporary design could, when applied to the bank, come off as flat and cold. Chapman communicated his ideas to Luckman, including the desire that the banking floor have "a primary 'focus,' which might for example be an extremely fine mural on the wall behind the tellers' area."⁸⁴ Luckman himself weighed in on the bank interiors, and his critique exemplified three aspects of his overall participation in the project as the principal architect: attention to how small design details created overall tone, careful consideration of how plans were represented to clients, and watching the bottom line:

⁸³ "Charles Stanton memorandum to Charles Luckman," May 17, 1962, CLP, New England Merchants Bank, Pru Center.

⁸⁴ "R. W. Jones memorandum to C. W. Stanton," December 18, 1962, CLP, New England Merchants Bank, Pru Center.

1) Care should be taken that the scheme for the main banking floor does not become too busy as a result of the use of too many colors, materials, etc; 2) Sufficient color renderings of the final scheme should be prepared to fully present the concept in a manner easily interpreted by the client; 3) Great care must be taken in developing budgets, and the final design concept presentation to the client must include budgets developed as accurately as possible.

If the Boston bankers were not prepared to fully embrace contemporary design, Luckman did not challenge his clients' preferences. If Chapman wanted a "traditional Georgian room" with a faux fireplace in the directors' meeting suite, he would get one. It was Luckman's job to gratify his clients, not to push an aesthetic agenda, and he reassured Chapman that the banker's "requirements for a handsome and dignified interior design are, in my judgment, being met very satisfactorily."⁸⁵

A Three-in-One Hotel. Prudential solicited proposals from hotel companies to lease and operate the Center's hotel. Boston-based Hotel Corporation of American (HCA) emerged as the leading candidate. Prudential set a \$17,500,000 budget for the project, and hired CLA as the architects.⁸⁶ But Prudential left most of the decisions about hotel construction to HCA—it would be *their* building. HCA proposed a "3-in-1 Hotel" that combined a "modern conventional-type commercial hotel," an "intown motel" (reminiscent of the Back Bay Center's planned motel), and a "deluxe hotel" that offered luxury accommodations.⁸⁷ The hoteliers wanted to bring in a "concept designer" for the

⁸⁵ Charles Luckman to Richard Chapman, April 19, 1963, CLP, New England Merchants Bank, Pru Center.

⁸⁶ "Ron Getty memorandum," December 23, 1960, CLP, Pru-HCA Hotel-July 1960. CLA said they would take a 6% fee (1.2% more than they charged for Prudential's tower, commercial pavilions, and other aspects.)

⁸⁷ "3-in-1 Hotel Due at Prudential Site," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 13, 1960, 2.

interiors—Harry End from Miami—and CLA accepted this plan on the condition that End’s fee not be taken from CLA’s own design budget for the hotel.⁸⁸

End’s specialty was to organize the spatial arrangements, materials, and thematic qualities of interior spaces, and he insisted on making small alterations to CLA designs. The hotel included many places to eat and drink, and End wanted to style them all. For example, he insisted that the Rib Room needed its own bar. (This may have seemed like overkill considering the plans for a Seafood Bar and Polynesian Room Bar.) He called for a draped fabric ceiling treatment for the Turkish Lounge (fig. 5.26). And, in an effort to open up the hotel’s public spaces, End suggested eliminating the entrances that separated the restaurants from the lobby, so that passersby could peer in and circulate more easily. (HCA nixed this idea for security reasons.)⁸⁹

Charles Stanton saw End’s involvement as an aggravation that would slow down the approval process as design moved from concept to working drawings. With End as a filter on the hotel’s side, Stanton complained that his letters to HCA were languishing without prompt replies: “The potential danger of End’s entering the picture . . . lies of course, in the possibility that he will want to make changes on work already approved, with, frankly, the possibility that he may need to justify his participation.”⁹⁰ Luckman himself expressed a personal concern about the hotel project: credit for the design. HCA had failed to mention Luckman’s name in an announcement published in *Hotel World Review and Hotel Management* in September 1960, and Luckman feared that CLA would

⁸⁸ John T. Stofko to James S. Craig, Vice President Staff Services and New Projects Planning, Hotel Corporation of America, July 22, 1960, CLP, Pru–HCA Hotel–July 1960.

⁸⁹ “John King memorandum,” December 5, 1960, CLP, Pru–HCA Hotel–July 1960.

⁹⁰ “C. W. Stanton memorandum,” October 27, 1960, CLP, Pru–HCA Hotel–July 1960.

not receive due credit.⁹¹ But HCA allayed this concern. When Prudential announced the groundbreaking for the 1,000 room, 28-story Hotel America in July 1962, the name of Charles Luckman Associates was attached to the project as “architect.” But Luckman was sorely disappointed when the Sheraton Hotel Company, which had assumed responsibility for the hotel when HCA backed out in 1964, produced a brochure that failed to mention CLA. Luckman was doubly miffed that the hotel had published an out-of-date rendering of the overall Center that showed the eastern half of the site as a landscaped parking garage. By then, Prudential had decided to go forward with two apartment buildings and to create a plaza over most of the balance of the property.⁹²

Cities within a city. Prudential originally planned for as many as six apartment towers, but announced in August 1963 that they would go forward with two towers, each containing 271 apartments.⁹³ Prudential perceived great demand for in-town apartment living. Suburbanites were “rapping on Boston’s door,” eager to leave their detached, single-family homes for more urbane digs. The developers of the West End renewal project also believed this to be the case. Boston had seen very little new residential construction since before the Great Depression, and most rental units were located in fixed-up or remodeled old buildings. For suburban empty-nesters who had grown accustomed to a high-amenity lifestyle, as well as for upwardly mobile young

⁹¹ There was a small flurry of memoranda between CLA architects and Don Perry, CLA’s director of publicity. Perry suggested that CLA architects mention to HCA executives that a mention in future interviews would be appreciated, CLP.

⁹² “Charles Luckman memorandum to Charles Stanton,” August 24, 1964, CLP, Pru–HCA Hotel–Jan. 1961.

⁹³ Merry, “Prudential Center to Expand,” 2.

professionals, there was a demand for “higher-grade apartments.”⁹⁴ And families moving into Boston from the suburbs on the crest of the apartment house boom were seeking homes closer to their workplaces and to the cultural and opportunities of the city.⁹⁵

In August 1963, Prudential president Orville E. Beal announced that the Pru would go ahead, with Luckman appointed to design the residential towers. CLA planned to face the apartments, which were framed in concrete, with “Boston’s traditional red brick,” a departure from the metal and glass that characterized the central plaza part of the project. The architects planned a “tree-studded park-like” plaza area that hovered some 30 feet above Boylston Street—a continuation of the roof that covered a three-story, 700-car garage for residents. A broad, red brick walkway connected the residential quarter to the main plaza (fig. 5.27). The *Globe* noted the intense interest in landscaping: “More than 300 matured trees will be growing in this residential park. More than 600 evergreens and flowering shrubs also will be planted. Tall trees will screen the commercial section of the project from the residential island.”⁹⁶ Within the larger island of the Center, CLA had designed a suite of distinct sub-islands (fig. 5.28). The first tower was planned for young, single people, including 101 studio units, 96 one-bedroom units, 47 two-bedroom units, 23 three-bedroom units, and four luxury penthouse suites. The second tower would have provided a higher proportion of larger units. In 1965,

⁹⁴ W. Clifford Harvey, “Suburbanites Rap on Boston’s Door,” *Christian Science Monitor*, October 28, 1960, 14.

⁹⁵ W. Clifford Harvey, “Building Boom Shapes Up for Boston,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 13, 1962, 21.

⁹⁶ Anthony J. Yudis, “How Twin Apartment Towers Will Rise at Prudential Center,” *Boston Globe*, June 18, 1964.

Prudential and CLA beginning planning a third, “Far East Apartment No. 5” (the first were numbered 1 and 3.)

In 1964, Prudential was in talks with Lord & Taylor about opening a department store in this so-called “far east section” of the Center.⁹⁷ Lord & Taylor, which was owned by the Associated Dry Goods Corporation, hired their own architects, Loewy-Snaith, to design both the exterior shell as well as the interior merchandising layout. Loewy-Snaith turned over their “production drawings” to CLA, which produced the final plans. The building for Lord & Taylor was scheduled to be ready for occupancy in mid-1968 (fig. 5.29).⁹⁸

In July 1967, Prudential officials announced that the 52-story Prudential Tower was mostly filled, and that “recent studies indicate that the demand for prime office space in the city has not been fully met.”⁹⁹ To respond to this need, the Pru unveiled its plan to build a second office tower, with 450,000 square feet of rentable office space and its own three-level, 700-car garage (fig. 5.30). At the same time, Prudential announced a two-story “specialty shop” to be operated by Saks Fifth Avenue (owned by Gimbel Brothers Inc.).¹⁰⁰ Charles Luckman Associates was retained as the architects for these new buildings as well (fig. 5.31). By this time, the first of three residential towers was nearing completion, scheduled for occupancy in the fall of 1967 (fig. 5.32).

Site planning for the second office tower and third apartment building seems to have been developed in Prudential’s own architecture divisions. The Pru’s Alfred

⁹⁷ “Charles Stanton memorandum,” April 27, 1964, CLP, Pru Center Tenants.

⁹⁸ George B. Merry, “Office Tower; Store Planned,” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 28, 1967.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ “Pru Complex Expanding—28-story Office, Garage,” *Boston Globe*, July 27, 1967.

Linkletter mailed a plan as well as rough massing studies to Charles Stanton in 1966 that proposed a 21-story tower that would gross 700,000 square feet, and he sought Stanton's reaction (fig. 5.33).¹⁰¹ The involvement of Linkletter's office in site planning raised issues of who was ultimately responsible for the planning and design of Prudential Center.

Who's Responsible? As CLA's responsibilities for the design of the Prudential Center expanded, the strains between Luckman and his patron, the Prudential Insurance Company, also increased. In particular, Prudential felt that Luckman was not giving enough personal attention to the project. The insurance company expected more direct involvement from the heads of the architectural firm that it engaged. Prudential officials raised this concern in a 1962 memo to CLA:

On all of our other projects such as Mid-America, Houston, Newark, etc., we have always had principals of the architectural firm involved conversant with all phases of the job, thus enabling them to better guide their field representatives.¹⁰²

CLA's organizational chart ran from Luckman himself to Charles Stanton, who ran the firm's New York office, to Serge Petroff, who was the project architect assigned directly to the Prudential Center. Petroff, in turn, managed a team of associate architects. CLA eventually hired H. G. Talboys to serve as the construction manager for the Prudential site. But executives wanted to interact with the "top man." The Prudential's concerns became even greater in 1965, when Serge Petroff resigned from CLA to start his own enterprise. Prudential's Westcott Toole was concerned about the defection and

¹⁰¹ Alfred C. Linkletter to Charles Stanton, October 14, 1966, CLP, Pru-Center Apartments, 1964.

¹⁰² "S. W. Toole and A. C. Linkletter memorandum to CLA," December 3, 1962, CLP, Pru-Miscellaneous-9.61.

dissatisfied with CLA's decisions about a replacement. In August 1965, with the tower, retail esplanade, and hotel open for business, Toole wrote to Luckman about his concerns about the staffing, even threatening to withhold fees:

I know you will agree that this project requires the best talents of CLA and I am sure your organization is capable of doing a satisfactory job if sufficient manpower and direction are devoted to this project. However, unless you reorganize your staff and give us better supervision, we may be forced to consider withholding payments of your fees.¹⁰³

While Prudential worried that Luckman was not personally devoting enough time to the project, CLA had similar concerns about the dedication of the projects' top engineer. The engineering firm was Metcalf & Eddy, the large Boston-based firm. In a memo to Luckman, Charles Stanton complained that Metcalf & Eddy's head, William Eddy, was ignoring the project:

I am questioning, Chuck, whether Bill Eddy is giving any of the necessary top management attention, or even general interest, that this major and complex project must have. Perhaps he is retiring from the firm, in which case we should be informed, especially since the present second echelon handling leaves much to be desired.¹⁰⁴

Eddy, for his part, implied that he resented having to spend time dealing with people at CLA who were below Luckman in the corporate hierarchy. After the opening of the Prudential Center in 1965, there was no further mention of this issue in the archives of letters and memos from either party. We can assume that Luckman made a point to show his personal involvement in the design development work, and (at least on the surface of things) smooth the ruffled feathers of disgruntled Prudential executives.

¹⁰³ S. W. Toole to Charles Luckman, August 5, 1965, CLP, Prudential Center 1965.

¹⁰⁴ "Charles Stanton memorandum to Charles Luckman," October 19, 1960, CLP, Pru-Miscellaneous- 960.

Reflections on Design

Even before the Prudential Center opened, it had become the place that architectural critics—both local and national—loved to hate. For many years, the architecture critic of the *Boston Globe* bestowed an annual “Pru Award” upon what he considered the most objectionable building to grace the city’s skyline that year. “We called it the Pru Award in honor of the ghastly Prudential Center,” Robert Campbell wrote.¹⁰⁵ The criticisms began fifty years ago and have continued to this day.

Among the early critics were ideological allies of the Boston Center Architects, who believed that the Prudential Insurance Company made a grievous aesthetic and sociological error when it retained CLA rather than BCA to design the complex. In 1956, for example, Siegfried Giedion, the Secretary General of CIAM, bemoaned the fact that the residential portion of the Prudential Center would not be built as designed by the BCA:

It was unfortunately replaced by a less than mediocre apartment house project because of so-called ‘vested interests’ and under the pressure of politicians who had no understanding of what Boston could have gained by such a community center for a great city—and of what it has now lost.¹⁰⁶

In strictly aesthetic terms, few would view the Prudential Tower—or even the Center as a whole—as a great success. But despite the persistent criticisms, the Pru has succeeded in many respects, both as a set of office and residential buildings and as a realization of the aspirations of its corporate sponsor, the Prudential Insurance Company,

¹⁰⁵ Robert Campbell, “These for Better Buildings, *Boston Globe*, February 3, 2008.

¹⁰⁶ Giedion, *Architecture You and Me*.

and its host, the city of Boston. We'll never know for sure whether the company, the city, and the architectural world would be better off if Wes Toole, Valentine Howell, and their colleagues had chosen the BCA rather than CLA to design the Pru. But when we undertake this exercise in the hypothetical, we will conclude that the answer is not as clear as the critics might have it.

The critics attack. In the early 1960s there was a feeling of anticipation in Boston, along with a sense of uncertainty. The *Monitor's* Michael Liuzzi dramatized the moment, referring both to the Pru and to the city's other development projects:

Boston today is like a butterfly about to emerge from its cocoon. Metamorphosis has taken place—but the new unspread wings are still hidden and hampered somewhat by the cobwebs of a passing era.¹⁰⁷

But as the opening of the Pru drew near, the critics sharpened their spears. They disdained the green and blue tinted tower as an artistic blight. Perhaps more significantly, they deplored the total concept of the Pru as a setback for urban development. To the *New York Times's* Ada Louise Huxtable, writing in 1964, Prudential Center was a “slick developer’s model dropped into a renewal slot in Anycity, U.S.A.” Huxtable went so far as to call the Pru a “textbook example of urban character assassination” – “rigid,” “routine,” “overscaled,” and even “megalomaniac.”¹⁰⁸ As the opening of the Center drew near in December 1964, the chorus of criticism was so loud that Mayor Collins felt the need to play architectural critic and urge a suspension of judgment. He called the Prudential Center “a citadel which has not forgotten the aesthetic values of a proud heritage. And while we’re on the aesthetic . . . why don’t we

¹⁰⁷ Michael Liuzzi, “Boston Breaks Its Cocoon,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 8, 1962, 9.

¹⁰⁸ Ada Louise Huxtable, “Renewal in Boston: Good and Bad,” *New York Times*, April 19, 1964.

answer a few critics who disdain the design of this huge structure.” Collins waved off those who claimed that the Pru fell short of contemporary modernist buildings then rising in Boston:

It is easy enough to refer irreverently to a major undertaking as a burden on the artistic sense of the public—but who could place the Prudential in a category inferior, say, to the dormitories at Harvard—the Earth Sciences Building at MIT—or even the new Boston City Hall, without proper reference to the surrounding locale? Why don’t we wait and look at the complete relationships before we offer negative opinion.¹⁰⁹

Despite Mayor Collins’s plea, the years have done little to soften the critical rejection of the Pru, most pointedly as a set of structures that did not fit into their urban context. “It ignored the old city around it,” Robert Campbell wrote in 1990, “the city of humanly scaled streets and squares and buildings. Instead, the Pru introduced what was then, foolishly believed to be the model for a city of the future: a place of bold towers and vast open spaces.”¹¹⁰

“You can’t find architecture easier to bash than the Prudential Center,” wrote the architecture critic Philip Acardi in 1994. “It’s a catalog of mid-century design blunders, 27 acres of plazas and skyscrapers that tower over two of Boston’s best Victorian neighborhoods, the Back Bay and the South End.”¹¹¹

“Alas,” Campbell wrote, “the original Pru complex was an ugly alien.” It looked like a “vast tourist capsule from Mars.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ John F. Collins, “The Prudential and Boston—A Dynamic Alliance,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, December 20, 1964, 4.

¹¹⁰ Robert Campbell, “Rebuilding the Pru Disaster,” *Boston Globe*, January 28, 1990, B-33.

¹¹¹ Philip Arcadi, “The Taming of the Pru,” *Progressive Architecture* (October 1994): 82.

¹¹² Robert Campbell and Peter Vanderwarker, “Prudential Center; Cityscapes,” *Boston Globe*, August 2, 1998, 16.

Reconfiguring the retail spaces. From a more practical standpoint, the original Prudential Center merits a mixed review. The office tower, the convention center, and the residential buildings were all commercially successful. In 1974, Prudential's leader of the Northeastern Home Office, Thomas Allsopp, reported that the Prudential Center was 100% rented.¹¹³ In fact, the Sheraton-Boston hotel was in 1974 in the midst of constructing a 450-room addition—a slim slab to the south of the original hotel.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, Prudential's return on investment was disappointing. One of the main reasons was that the Pru had failed as a retail destination.

Luckman's design for the retail plaza was patterned after a Roman Forum, or a southern California shopping arcade, with austere, open-air colonnades framing a central plaza that hovered above street level. In Boston, however, the space proved to be to be a windswept, uncomfortable, and undesirable place. Walter Muir Whitehill called it a “windy world of its own,” divorced from its host city. Whitehill also viewed the retail plaza as a “Chinese wall” that divided the Back Bay from the South End.¹¹⁵

Clearly, heavy winds in the central plaza section and the pedestrian promenades at the base of the tower were serious problems, recognized as early as 1965, soon after the plaza had opened. The Associate General Manager of Prudential's Northeastern Home Office, housed in the Prudential tower, fired off a note to his superior in Newark, the Executive General Manager of Home Office Buildings and Plant Department, that the

¹¹³ Thomas Allsopp, “Boston and the Prudential Center,” *Journal of Contemporary Business* (Spring 1974).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Walter Muir Whitehill and Lawrence Kennedy, *Boston: A Topographical History*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 225.

wind issue in the plaza had reached a crisis phase. Some tenants on the esplanade had trouble opening their doors:

Yesterday afternoon and evening there were very high winds gusting more than 50 miles per hour which again highlighted the serious condition we have on the plaza level. It was virtually impossible for women to open the doors of the drug store. Furthermore, one of our men stayed out by the drug store for 15 or 20 minutes and observed that the doors facing the east would not close for at least ten minutes because of the wind pressure.

If that wasn't enough, the Associate General Manager reported that a few people had almost been blown into the moat. An engineer from New York University was hired to study the wind issue with a scale model wind tunnel, and produced a rudimentary proposal for wind barriers.¹¹⁶

As time went by, it became clear that wind barriers would not be enough. The retail scheme simply did not work. The shops were not accessible to the street and were further isolated by virtue of CLA's "moat" theme. The designers had set off each commercial arcade with a rectangular pool that potential shoppers could only cross at two points. The plaza lacked the comfort of an enclosed shopping center and likewise the careful planning of a narrow mall so that a shopper could walk down a simulated street and survey the shops on either side. Though they faced each other across a plaza, the retail arcades seemed to be "single-sided," explained urban designer Gary Hack, and they "lacked the intensity to seem more than an adjunct to the offices above" (fig. 5.34).¹¹⁷ Especially by the early 1980s, when a new enclosed shopping center, Copley Place, opened adjacent to the Pru, the shops at Prudential Center had far fewer shoppers than expected. This, in turn, cut into the Prudential's income.

¹¹⁶ Donald Manchee to Art Linkletter, September 2, 1965, CLP, Pru Center 1965.

¹¹⁷ Gary Hack, "Updating Prudential Center," *Urban Land* (October 1993): 88.

Motivated primarily by commercial reality, rather than by any new urban vision, in the early 1980s Prudential began to look at how it might revamp the complex to improve the retail environment. As noted above, one of the problems with Luckman's scheme for the Prudential Center was that the plazas were too wide to create a cohesive, street-like mall environment. The new plan—designed by a partnership between Carr, Lynch, Hack and Sandell of Cambridge, and Sikes Jennings Kelly & Brewer of Houston—envisioned Prudential Center as a series of enclosed streets and blocks, much like any other part of the city. The new shop fronts placed within the interior, skylit “street arcades” had bowed display windows and projecting signs. Planners encouraged individuality in storefront design. New public spaces were placed at the intersections of the arcade paths, including a 90' x 90' Center Court, the “central city square of Prudential Center.”¹¹⁸ In addition to the new retail program, planners envisioned a third office tower and luxury condominiums. The plan later expanded to include a new hotel in the eastern part of the Prudential Center facing Boylston Street, which was recently built.

In the 1980s and early 90s, the standards of “good urbanism” had turned from open plazas to “busy streets.”¹¹⁹ In revamping the Prudential Center, planners invoked the language of traditional urban fabric and small-scale place-making as correctives to the old Pru, which seemed both out of scale and out of context. The new plan endeavored to turn what had been viewed as an island separating the Back Bay from the South End into a bridge connecting them. The goal, according to one architect with Carr, Lynch, Hack

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Campbell, “Rebuilding the Pru Disaster.”

and Sandell, was “to knit the Prudential Center into its context.”¹²⁰ Pru and its designers also made a specific effort to take account of community concerns. At first, Prudential simply announced an ambitious plan to expand the program on the site, but quickly faced opposition from neighborhood groups in the adjacent communities. Kevin White, Boston’s Mayor from 1968 to 1984, insisted on a new approach along a “participatory model,” and created the Prudential Property Advisory Committee, a consortium of 22 neighborhood, civic, and business groups to oversee, along with the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the development of a new plan.¹²¹ PruPAC, as the group was called, was given authority to establish planning guidelines, evaluate design concepts, and assess environmental mitigation issues. What had previously been mediated through an internal bureaucratic process between corporations was now worked through an ostensibly public process.

What If . . . ? Although they did not express it in so many words, critics of the Pru’s design seemed to bemoan the fact that the project was entrusted to CLA—viewed as more or less of an aesthetic philistine—rather than to the modernist greats of assembled in the Boston Center Architects. As the *Globe*’s Robert Campbell tartly observed, “Luckman sold soap better than he designed buildings.” The Prudential Center’s original architecture has been an unceasing target of critical barbs. Campbell recently opined that “the tower’s aluminum-curtain wall . . . still looks like mesh you’d pull down over the front of your pawnshop to defy burglars.”¹²² The Prudential tower

¹²⁰ Mark Pickering, “The Pru Tries to Get it Right the Second Time,” *Boston Business Journal* August 24, 1992.

¹²¹ Charles Tseckares, “The Politics of Development,” *Urban Land* (September 2001).

¹²² Campbell and Vanderwarker, “Self-Centered,” *Boston Globe*, March 13, 2005, 62.

skin was part of a contemporary trend toward a softer modernism that used colors and grills and screens to create texture instead of the more austere glass façades championed by practitioners like Mies van der Hohe. It is possible that if the Prudential façade had been more successful, or better received by critics, the project as a whole might have also been considered more of an aesthetic success.

What if the Pru had made a different decision and enlisted Gropius, Belluschi, Bogner, and their fellow BCA architects to transform the work they had done on the Back Bay Center into the Prudential's Northeastern Home Office complex? Would the product have been received more enthusiastically by the architectural community? And would it have better stood the test of time?

We can only imagine what a BCA-designed Prudential Center would have looked like by extrapolating from the designs for the unbuilt Back Bay Center. Instead of the imposing tower with PRUDENTIAL across the top, we might have had a pinkish pillbox of a building without any overtly commercial adornment. Instead of retail courts that spilled away from the tower toward the ring road, we might have had a more concentrated public space around the tower and an enclosed shopping mall.

Could it have been brought off successfully? Perhaps. But there would have been many obstacles and challenges. First, we don't know what changes the BCA would have had to make to stay within the Prudential's budgetary constraints. Second, it might have been difficult for the Prudential businessmen and the BCA visionaries to work together. For all of the strains between the Pru and CLA, there was still a certain rapport among businessmen that might have been more difficult to achieve with BCA. In terms of aesthetic distinction, the BCA-designed tower might have met the same critical fate as

the Pan Am tower built over the air rights of the New York Central Railroad behind Grand Central Terminal, which was designed by essentially the same group that worked on the Back Bay Center. The Pan Am building was maligned by critics as an ungainly intrusion in the midtown landscape, and has been associated with the “shattering of the modernist dream.”¹²³ More fundamentally, the Back Bay Center represented an urban vision not all that different from CLA’s Prudential Center, and might have met the same resistance from critics. Both embodied an insulated plan, divorced from the streets of the surrounding neighborhoods. Most critically, how well would a BCA-designed Prudential Center have served the function that was paramount to the Pru: to cement the bargain between the corporation and the city and thus to nurture an extended downtown for Boston?

In the last analysis, a balanced appraisal of the Prudential Center must include consideration of the project on the terms of its own sponsors and designers. In fact, Luckman’s Prudential Center achieved to a large extent the company’s desire to place its own stamp on Boston by anchoring a major expansion of the city’s downtown. Since the mid-1960’s, Boston’s “second downtown” in the Back Bay has steadily grown, to become a vital and well-integrated part of the city landscape. This growth has been spurred by many developments separate from the Pru, including the Copley Square development and the John Hancock Tower, completed in 1976. When coupled with cultural and religious institutions—the expanded Boston Public Library, the Museum of Fine Art, Symphony Hall, and the Christian Science headquarters—the area has become a

¹²³ Meredith L. Clausen, *The Pan Am Building and the Shattering of the Modernist Dream* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005).

commercial and cultural magnet. In the context of the Back Bay developments of the past twenty years, the Pru is no longer an “ugly alien.” Rather, it is the beacon of a vibrant extended downtown area.

The Pru’s critical role in facilitating automobile access to Boston has also stood the test of time. The Mass Pike Extension, choreographed in the financial and legal *pas de deux* between the Pike and the Pru discussed in Chapter 4 continues to work effectively, making accessible not only the Pru itself but also the entire expanded Boston downtown, both commercial and cultural. More recently, the Extension itself has been extended, through the massive undertaking known as the Big Dig, to permit ready automobile access from the west to the “old downtown,” to Logan Airport in East Boston, and to the regional network of highways. When a driver approaches Boston from the west, he does not see what Campbell described as a “vast tourist capsule from Mars.” Rather, he sees the lodestar of a midtown business district that is a signal and integral part of the city.

Conclusion:

Insuring the City

Insure (transitive verb)

1.a. To provide or arrange insurance for: *a company that insures homeowners and businesses.*

b. To acquire or have insurance for: *insured herself against losses; insured his car against theft.*

2. To make sure, certain, or secure.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition (2000)¹

This work is a case study of insurance, in both of its senses. We have examined the role of the Prudential, one of the nation’s largest insurance companies, as a shaper of the contemporary landscape in American cities. And we have looked at the ways in which the Prudential “insured” Boston, by serving as a financial guarantor, a protector against urban blight and obsolescence, and as a securer not only of the landscape but also of the public realm more generally.²

¹ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000). www.bartleby.com/61/, accessed May 22, 2009. *The American Heritage Dictionary* is published by the Houghton Mifflin Company, an important Boston institution for more than a century. In 1992, Houghton Mifflin moved its offices from downtown to a new building at 222 Berkeley Street in the Back Bay, three blocks from the Prudential Center.

² The links between insurance, assurance (or confidence-giving), and security are deeply embedded in language and social life. See, for example, “ensure,” Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ensure, accessed May 22, 2009: “Ensure, insure, and assure are interchangeable in many contexts where they indicate the making certain or insurable of an outcome, but ensure may imply a virtual guarantee (the government has ensured the safety of the refugees) while insure sometimes stresses the taking of necessary measures

The introductory chapter set the stage, presenting the corporate context in which the Prudential, the self-styled Rock of Gibraltar, established its massive promontories in American cities. Like the railroads of the nineteenth century, the insurance giants of the twentieth established elaborate bureaucratic structures and, in some respects, became quasi-governmental entities, interacting in complex ways with government and with other public institutions. As part and parcel of its role as Insurer, the Prudential made a commitment to protect American cities—in particular, the locations of its Regional Home Offices—against losses, both financial and geographical. Chapter 1 explored Prudential’s urban policy in greater detail, examining the company’s adoption of a decentralized corporate structure and its establishment of regional home offices in cities throughout America. Each RHO built its own building in ways that shaped the landscape of its home city. The case of Chicago, in particular, presaged the study of Boston by illustrating the complex interplay of corporate policy and governmental urban policy.

Chapter 2 presented the financial and cultural constraints, and the architectural backdrop of Boston, the home-to-be of Prudential’s Northeastern Home Office (NEHO). Boston, like other American cities, was preoccupied with urban obsolescence and renewal, and it erected a political and legal structure to try to facilitate such redevelopment. As detailed in Chapter 3, when the Prudential came to Boston, it had to navigate its way through these political structures and, in the process, became an “urban redevelopment company” in its own right.

beforehand (careful planning should insure the success of the party), and assure distinctively implies the removal of doubt and suspense from a person’s mind (I assure you that no harm will be done). Secure implies action to guard against attack.”

Chapter 4 demonstrated how the development of the Prudential Center became inextricably bound with the development of Boston's road system and, in particular, the extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike into downtown Boston. The interplay of the Pike and the Pru was in the first instance geographical, because the Pru's intended location was an abandoned rail yard on the outskirts of the central downtown. This location was pivotal to the Pike's plans to make the city more accessible to automotive traffic. The interplay was in the second instance legal and political: the Pru navigated a triangular relationship with the Pike and the Boston Redevelopment Authority to gain recognition—and favored tax status—as a quasi-public actor that was part of the legislatively sanctioned fight against urban blight. The passage to quasi-public status was a complicated and sometimes perilous one, including side-trips to the highest court in Massachusetts to pass on the legality of the enterprise. The Prudential indeed became an “urban redevelopment corporation,” in reality as well as in legal fiction: the Pru, together with the Pike, became the mover of a major shift in the Boston landscape, expanding the “downtown” to a second midtown area.

Chapter 5 examined the design choices made by the Prudential for their Boston regional office, beginning with the selection of a “businessman” architect, Charles Luckman, and looked closely at the bureaucratic aspects of the design process itself. The Pru has never been loved by the architectural critics. And, indeed, some aspects of the Center, such as its retail spaces, were at least initially colossal failures. Yet the overall plan of the Pru—especially after it was reworked in the 1980s and 90s—achieved many of its important goals. As such, the Prudential Center has had a lasting impact on the landscape of Boston and, in several senses, insured the city's survival and growth. It

instilled the city with new financial confidence, it protected the city from obsolescence, and it invested in the city's public realm.

Did the Pru's shaping of Boston's physical, financial, and cultural landscape coincide with the best interests of the city? The answer to this question remains a matter of one's perspective, whether architectural, political, or social. One measure of the success of this study may be the extent to which it accommodates the informed consideration of this question.

Insuring the City by Instilling Financial Confidence

As he craned his head in 1964 to look up at the Pru's newly completed 52-story tower, Mayor John Collins saw much more than an office building. It was a "bellwether of the renaissance of a city determined to regain its rightful place among the top municipalities of the world."³ Boston had obtained the imprimatur of a great corporation that demonstrated its confidence in the city's future by constructing its Northeastern Home Office complex there. When the project was first announced, the Pru's president, Carrol Shanks, expressed the "firm conviction on our part that Boston faces a dynamic future. . . . We believe in Boston."⁴ Prudential's confidence in Boston was threefold: in the economic prospects of the city and region, in the high-skilled labor force from which it

³ John F. Collins, "The Prudential and Boston—A Dynamic Alliance." *Boston Sunday Herald*, December 20, 1964, 3.

⁴ Carrol M. Shanks, "We Believe in New England," Prudential Archives (hereafter cited as PA) 10-42.

would draw new employees, and in the local political regime that would deliver the incentives needed to facilitate Pru's investment.

After John Hynes unseated James Curley from the mayor's office in 1949, he looked for a big project to jumpstart the urban service economy and the city's real estate market. Hynes saw the B&A yards as the perfect site for such a project. He lobbied Prudential to consider it for the Northeastern Home Office and dangled the possibility of a tax break. The mayor first proffered an informal agreement that established a predictable tax schedule. But Prudential would be satisfied only by a legally binding pact, insulated from the challenges of local rivals. The next solution would have sheltered Prudential under the tax-free umbrella of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority. This solution was rejected by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, which could not imagine the "public purpose" of ordinary real estate development. In response to this rejection, the Massachusetts legislature amended the state redevelopment law (Chapter 121A) to certify Prudential as a limited-dividend urban redevelopment corporation empowered to develop land in the public interest. The Supreme Judicial Court approved the new law, finally adopting a "modern view of public purpose."⁵ The "modern view" recognized that "blight" could be defined as any parcel that would not otherwise be redeveloped by the "ordinary operations of private enterprise."

The Pru was a centerpiece of projects that instilled confidence in Boston as a modern city built on centuries old foundations. One might have supposed that the growth of the Back Bay area would draw companies and shoppers from downtown and thus threaten the downtown area. John Collins acknowledged this in 1964: "The fear has

⁵ Lewis Weinstein, "Urban Renewal in Massachusetts," *Massachusetts Law Quarterly* (1962).

often been expressed in the past that the Pru would create another downtown on the other side of the City, thus cutting the City in half.” The evidence, albeit circumstantial, was otherwise. “Recent activities attest to the fact that planning, private enterprise and redevelopment have co-operated to effect a city-wide renaissance rather than sectional competition.”⁶ In 1964, Prudential executive Wes Toole was able to say, with some justification, “today, Boston is confidently in the midst of a billion-dollar building boom.”⁷ Among the first to jump into the new building arena was the State Street Bank, the flagship tenant of a \$20 million, 30-story tower in the financial district. Other Boston banks were soon to follow, and by the mid-1970s Boston had a new, high-rise business district.

Few of the new commercial projects followed the urban redevelopment model established by 121A. Most firms, presumably, did not want the burden of establishing a public purpose, and the practice of ad hoc tax agreements between the mayor and developers persevered. Yet Prudential was often credited for igniting the building activity. When he surveyed “tomorrow’s Boston—a city of new scale and grandeur,” one journalist concluded that “the turning point for the city came in the late 1950s when the Prudential Insurance Company of America decided to build a multimillion-dollar center on soon to be abandoned railroad yards in the Back Bay.”⁸

It is difficult to isolate specific causes and effects in the context of an evolving national, regional, and urban economy. Yet there is reason to believe that the Pru's

⁶ John F. Collins, “The Prudential and Boston,” 4.

⁷ S. Westcott Toole, untitled, *Boston Sunday Herald*, December 20, 1964, 4.

⁸ George B. Merry, “Booming Boston Reaches Skyward,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 5, 1965, 9.

success in bringing off its challenging "urban renewal" project emboldened others to proceed with ambitious projects, both in the Back Bay—where the John Hancock announced plans in the late 1960s to surpass the Pru in height with a 60-story tower—and in the old financial district. We may hypothesize that in the domain of urban development, as in financial transactions and other domains of life, confidence can be contagious: when public, quasi-public, and private actors see successful urban ventures, supported by public-private cooperation, they are more ready to take such risks and face such challenges themselves.⁹

Insurance as Protecting against Obsolescence

If providing financial security is akin to life insurance—guaranteeing that funds will continue to be available to support the enterprise (whether a family or a city)—protecting against obsolescence is perhaps more analogous to health insurance or long-term care insurance. The city, like the individual, inevitably ages and takes on a new shape. But

⁹ Social scientists have analyzed the social nature of confidence and its effects on investment. A central tenet of *Animal Spirits*, by the economists George A. Akerlof and Robert J. Shiller, is that “when people make significant investment decisions, they must depend on confidence.” The effect of confidence is not an entirely rational process, as standard economic theory would suggest, but in large part an emotional decision of individual actors that depends on “perceptions of other people’s confidence, and of other people’s perceptions of other people’s confidence. . . . Just as diseases spread through contagion, so does confidence, or lack of confidence.” Akerlof and Shiller, *Animal Spirits: How Human Psychology Drives the Economy, and Why It Matters for Global Capitalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 13, 55. Similarly, the organizational researcher Rosabeth Moss Kanter defines confidence as “positive expectations for favorable outcomes” and explains that it can be shaped by leaders who inspire initiative and innovation. She concludes that “Confidence influences the willingness to invest—to commit money, time, reputation, emotional energy, or other resources—or to withhold or hedge investment.” Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Confidence: How Winning Streaks and Losing Streaks Begin and End* (New York: Crown Business, 2004).

urban redevelopment ventures such as that spearheaded by the Pru may help to insure that the city remain healthy and viable.

Wes Toole pointed to the Prudential Center as an example of Prudential's commitment to solving "major urban problems of building in metropolitan areas." This was true in two ways: Prudential had awakened Boston's business leaders to a new era of investment in their own city, and Prudential helped modernize Boston's physical landscape. "For the first time in the building of a downtown real estate project," Toole said, "the needs of both pedestrians and motorists will be successfully met in a single architectural plan."¹⁰

Until 1920, accessibility to the business district was defined by mass transit. But after 1920, the "riding habit" declined and more Americans began driving cars and patronizing outlying business districts.¹¹ City leaders faced a two-pronged crisis: the drift of business activity from the center to more accessible districts and intense traffic congestion in the core. The crisis of decline, obsolescence, and abandonment was well represented in contemporary urban discourse.¹² Urban analyst Raymond Vernon observed that the rise of cars in the CBD had "taxed the obsolescent street system of the area almost beyond endurance." He identified "Boston's narrow crooked street system" as one example of obsolescence that contributed to congestion, a factor that pushed

¹⁰ Wes Toole, *Boston Herald*, 1964.

¹¹ Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880–1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 250.

¹² See Robert A. Beauregard, *Voice of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993).

business functions to the fringes of the center city.¹³ The challenges posed by cars in the city and the cost of modernization were central to traffic expert Wilfred Owen's analysis of the "metropolitan transportation problem."¹⁴

The Pike's William F. Callahan assigned himself the mission to fix all that and modernize Boston's transportation landscape. His answer was better highway access, and he seized on the B&A corridor as the most efficient route from the western suburbs to the center city. Unwilling to cede control to the state's Department of Public Works (which he had once headed) and wait for federal funding to trickle in, Callahan advocated private financing of the Boston Extension through the fickle bond market—a market that was ultimately fortified by Prudential's commitment to purchase a large measure of the bonds. Together, the Pike and the Pru were partners in converting disused railroad infrastructure into a physically joined and self-contained landscape organized around the car.

Urban redevelopment in the 1950s and 60s was frequently centered around railroad sites. Railroads had helped to construct the industrial metropolis—the Prudential Center site had been a marsh before the railroads traversed it and filled it with land—but after World War II many planners saw urban rail infrastructure as outmoded sources of decay and impediments to growth. The Prudential's investments in both Chicago and Boston marked the passing of the Octopus—the nineteenth century railroad trust—and the ascent of the Mighty Pump—the insurance industry. Like other insurance companies

¹³ Raymond Vernon, "The Changing Economic Function of the Center City," in *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy*, ed. James Q. Wilson (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1966), 9.

¹⁴ Wilfred Owen, *The Metropolitan Transportation Problem* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1966). See also Wilfred Owen, *Cities in the Motor Age* (New York: Viking Press, 1959).

acting in American cities, Prudential used its immense resources to produce white collar office landscapes over the embers of dying rail facilities.

The Pike and the Pru also embodied a new urban form intended to curb the decentralization of the city's office and commercial functions by mimicking the suburban logic of accessibility.¹⁵ Victor Gruen proposed this vision in its most ambitious form for downtown Fort Worth, which he wanted to convert into a pedestrian precinct ringed by highways and parking garages. Wilfred Owen called it a “total strategy for attacking obsolescence and restoring vitality” to the urban center.¹⁶ On a smaller scale, urban renewal was creating opportunities for private developers to assemble large sites, superblocks, and produce integrated building complexes. In 1964, the critic Mildred Schmertz pointed to the Prudential Center as one example of this proliferating urban form, the “downtown center,” where architects were more likely to design complexes of buildings—“self-contained little cities”—than individual buildings.¹⁷ The new business centers were “welcome islands of safety for pedestrians . . . surrounded by elaborate traffic arteries.”¹⁸

A single successful project may also have wide-ranging effects by setting a standard that others are motivated to emulate. The Pru's Thomas Allsopp, president of the Northeastern Home Office, explained Boston's new office buildings this way: “There

¹⁵ Government and insurance companies were the major patrons of the new urban form. Along with the Prudential Center, Schmertz mentioned Constitution Plaza in Hartford, financed by Travelers Insurance Company, as another example of the “downtown center,” along with the Port Authority of New York's World Trade Center and Government Center in Boston.

¹⁶ Owen, *Cities in the Motor Age*, 67.

¹⁷ Mildred F. Schmertz, “Planning the Downtown Center,” *Architectural Record* (March 1964): 177.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

seems to be a kind of corporate ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ that made many old buildings look inadequate to their owners after Prudential Center appeared on the Boston scene.”¹⁹ Air-conditioned and accessible to suburban commuters, the Prudential tower immediately defined “Class A” office space in Boston. By participating in the development of a new urban form—the “downtown center”—and by raising the standard for office space and related amenities, the Pru played a critical role in insuring Boston against obsolescence.

Insuring the Public Realm

To mark the dedication of the Prudential Center in 1965, Prudential organized a symposium called “The Free Society and Its Posture in World Affairs.” It was held in the Grand Ballroom of the Pru’s Sheraton-Boston hotel and broadcast on WHDH television. Prudential engaged Walter Cronkite to moderate the forum and invited such luminaries as U.N. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson and former Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden to participate as panelists.²⁰ The purpose of the forum was to promote Prudential as a leading sponsor of public discourse and to establish the Prudential Center as Boston’s chief site for such discourse. It demonstrated Prudential’s commitment to playing a central role not only in Boston’s landscape and financial life but also in its public realm and culture.

¹⁹ Thomas Allsopp, “Boston and the Prudential Center,” *Journal of Contemporary Business* (Spring 1974). PA 10–43, 96.

²⁰ Cronkite was a natural choice: Prudential was the chief sponsor of the newsman’s weekly television program, “The Twentieth Century.”

The dedication was also timed to coincide with the finish of the Boston Marathon, whose finish line was moved from Boylston Street to the north plaza of the Prudential Center for the occasion.²¹ The Marathon is a Boston institution run every year since 1897.²² Like the Freedom Trail, the Red Sox, and the Boston Pops, it is part of the enduring and continuing culture of the city. The Pru made a concerted effort to insert itself into that culture. The effort continued in the years that followed the dedication. The Pru became heavily involved with local philanthropies and continued to mobilize the Prudential Center itself as “an action place where things happen in Boston.”²³ Prudential conscientiously programmed the Center’s open plaza spaces, holding summer band concerts, square dancing, and ice-skating on the south plaza.

To be sure, these efforts were all parts of Prudential’s advertising and promotional activities. The company was seeking to promote itself in order to increase the sales of insurance policies in the seven-state northeast district. In 1974, NEHO’s director Thomas Allsopp reported that this goal had been achieved. But was there more to Prudential’s strategy? The Prudential also wanted to “earn for the company the reputation of a good corporate citizen in Boston and New England.”²⁴ Within a short span of years following the opening of its NEHO, the Prudential had transformed itself from an outsider into a local. Thomas Allsopp reported that “Prudential now is regarded as a full-fledged member of the Boston business community and has a presence today in the state and the

²¹ The marathon finish line would remain at the Prudential Center for the next twenty years.

²² In 1965 the marathon was won by Japanese runner Morio Shigematsu in a time of 2:16:33. Women could not officially enter the marathon until 1971. <http://www.bostonmarathon.org/BostonMarathon/History.asp>

²³ Allsopp, “Boston and Prudential Center,” 94.

²⁴ Ibid.

region which is far more important than it was a decade ago.”²⁵ As such, the Pru was seeking to insure not only individuals’ lives and property in Boston and the northeast but also to play a major role in securing Boston’s public realm.

The Pike, the Pru, and the Public Interest

It is possible for an insurance company—or any private, for-profit corporation—to legitimately represent the public interest?

Prudential’s investment in Boston adhered to the policies that governed Pru’s other Regional Home Office developments. Each was a semi-autonomous regional satellite organized around a company-wide set of principles. Boston is a case study of how Prudential’s policies would shape American cities, a local instance of the company’s national urban vision. It may strike the reader as ironic that Prudential asserted urban values through a process of corporate decentralization. The “specter of decentralization” has haunted downtown leaders for nearly as long as the concentrated city has itself existed.²⁶ Prudential addressed those fears by consciously locating the regional offices within city limits, rather than in the suburbs, if not in the central business district itself. As Prudential strategist Wes Toole proclaimed, “The Prudential believes strongly in the future of the downtown city.”²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., 95.

²⁶ Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall*, 381.

²⁷ S. Westcott Toole, “The Outlook for the Central City,” speech to Real Estate Board of Newark, 1955, PA 01–123.

The geographer James Vance tells how insurance companies were among a vanguard group of firms that helped established midtown districts in American cities after World War I.²⁸ Vance assumed that tall buildings located outside the established center could be explained by “the desire to cluster together very large units of office space,” but not from the “advertising uses of a tall building.” This fact was buttressed by Vance’s observation that “by the years after World War II most large insurance headquarters had abandoned the downtown, as had Connecticut General in Hartford . . . constructing massive but relatively low office buildings even in rather open country.”²⁹ Connecticut General’s abdication of a CBD location demonstrated a larger trend: the suburbanization of corporate headquarters.³⁰ But our study of the Prudential’s urban and architectural policies for the Regional Home Offices requires a revision of Vance’s assumptions. Prudential acted on an institutionalized urban consciousness and explicitly sought the “extra dividends” derived from an midtown location.³¹ It is in part that by building in a new area, the company may be able to have a higher profile: the big “Prudential” emblazoned across the skyline; the impact of leading a greater reshaping of the city; the

²⁸ Vance illustrated this by pointing to Boston, where the New England Mutual Insurance Company of Boston relocated from Post Office Square to the Back Bay in the 1930s. James E. Vance Jr., *The Continuing City: Urban Morphology in Western Civilization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 480.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The most iconic examples including IBM and General Foods, both of which moved from Manhattan to Westchester County. See Alexandra Lange, “Tower Typewriter and Trademark: Architects, Designers and the Corporate Utopia, 1956-1964” (Ph.D. dissertation, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 2005) and Louise Mozingo, “Campus, Estate, and Park: Lawn Culture Comes to the Corporation,” in *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies after J. B. Jackson*, eds. Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

³¹ S. Westcott Toole, speech to Mortgage Loan Conference, Skytop, Pennsylvania, November 14, 1957, PA 01–123.

chance for an insurance company (a company specializing in managing risk) to take a bold urban step and to be recognized for doing so.

The Pru's decision to reshape Boston by building its tower over the abandoned rail yard in the Back Bay reinforces the view that the Prudential was a special type of urban actor: a company with resources and patience to implement a national policy that was informed by its distinct civic identity. Prudential shared this attitude and sense of scale with the federal government. Indeed, Prudential was "seeing like a state."³² Working in tandem—and sometimes in tension—the Pike and the Pru took on many of the functions of the state by defining the public interest and together planning the future of Boston.

Should private, for-profit companies be playing such a prototypically public role in the shaping of cities? Are public-private urban partnerships desirable or even genuinely possible? The case of the Prudential Center can be used to support more than one set of answers to these questions. "Insuring" financial viability, "protecting" against obsolescence, and "securing" the public realm, as we have described these functions, may all sound like unalloyed boons to the city. On the other hand, the functions and incentives of insurance companies do not coincide in all respects with the needs and goals of the larger community. Indeed, some of the Pru's decisions that have been examined in this study may appear to be peculiarly opposed to the general welfare of the citizens of Boston. By its maneuvering for tax breaks, the Pru may have served its own goals of financial risk management but, at the same time, may have avoided paying its fair share of the freight. And the Pru may also be sharply criticized—and indeed has been rather

³² James Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

unremittingly—for eschewing a design that might have more fully embraced the surrounding city and for building an undistinguished tower that marked (some would say “marred”) the Boston skyline with the word “PRUDENTIAL.” In the last analysis, the Prudential “insured” Boston in many senses of the word.

Figures



Figure I.1. Aerial photograph of the interchange of the Massachusetts Turnpike with Route 128 and the extension toward Boston, ca. 1965. Prudential tower (and the old, shorter 1947 John Hancock tower to its left) appear in the horizon. The photo was commissioned by the Perini Corporation, the contractor who worked extensively on both projects. Courtesy of the Perini Corporation Archives, Framingham, Massachusetts.

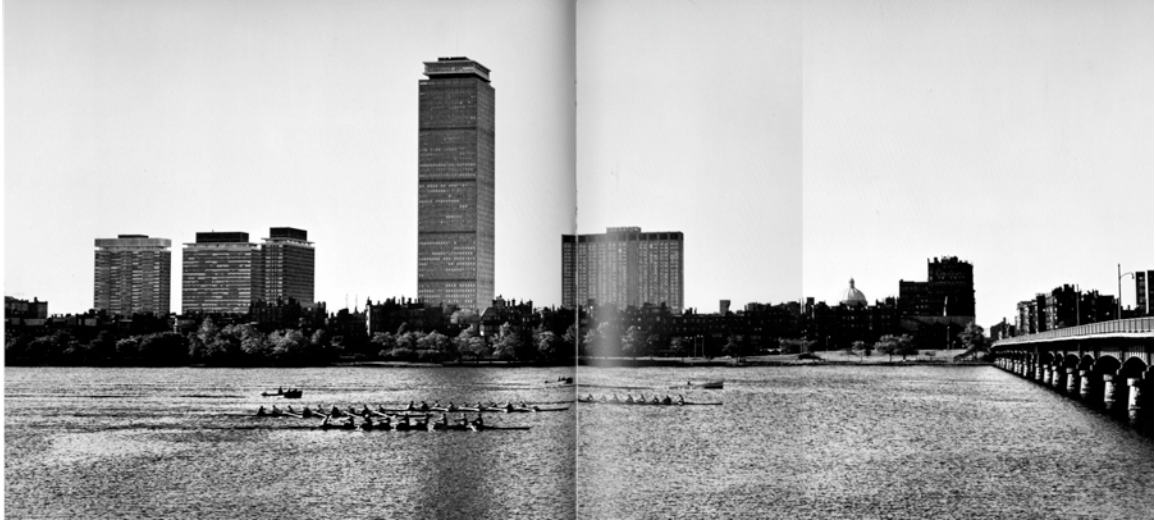
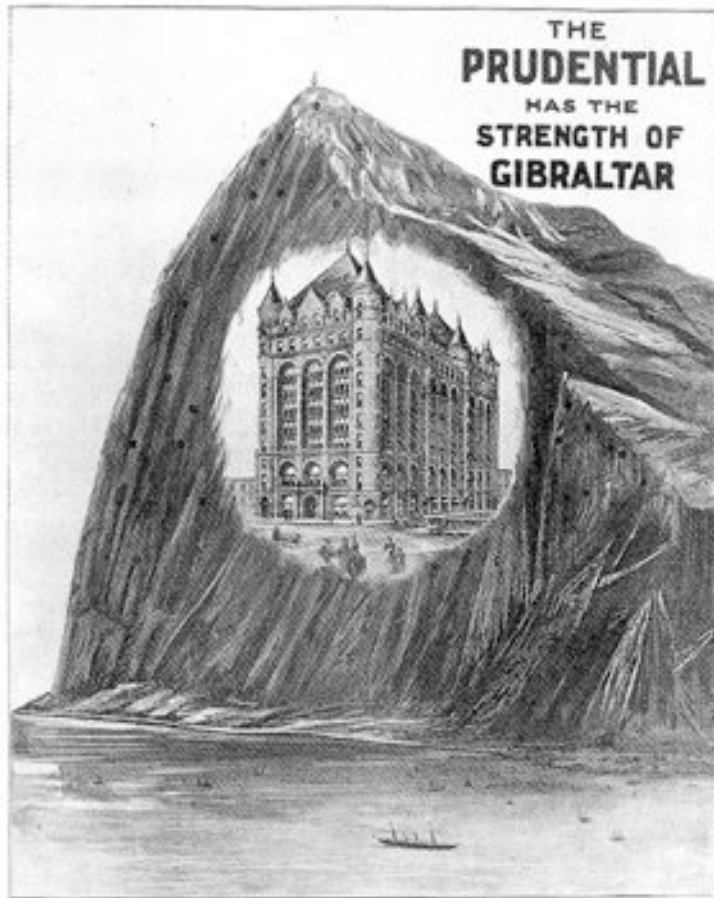


Figure I.2. Photograph of Boston's Prudential Center from the north bank of the Charles River in Cambridge. To the right of the 52-story tower is the Sheraton Boston hotel, and to the left are the Pru's three apartment buildings. The source is a bound catalogue of Charles Luckman Associates (CLA) projects. The catalogue is undated but was probably produced in the mid-1970s. At the time, CLA maintained "fully staffed offices" in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Phoenix. The 1976 John Hancock Tower, designed by Pei, Cobb, & Fried, if it were built at the time of this photograph, would be out of the picture to the left.



THE MASSIVE BUILDING PICTURED ABOVE IS OWNED AND OCCUPIED BY
THE PRUDENTIAL INSURANCE CO. OF AMERICA
AS ITS HOME OFFICE AT NEWARK, N. J. JOHN T. PRUDEN, President.
FROM WHICH IS CONDUCTED ITS VAST BUSINESS OF LIFE INSURANCE FOR MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN.

Figure I.3. Prudential advertisement from the 1890s, where an image of the home office building in Newark is embedded in the corporation's icon, the Rock of Gibraltar. The text below reads: "The massive building pictured above is owned and occupied by the Prudential Insurance Company of America as its home office in Newark, N.J., from which is conducted its vast business of life insurance for men, women, and children." Source: *Harper's Weekly*, 19 December 1896, 1256, reproduced in Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 37.



Figure I.4. Map of roads in the Boston region, produced by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority ca. 1960, showing basic highway forms to be built by the end the 1960s. Around the peninsula of Boston, note the dotted line of the “Inner Belt” that was never constructed. The bold line of the Turnpike Extension—its interchange with Route 128 is at the left side of the image—pierces through Newton, Brighton, and the Back Bay along the route of the Boston & Albany railroad tracks and passes through the Prudential Center, which is colored-in and labeled in the map, before meeting the Central Artery in the vicinity of South Station, the railroad’s urban terminal. The Central Artery snakes through the inner city along what was Atlantic Avenue, and links the Northeast and Southeast Expressways, both prescribed in the 1948 Master Highway Plan for Metropolitan Boston.



Figure I.5. “Back Bay Train Yards,” by C. Roy Morse, 1939. Source: Thomas O’Connor, *Building a New Boston: Politics and Urban Renewal, 1950–1970* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 99, courtesy of the Bostonian Society.



Figure I.6. A nineteenth-century promotional postcard produced by the Prudential Insurance Company of America to introduce the concept of the “field agent” who would collect weekly premiums for life insurance policies. Source: William H. A. Carr, *From Three Cents a Week: The Story of the Prudential Insurance Company of America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1975).



Figure I.7. Aerial photograph, probably taken in 1964, of the Prudential Center and the Boston Extension of the Mass Pike which passes through the rail yard site and continues on to meet the Central Artery in the vicinity of South Station, to the right of this image. Vincent Scully used this image, courtesy of the Prudential Life Insurance Company of America, in *American Architecture and Urbanism* to illustrate the Urban Redevelopment megastructure, which he called “cataclysmic, automotive, and suburban.” The Pru’s

tower—“standing in a wasteland of its own making,” Scully wrote—straddles the highway, which loops around in the vicinity of Copley Square and feeds the three levels of garages that form the base of the Prudential Center. In the 1964 view, the eastern portion of Prudential’s site is still a construction site. Source: Vincent Scully, *American Architecture and Urbanism* (1969; repr.: New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1988), 244–45.

	Newark	Los Angeles	Dallas	Houston	Cincinnati	Minneapolis	Chicago	San Francisco
Regional vice president	The Corporation's first vice president in charge of the region	 Thomas H. Jones	 W. Frank Johnson	 Charles E. Jones	 J. C. Johnson	 Arthur W. Jones	 Thomas H. Jones	 Thomas H. Jones
Regional home office								
Size (square feet)	\$12,000,000	\$11,500,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Payroll	15,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Assets	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Other statistics	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000

Figure 1.1: A spreadsheet of Prudential’s Regional Home Office building program, including the vice presidents, home offices, and information about regional sales.

Source: Robert Sheehan, “The Mighty Pump, Prudential,” *Fortune* (January 1964).

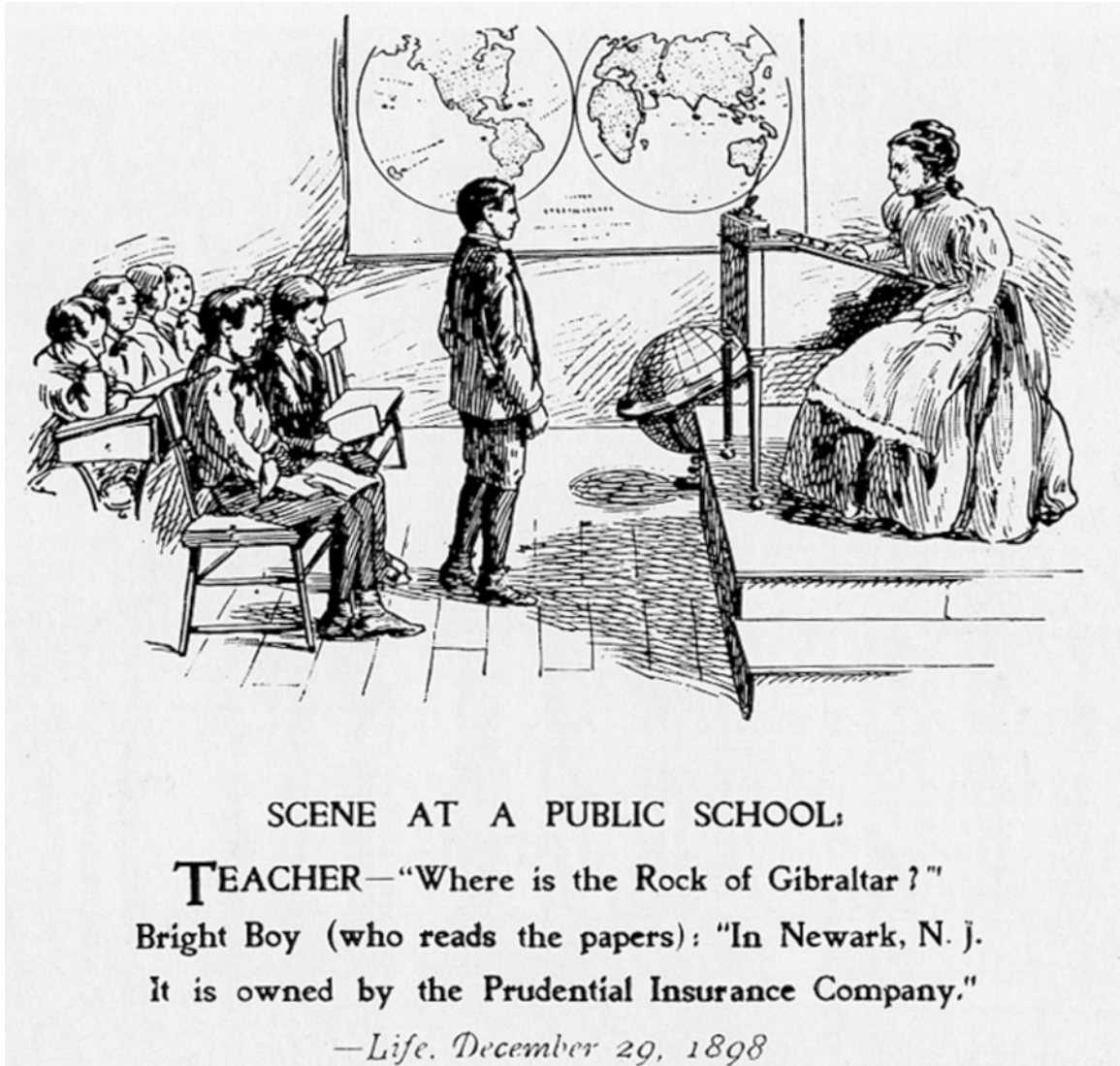


Figure 1.2: A Prudential advertisement from *Life* magazine, December 29, 1898.

Reproduced in Carr, *From Three Cents a Week*. So pervasive was Prudential's presence in late-nineteenth-century American society that this young schoolboy answers wrongly a geography question, thinking the Rock of Gibraltar was in Newark, and not on the Iberian Peninsula.



Figure 1.3: The Prudential Building, Broad Street, Newark, 1892. Architect: George Post. Source: Carr, *From Three Cents a Week*.



Figure 1.4: “Prudential Square,” the Western Home Office on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles. Design by Wurdemann & Beckett, 1949. Source: Prudential Archives (hereafter cited as PA) 17–57.

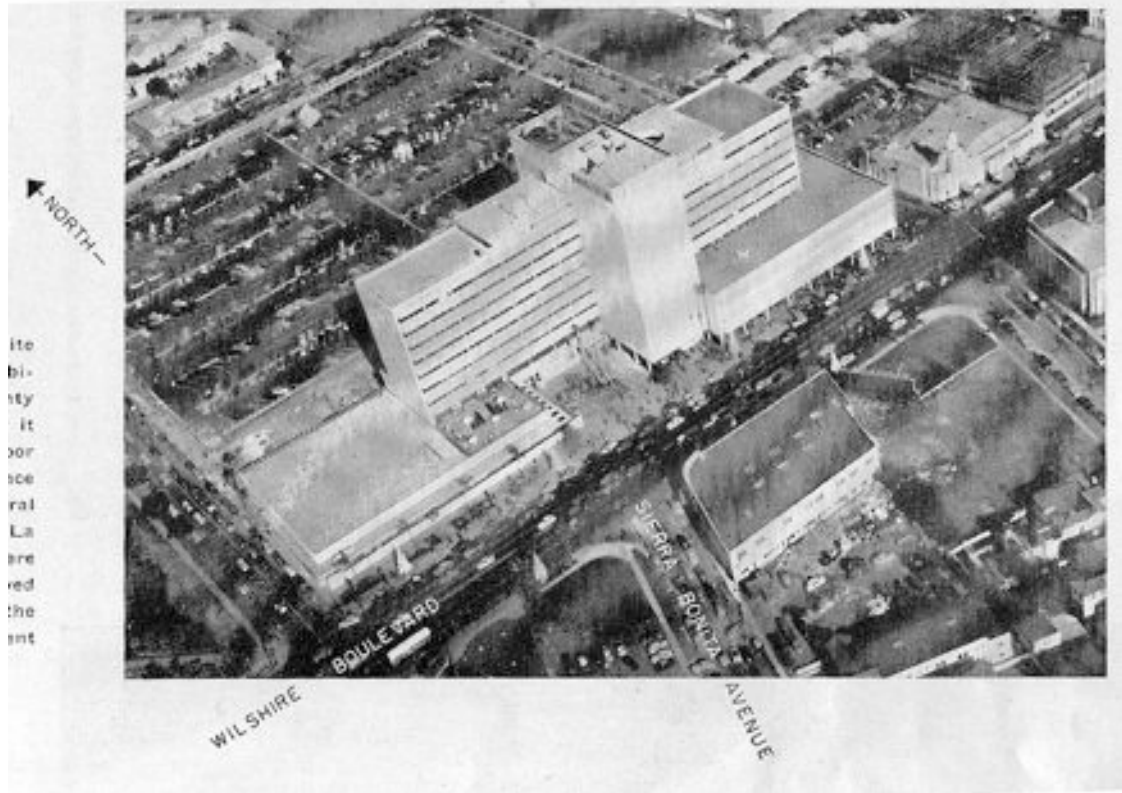
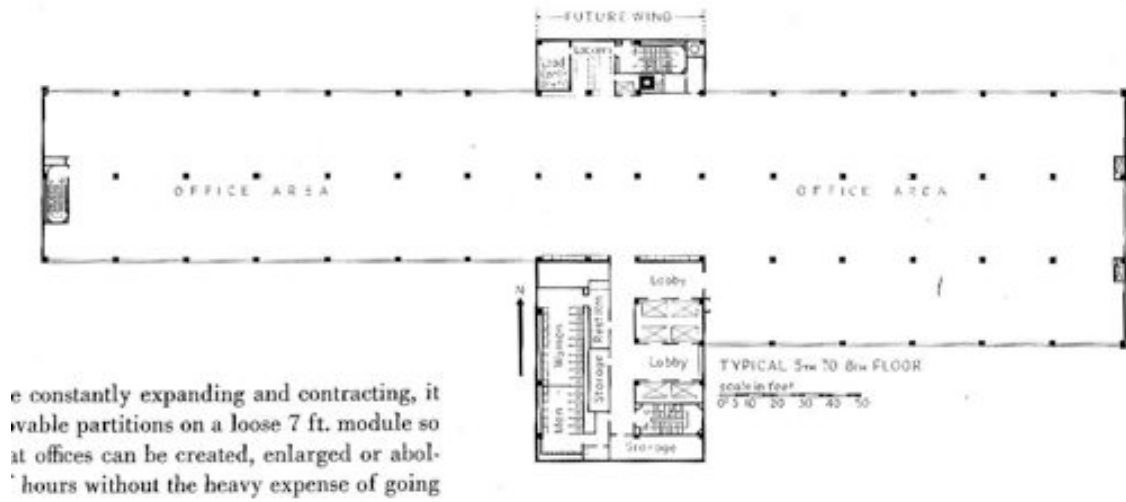


Figure 1.5: An aerial view of the Western Home Office in Los Angeles showing the 1,000-car parking lot at the back of the site. Source: *Architectural Forum* (May 1949).



Figure 1.6. A view of the Western Home Office driving east on Wilshire Boulevard, ca. 1950. Wurdemann & Beckett used the mechanical core of the building to design a billboard. Source: PA 17–57.



able to be constantly expanding and contracting, it allows for movable partitions on a loose 7 ft. module so that offices can be created, enlarged or abolished at any time without the heavy expense of going

Figure 1.7: Typical tower floor plan, Prudential Western Home Office. The office plan allowed for 27,000 square feet of open office space on each floor. Source: *Architectural Forum* (May 1949).



Figure 1.8. The Oil and Gas Building at 706 Lamar Avenue in Houston, built in 1937 and designed by Kenneth Franzheim, who would also design Prudential's Southwest Regional Home Office in Houston. Franzheim's design marks a "late-deco," "modernistic" style for a large corporation. Source: www.houstondeco.org



Figure 1.9. Prudential's Southwest Regional Home Office, designed by Kenneth Franzheim and opened in 1952. Source: "The Pru Decentralizes," *Architectural Forum* 102 (1955).

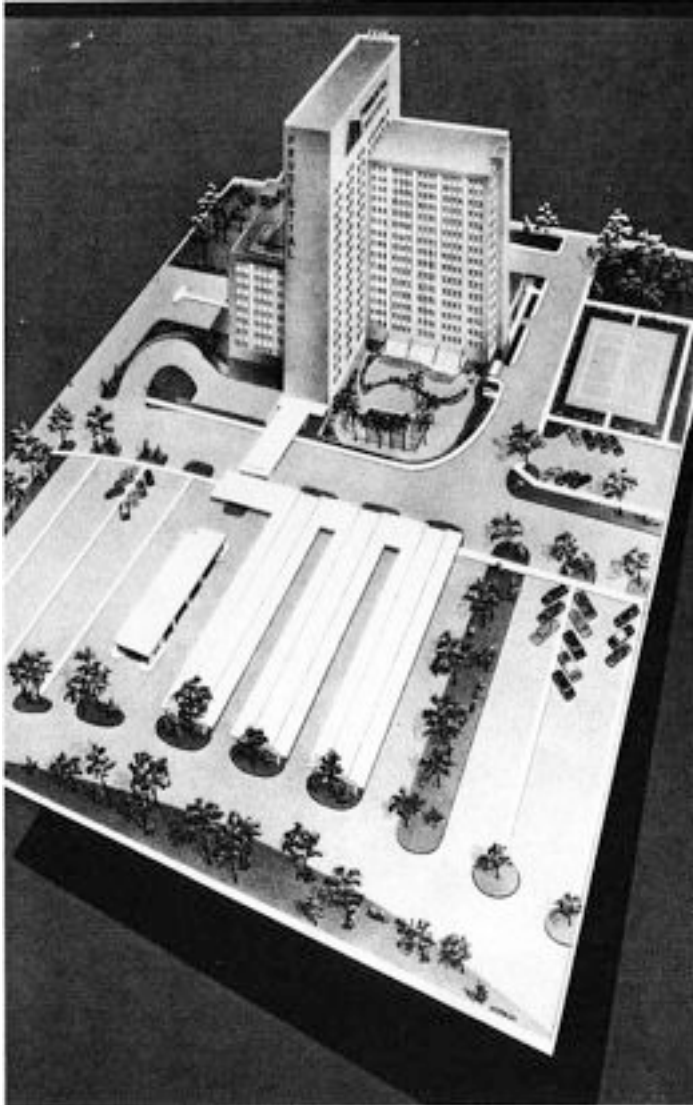


Figure 1.10. This illustration of the site plan for the Southwest Home Office (SWHO) was published in a Prudential brochure called “At Home in the Great Southwest” to accompany the building’s opening in 1952. Source: PA 10–26.



Figure 1.11: “*Life Goes to Houston’s Paradise for Office Girls*” was a photo-spread featuring a work day in the life of one of Pru’s employees, 18-year-old Oveta Smith. Here she poses by the Southwest Regional Home Office pool, with is surrounded by planted palm trees. Source: “*Life Goes to Houston’s Paradise for Office Girls*,” *Life* 33, September 15, 1952, 150–55.



Figure 1.12. This is the site of Prudential's Mid-America Home Office (MAHO) over the tracks of the Illinois Central Railroad in Chicago. To the south, at the top right of the photograph, is Grant Park, and Lake Michigan is out of the frame to the left. This photo is from around 1952, when the designs for Prudential's project, by architects Naess & Murphy, were published in *Architectural Forum*. The building opened in 1955. Source: PA 10-37.

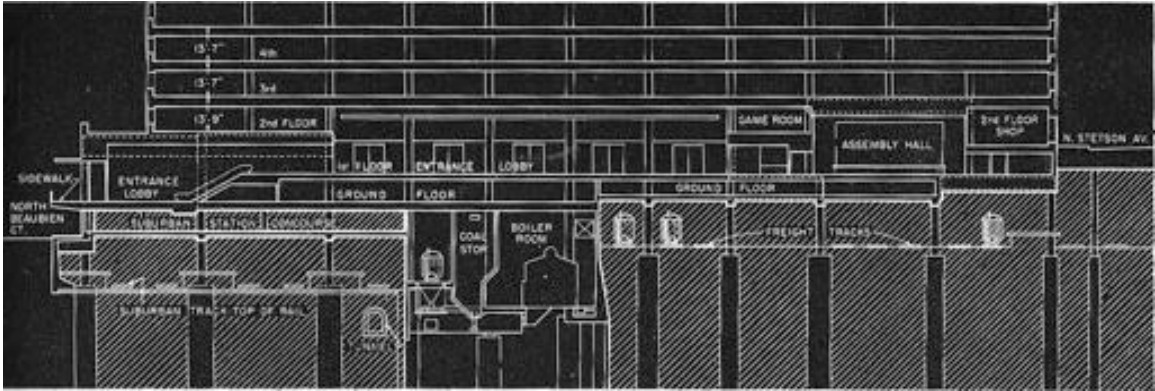


Figure 1.13. This section of Prudential's MAHO project in Chicago shows how the building's foundations would be sunk between the tracks of the Illinois Central Railroad. Prudential took title to each individual foundation lot. Source: "Chicago's Prudential Building," *Architectural Forum* 97 (August 1952).

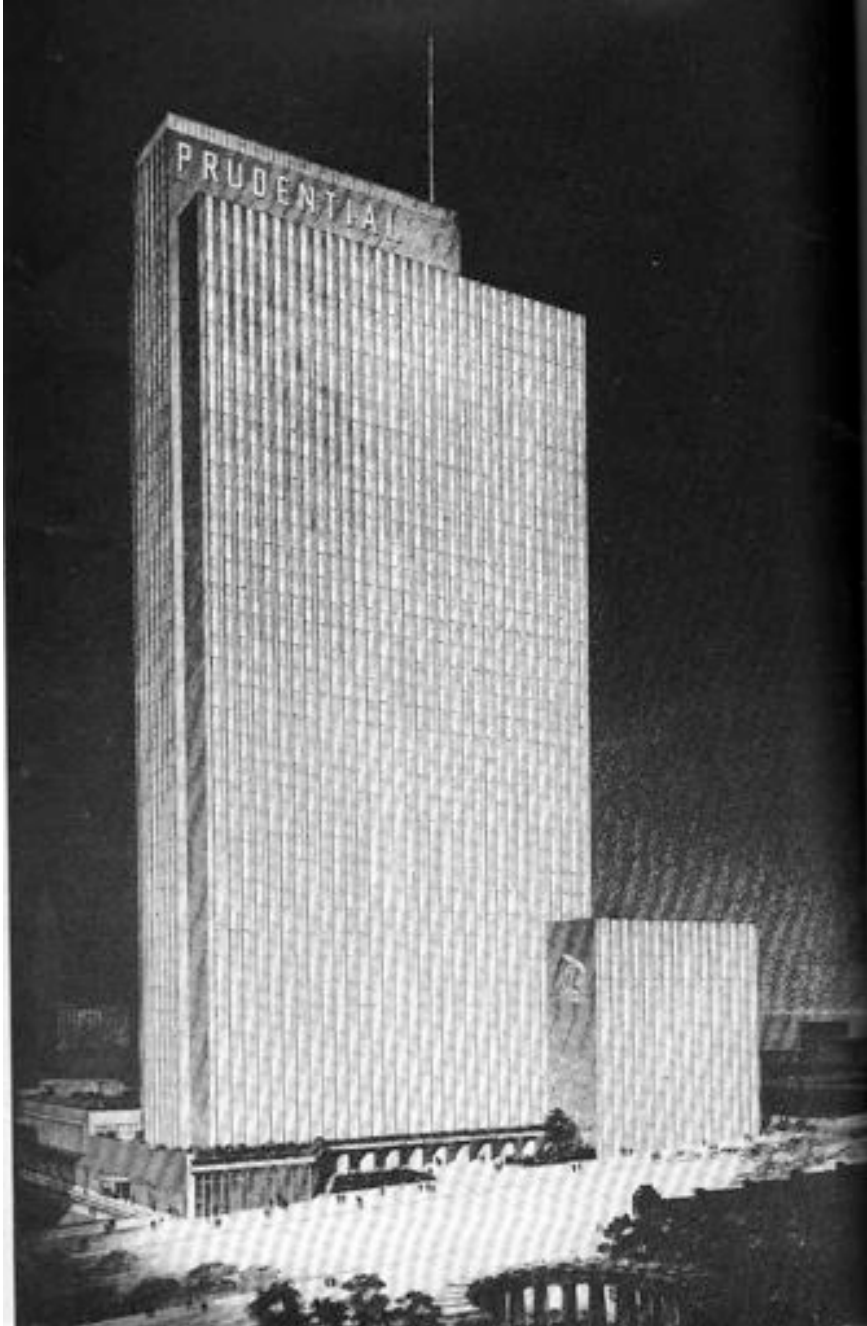


Figure 1.14. A rendering of Naess & Murphy's final design for Prudential's Mid-America Home Office in Chicago. Source: "Chicago's Prudential Building," *Architectural Forum*.



Figure 2.1. This late-nineteenth-century picture of Post Office Square in Boston shows the pair of Second Empire Style insurance buildings constructed soon after the fire of 1872. On the left, with projecting campanile, is the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York building, designed by Peabody & Stearns. On the right is Nathaniel J. Bradlee's New England Mutual Life Insurance Company building. Source: Anthony Mitchell Sammarco, *Images of America: Boston's Financial District* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Press, 2002).



Figure 2.2: The United Shoe Machinery Building, 140 Federal Street, Boston, soon after it was completed in 1930. Architects: Parker, Thomas & Rice. Source: www.cummings.com/history.html.



Figure 2.3. The Boston Post Office and Federal Building, designed by the Cram & Ferguson firm with James Wetmore in 1930–31. I found this postcard image online, where the postcard was being sold in an eBay auction.



Figure 2.4. An aerial view of the New England Mutual Life Insurance Company building, designed by the firm of Ralph Adams Cram and completed in 1939. Source: Boston Public Library, Fine Arts Departments, the collection of Hoyle, Doran, and Berry.



Figure 2.5. A photograph of the John Hancock Insurance Company's "Berkeley Building" (named after the street it faced), designed by Thomas & Rice and erected in 1922. Source: Boston Public Library, Fine Arts Department, John Hancock Insurance Company Collection.



Figure 2.6. A stunning photograph of the John Hancock Insurance Company tower in Boston, probably taken not long after it was completed in 1947. The design is by Cram & Ferguson. Source: Boston Public Library, Fine Arts Department, John Hancock Insurance Company Collection.



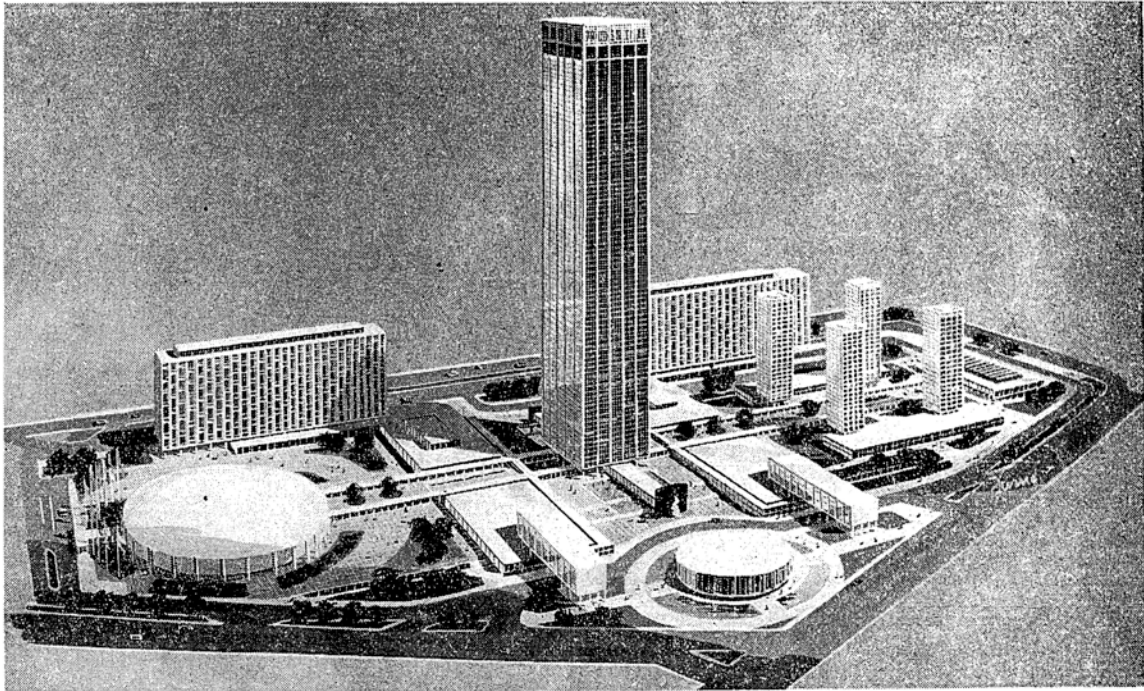
Figure 2.7. An aerial view of the Back Bay insurance district in 1949, with H. H. Richardson's Trinity Chapel and Copley Square at the lower left edge. The courtyard building in the foreground is John Hancock's 1922 office building, with the 1947 tower behind it and the 1939 New England Mutual building at the left of the frame. Source: Boston Public Library, Fine Arts Department, John Hancock Insurance Company Collection.



Figure 3.1. Carrol Shanks, right, Mayor John Hynes, center, and a reporter from WBZ TV announced Prudential's intentions to develop the Northeastern Home Office in the Back Bay. Behind the men is a larger rendering of the Prudential Center, produced by Cram & Ferguson with Pereira & Luckman serving as coordinating architects. Source: PA 17-69.



Figure 3.2. Another image from the January 1957 press conference with Carrol Shanks pointing to the Prudential tower, the centerpiece of the Northeastern Home Office Plan. Source: PA 17-69.



Prudential Skyscraper Dominates Skyward Thrust of Planned Back Bay Center

The Prudential Center, spread over the 31-acre site in Boston's Back Bay section, will consist of 12 structures interconnected by covered, glass-walled walkways. The insurance company's own office building will rise from 45 to 50 stories in the center of the tract, which extends from Exeter Street on the right to a point past Dalton Street on the left. Hunt-

ington Avenue extends from center foreground to the right, while Belvidere Street passes two circular buildings in foreground—a convention hall at left, to be built by the city, and a restaurant in front of the skyscraper. At the rear is Boylston Street, featuring a 1,000-room hotel at the left and an apartment building at the right—tall rectangular buildings. Four

square structures at the right are also apartment buildings. Low flat buildings are planned for commercial use. Apartment space will approximate 1,250 dwelling units. The Mother Church, The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, Massachusetts, is located about two blocks to the left of the location where the circular auditorium is planned.

Figure 3.3: This is one of the images of the Prudential Center that Prudential president Carrol Shanks showed to the Boston Chamber of Commerce on January 31, 1957, and that was released to local newspapers. The design is by Cram & Ferguson with Pereira & Luckman serving as coordinating architects. Source: *Christian Science Monitor*, January 31, 1957.

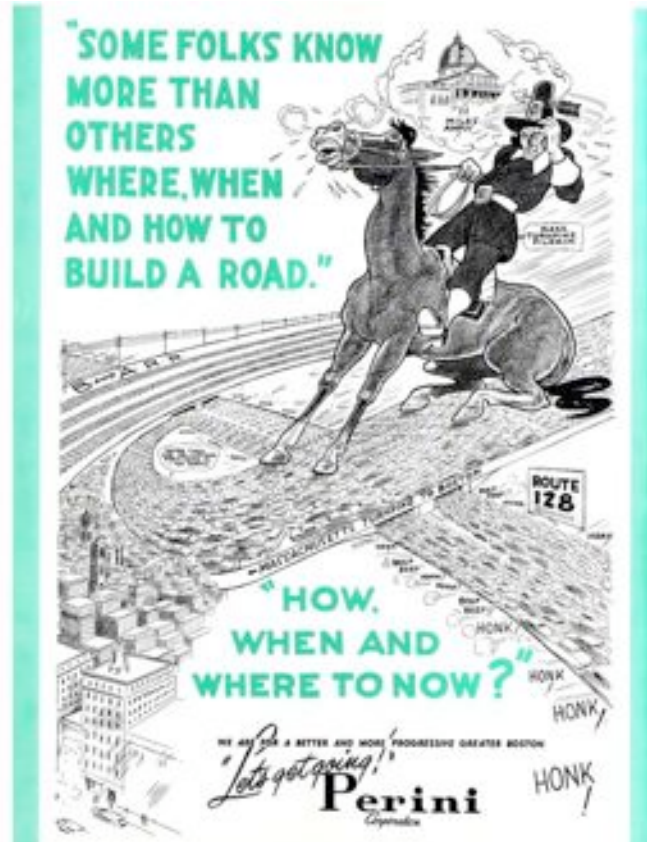


Figure 4.1. Illustration on the back page of the *Perini News*, Spring 1957. The text reads: “Some folks know more than others where, when and how to build a road. How, when and where to now?’ We are for a better and more progressive greater Boston. ‘Let’s get going!’” Source: Perini Corporation, Framingham, Massachusetts.

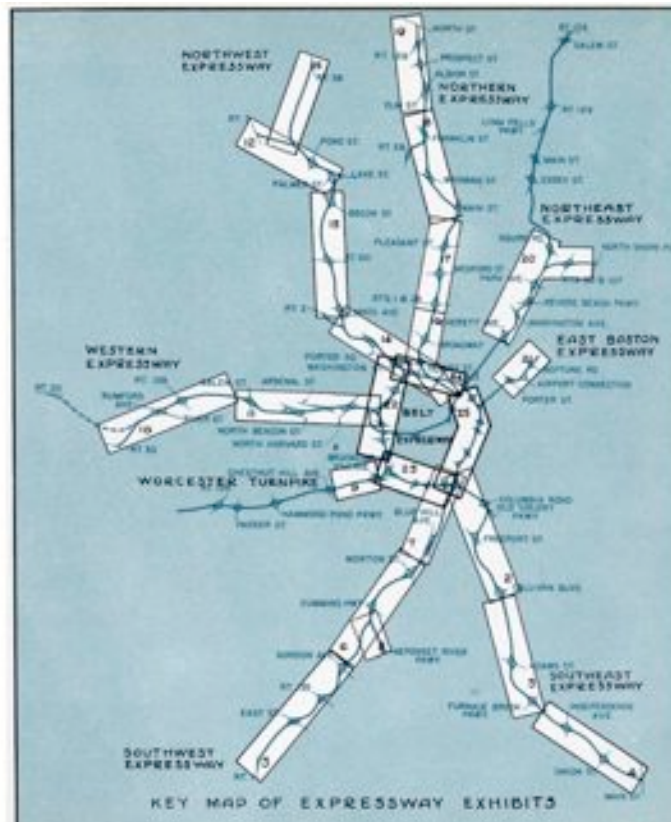


Figure 4.2. Diagram of the highways stipulated by the 1948 Master Highway Plan for Metropolitan Boston. Eventually the form of radiating highways and an “Inner Belt” loop of highways would revolve around the Central Artery, which cut through downtown Boston. William F. Callahan hoped to substitute a Boston Extension of the Turnpike for the “Western Expressway” as expressed in this plan. Source: Master Highway Plan for Metropolitan Boston, 1948.

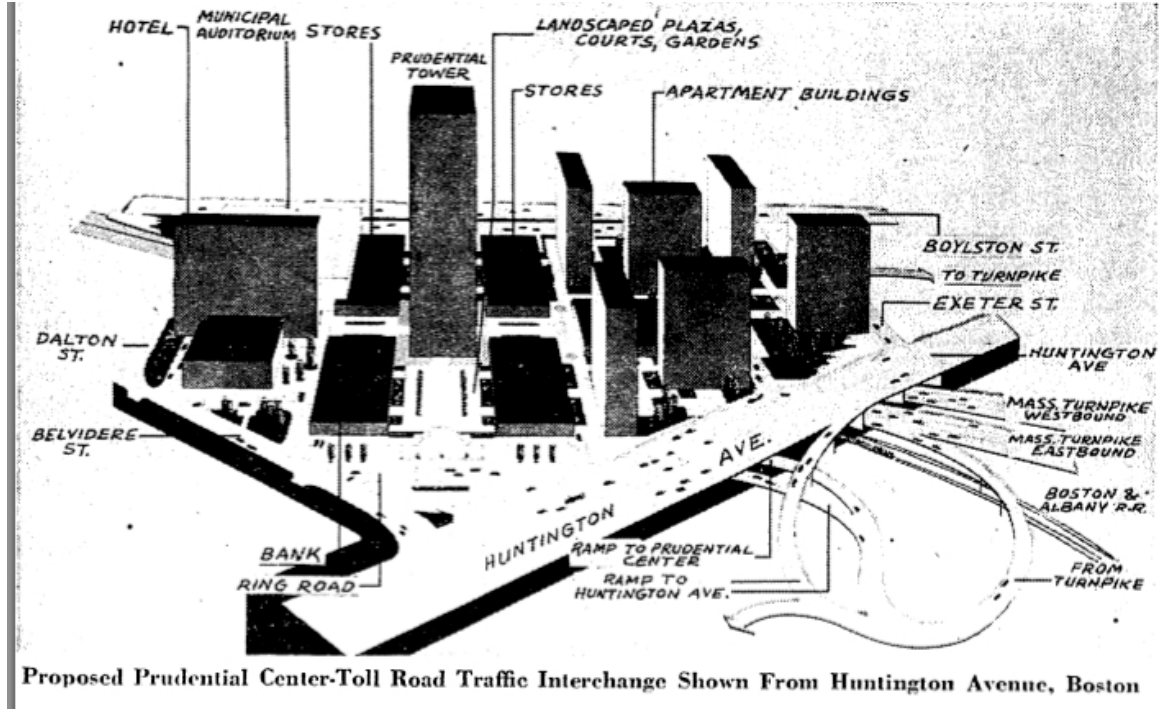


Figure 4.3. A diagram published by the *Boston Globe* describing the physical coordination between the Pike and the Pru that accompanied their plans for a merger. The Pike would construct the Boston Extension along the easement that Prudential had provided through the site; just east of the site, it would construct a looping interchange to bring cars directly into the Prudential Center's parking garage. Oddly—for such an important symbiosis—this is the best visual description I have found of the physical coordination between the Pike and the Pru (in chapter five I show a different rendering of this type). Source: *Boston Globe*, April 29, 1960.



Figure 4.4: William F. Callahan depresses the plunger that inaugurated the Mass Pike Boston Extension construction project. On his left is Lou Perini, the contractor. On his right is Fred Smith, Prudential's main negotiator in Boston. Source: Perini Corporation, Framingham, Massachusetts.



Figure 5.1. A model of the Back Bay Center, released by the developer Roger Stevens in September 1953. In the center is the hotel/motel structure. Source: *Architectural Forum* (November 1953).

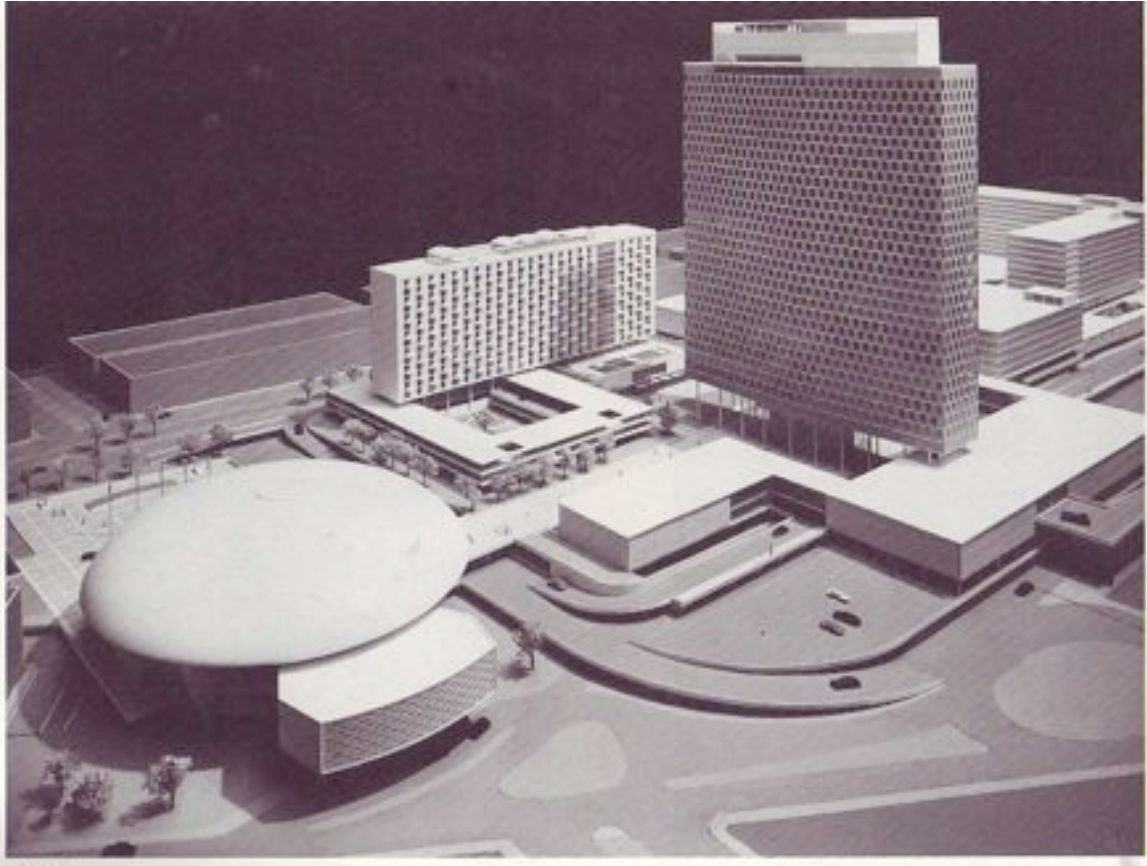


Figure 5.2. A photograph of the model of the Back Bay Center. In the foreground is the dome-roofed convention center, designed by Samuel Glaser, with an open plaza on the north side facing Boylston Street. North of the tower, which is surrounded by a plaza, were placed the hotel and motel structures. Beyond the tower was the shopping center and additional office structures. Source: Winfried Nerdinger, ed., *The Walter Gropius Archive, vol. IV* (New York: Garland, 1990).

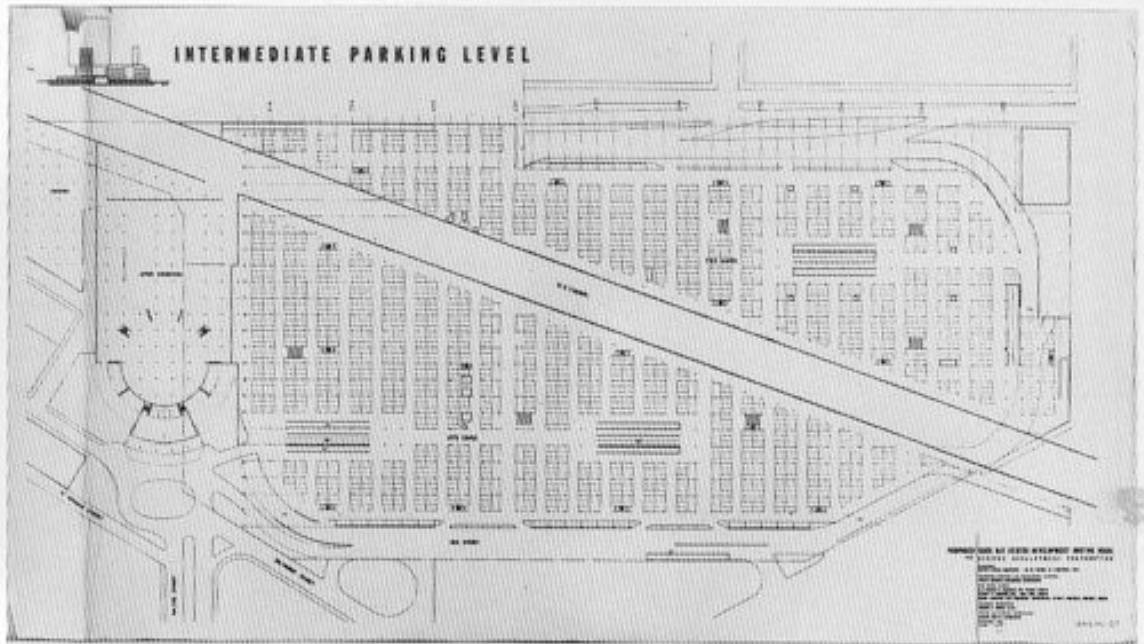


Figure 5.3. Plan of a parking level at the Back Bay Center, split by the easement for the New York Central Railroad. The ring road provided access to the garage. Source: Nerdinger, ed., *The Walter Gropius Archive*.





Figure 5.5. A promotional photograph for Pereira & Luckman found amongst the Charles Luckman Papers, probably taken around 1953. Luckman, on the left, brandishes his pipe. Pereira, on the right and wearing an artist's smock, points to a detail on a blueprint. Source: Charles Luckman Papers.



Figure 5.6. A postcard view of CBS Television City, 1953, Pereira & Luckman.

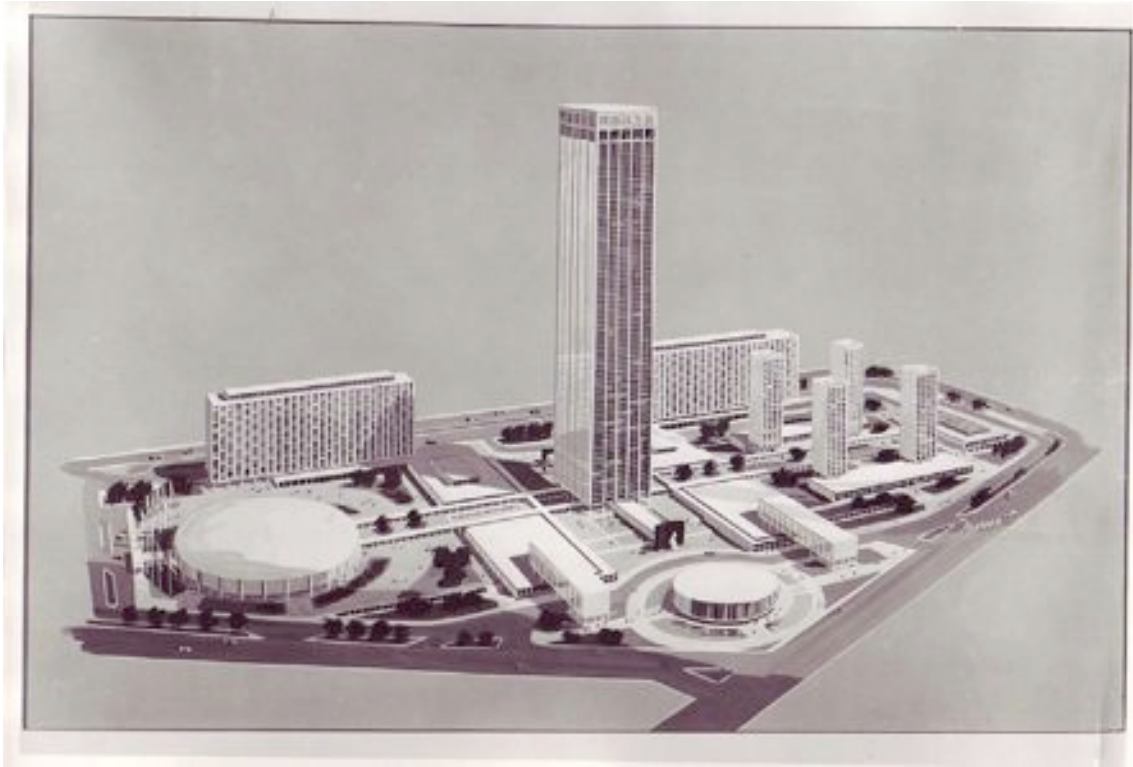


Figure 5.7. The first rendering of the Prudential Center that Carrol Shanks presented to Boston in 1957. This image accentuates the vertical frame of the curtain wall. Also significant is the circular-plan municipal auditorium (and restaurant, at the southern corner) that mimics the saucer-shaped auditorium that Samuel Glaser had designed as part of the Back Bay Center. Source: PA 17–68.

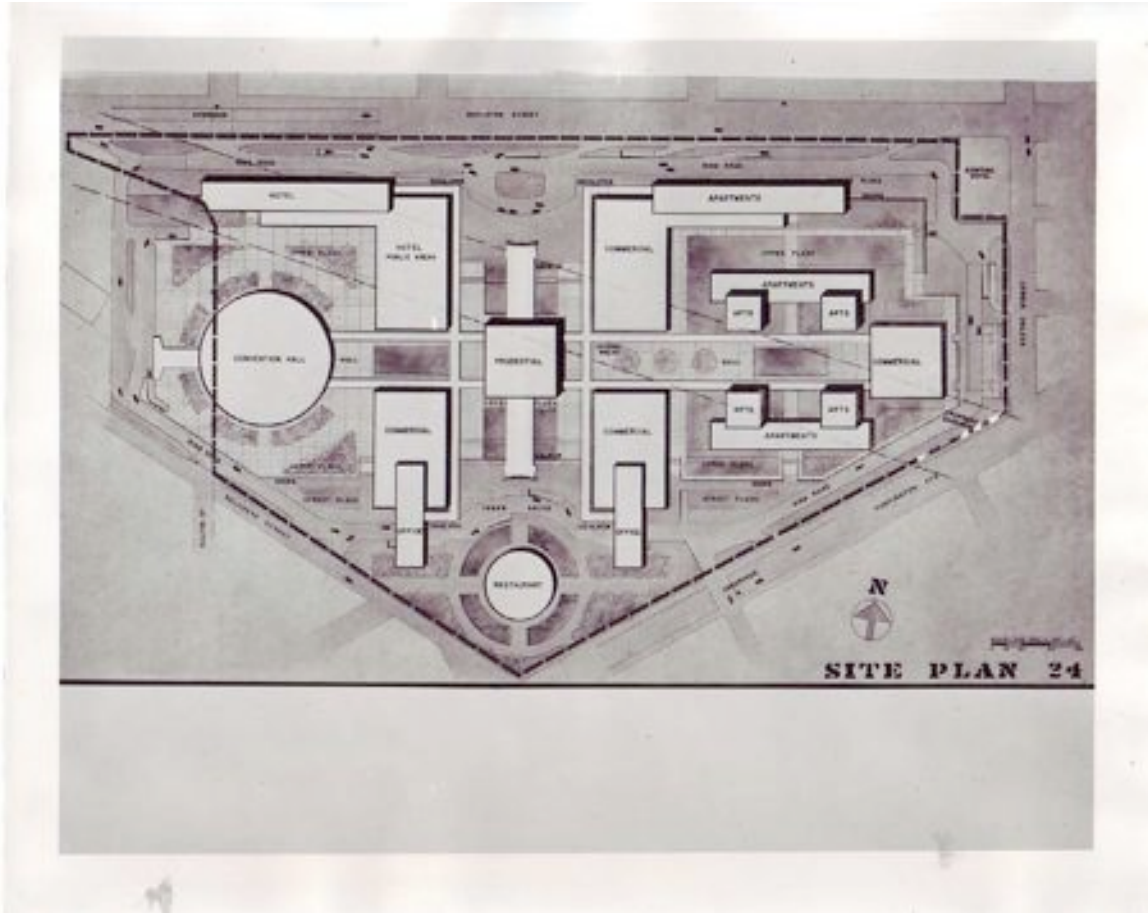


Figure 5.8. This plan, the first publicly released (I don't know the significance of its name, "Site Plan 24," but there were earlier schematic plans that Pereira & Luckman produced), illustrates the claim that only about a quarter of the Prudential Center's surface (or reconstructed surface over the parking garage) would be given over to buildings. The plan also shows Pereria & Luckman's symmetrical resolution and zoning of the Center's program. Source: PA 17-68.



Figure 5.9. A rendering of the “Entrance Concourse,” with a water feature to one side, that served as a kind of extension of the tower’s lobby to the ring road. Source: PA 17–68.



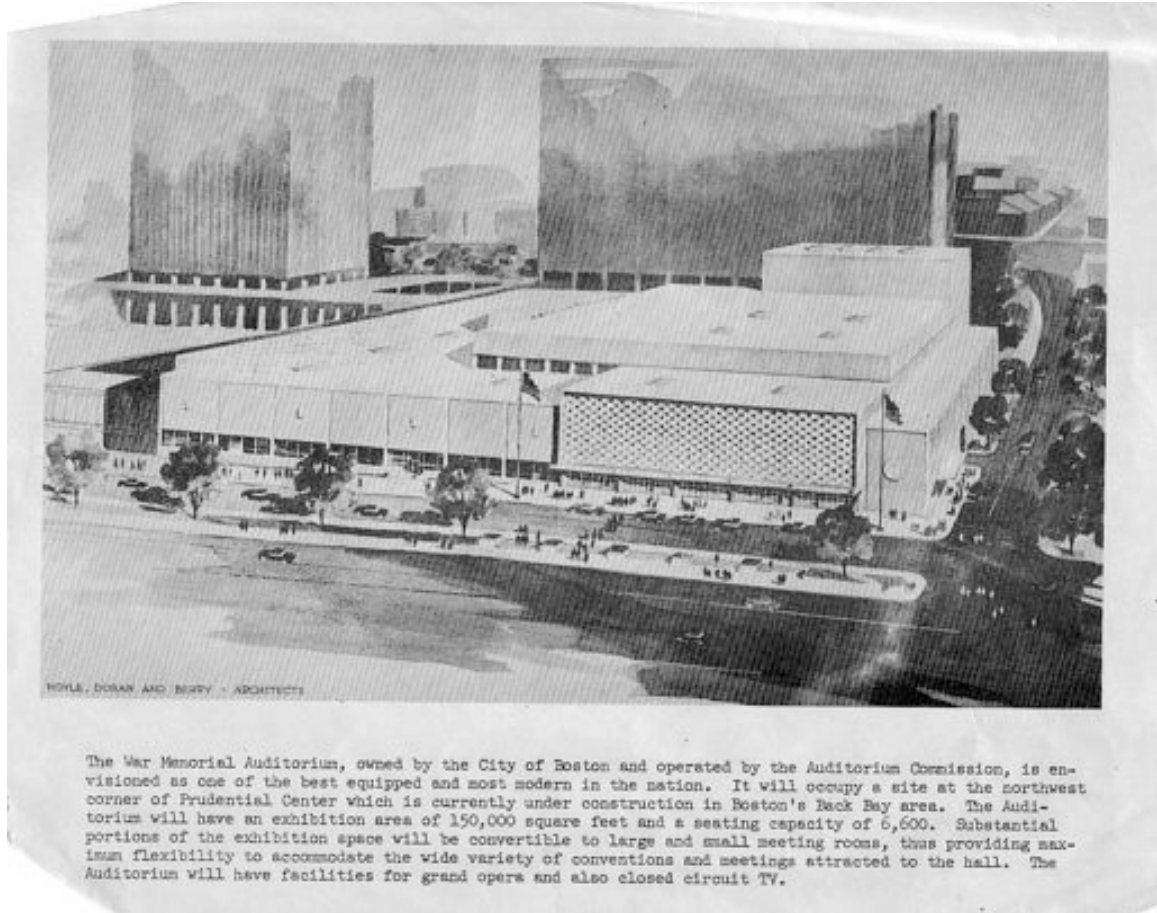
Figure 5.10. This “Upper Plaza Study” illustrates a broad, landscaped shopping concourse. In the foreground, a group of three figures gather at the ledge of a rectangular fountain. It is difficult to correlate this scene with a location in the plan, but the architects envisioned a set of “upper plaza” areas, elevated from the street and connected by an east-west “mall” with covered walkways. Source: PA 17–68.



Figure 5.11. A postcard view of the Prudential Center in 1958. Much remains from the initial scheme—including the delicate, glassy rendering of the tower—but the eastern apartment precinct has been altered and now displays six rectangular apartment towers turned 90 degrees to Boylston Street. Source: Boston Public Library, Fine Arts Department, folder Prudential Center.



Figure 5.12. In July 1958, Prudential’s Fred Smith announced that “final working plans” for the Prudential Center were ready. This rendering accentuates the lacy, textured effect that CLA architect Charles Stanton aimed for the tower—gone are the vertical fins from prior images of the tower. This scheme would remain essentially unaltered for at least three years, though there are minor changes between this image and those that were released later. Source: Boston Public Library, Fine Arts Department, folder Prudential Center.



The War Memorial Auditorium, owned by the City of Boston and operated by the Auditorium Commission, is envisioned as one of the best equipped and most modern in the nation. It will occupy a site at the northwest corner of Prudential Center which is currently under construction in Boston's Back Bay area. The Auditorium will have an exhibition area of 150,000 square feet and a seating capacity of 6,600. Substantial portions of the exhibition space will be convertible to large and small meeting rooms, thus providing maximum flexibility to accommodate the wide variety of conventions and meetings attracted to the hall. The Auditorium will have facilities for grand opera and also closed circuit TV.

Figure 5.13. Hoyle, Doran & Berry produced several alternative designs for the War Memorial Auditorium and convention hall, and this design was chosen from amongst them. Source: Boston Public Library, Fine Arts Department, folder Prudential Center.

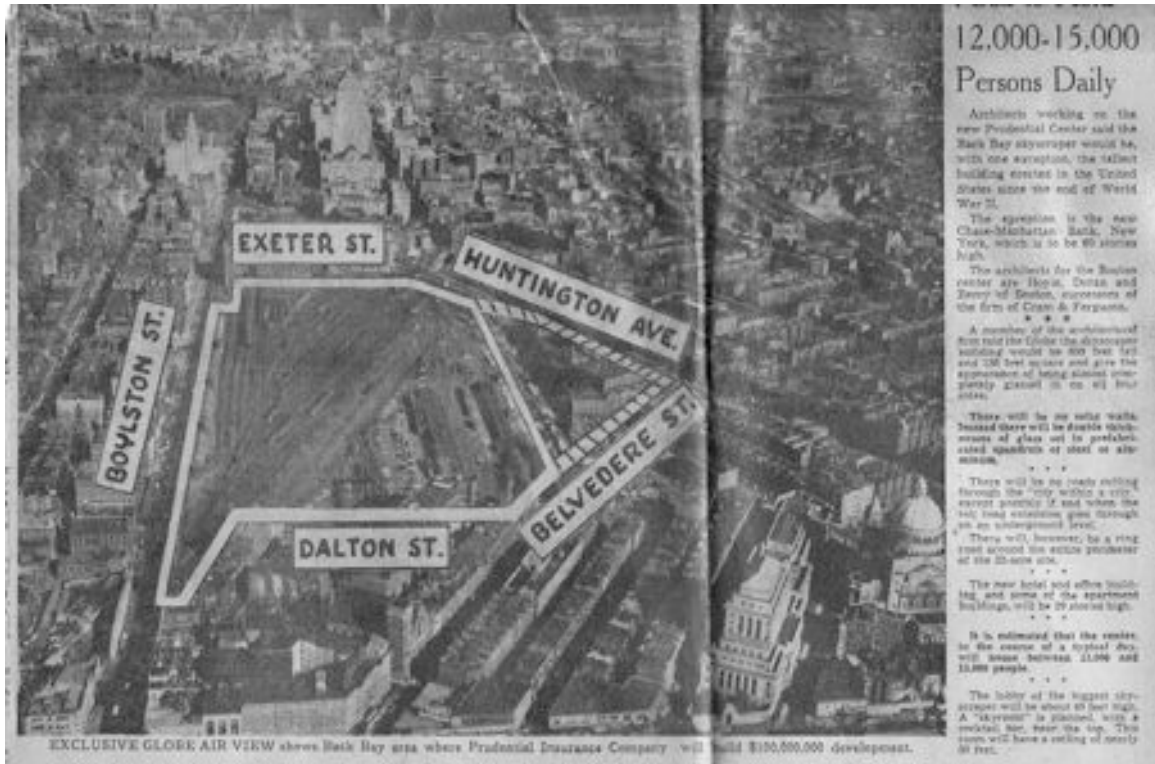


Figure 5.14. This aerial photograph published in the *Boston Globe* in 1957 shows the Boston & Albany rail yard site in the Back Bay and the site of the Mechanics Hall in between Huntington Avenue and Belvedere Street at the southern corner of the site. Prudential acquired this building and land in a separate transaction in order to raze the Hall and expand the site of the Prudential Center. Source: *Boston Globe*, January 31, 1957.

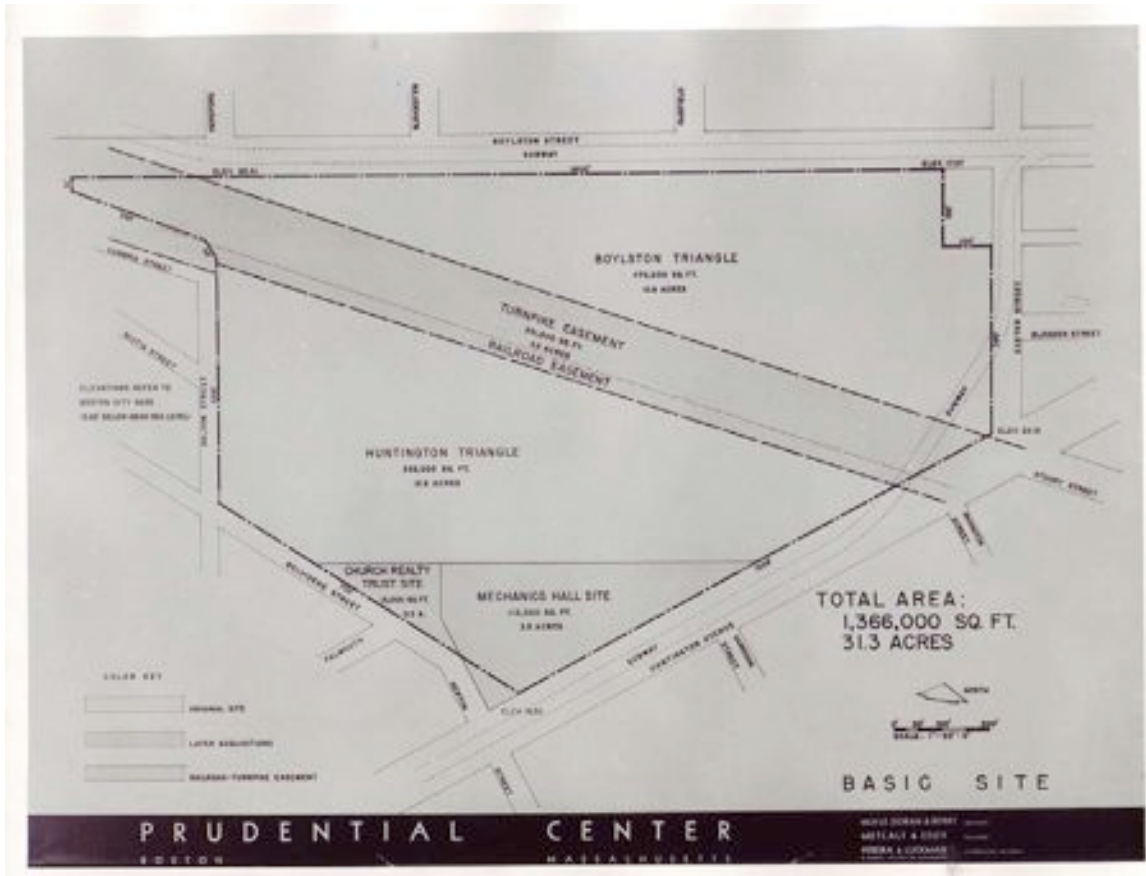


Figure 5.15. HDB and Pereira & Luckman’s map of the site shows the three distinct parcels that Prudential would acquire for the Prudential Center. The Mechanics Hall site is at the southern corner. In total, Prudential would acquire 31.3 acres. Source: PA 17–68.



Figure 5.16. A postcard of the Mechanics Building.

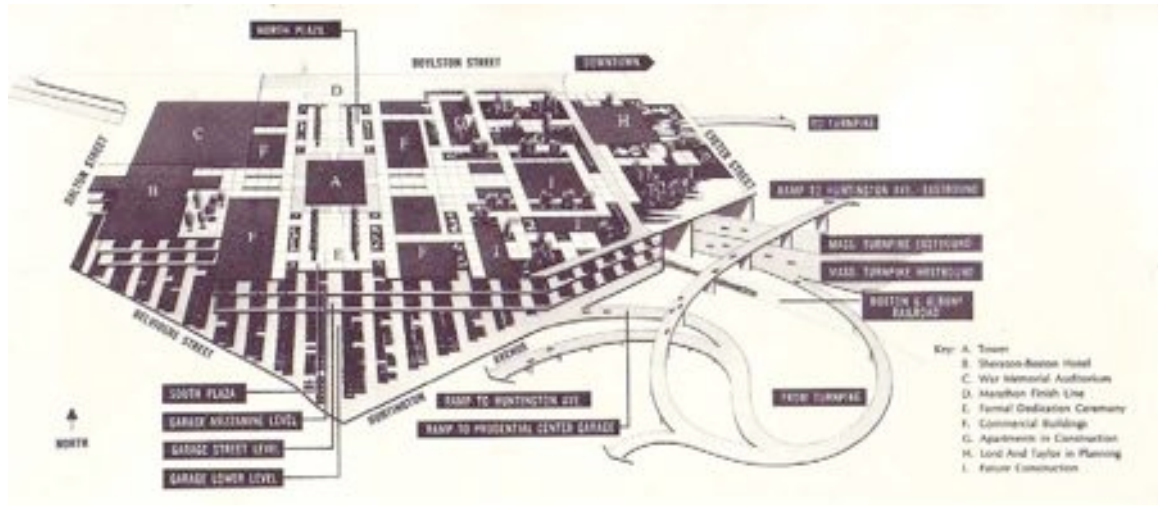


Figure 5.17. Prudential released this diagram in 1965, clearly illustrating the connection between the Mass Pike Extension ramps and the Center’s parking garages. Source: PA 17–68.



Figure 5.18. When Prudential ordered that the de-watering pumps be shut-down in 1960, the Prudential Center site was flooded, as shown in this 1962 photo. Source: Perini Corporation Archives.



Figure 5.19. A 1962 rendering of the Prudential Center shows how the insurance company scaled back on its plans to develop the eastern portion of the site, and emphasizes how the Pru envisioned the overall site as a suite of distinct precincts. Source: Boston Public Library Fine Arts Department, Prudential Center files.



Figure 5.20. CLA produced a rendering of the landscaped parking lot that would occupy the eastern section of the Prudential Center site. Note the uncovered portion of the Mass Pike extension that would cut through the surface parking lot. Source: PA 17-68.



Figure 5.21. Model of the central section. Source: PA 17-69.

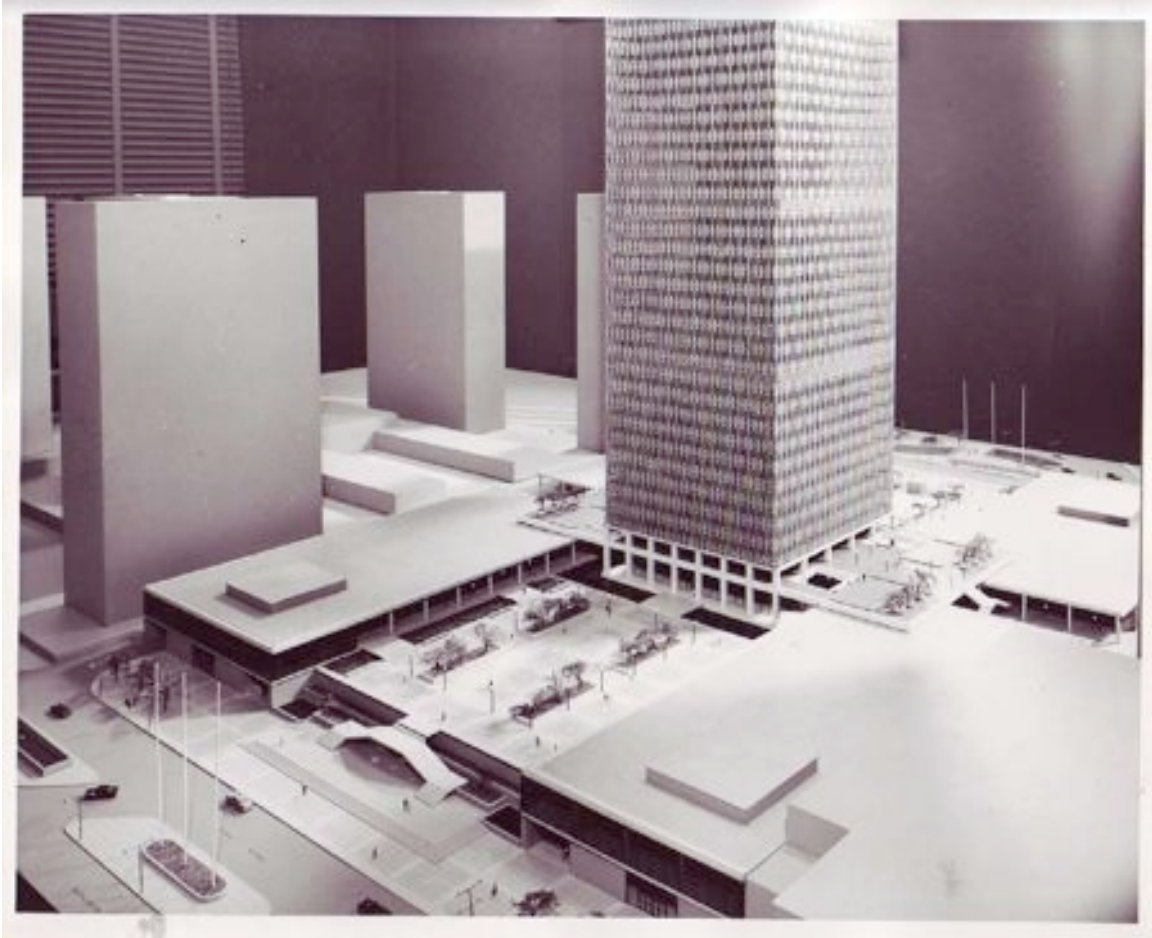


Figure 5.22. A model of the north plaza, facing Bolyston Street. Source: PA 17-69.



Figure 5.23. This rendering, reproduced in Boston newspapers, illustrated the “modern moat” that CLA architects designed for the base of the tower. Source: Charles Luckman Papers (hereafter cited as CLP), Pru 860.08–Office Building.



Figure 5.24. The “Skyroom” restaurant planned for the top of the Prudential tower. Charles Luckman objected to the barren feeling of this image. Source: CLP, Pru 860.08–Office Building.

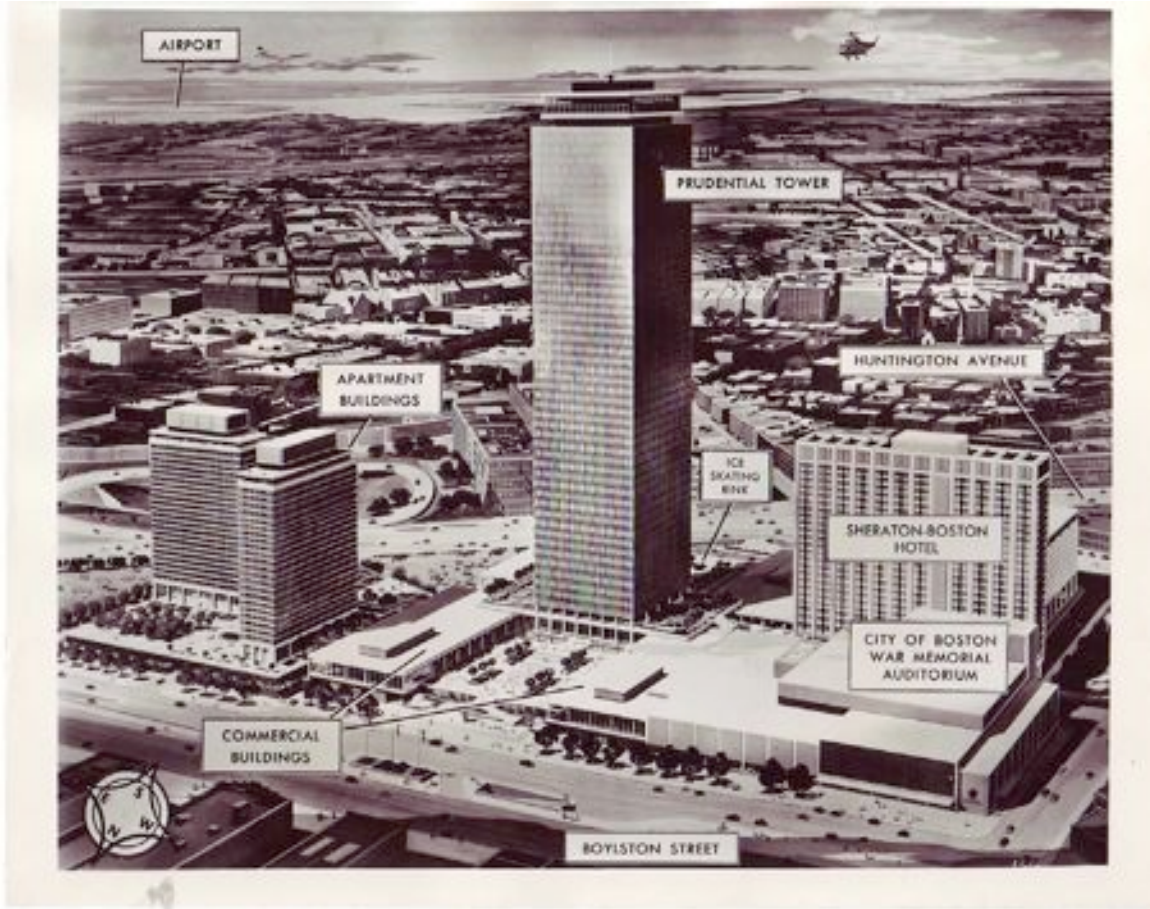


Figure 5.25. Rendering of the Prudential Center, looking to the south across Boylston Street, illustrating Prudential's plan to erect two apartment buildings in the eastern precinct of the site. Source: PA 17-68

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Figure 5.26. This brochure produced by the Hotel Corporation of America to promote its new hotel at Prudential Center featured renderings of the facility's various restaurants and bars that Harry End, the concept designer from Miami, had helped produce. Source: PA 17-69.

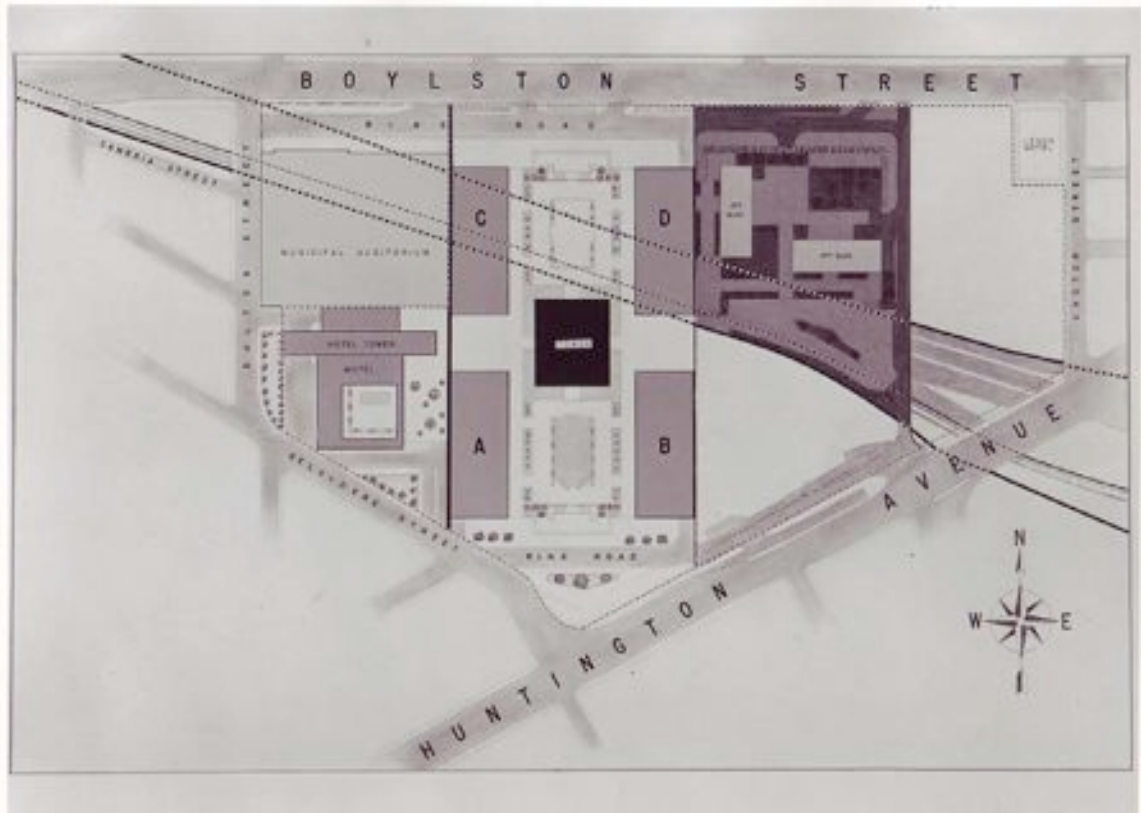


Figure 5.27. This undated and unsigned plan from the Prudential Archives illustrated the site planning for the two apartment towers in the eastern precinct. CLA architects were careful to place them north of the tunnel that housed the Mass Pike Extension. Source: PA 17–68.

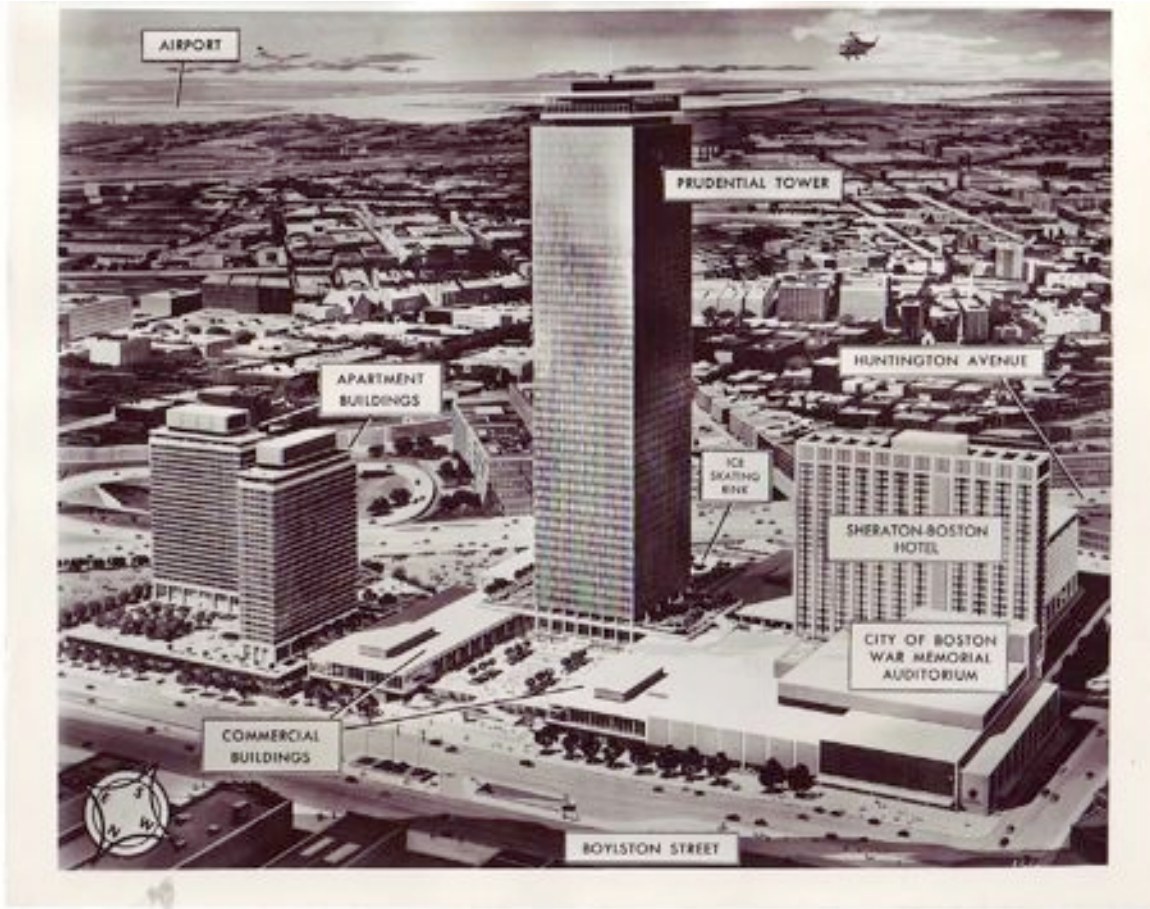


Figure 5.28. Prudential released this image in 1963 to promote an enhanced vision of the Prudential Center with two 26-story apartment towers in the eastern half of the site. The towers were sited at a right angle to shape a landscaped plaza. Source: PA 17-68.



Figure 5.29. Lord & Taylor at the Prudential Center, opened in 1968 and designed by CLA. The brick-clad structure featured a recessed portico entrance that faced directly on Boylston Street. Source: PA 17-69.



Figure 5.30. A rendering of the “South East Office Tower,” here in the shadow of the Prudential Tower with the apartment buildings in the distance. Source: PA 17–68.

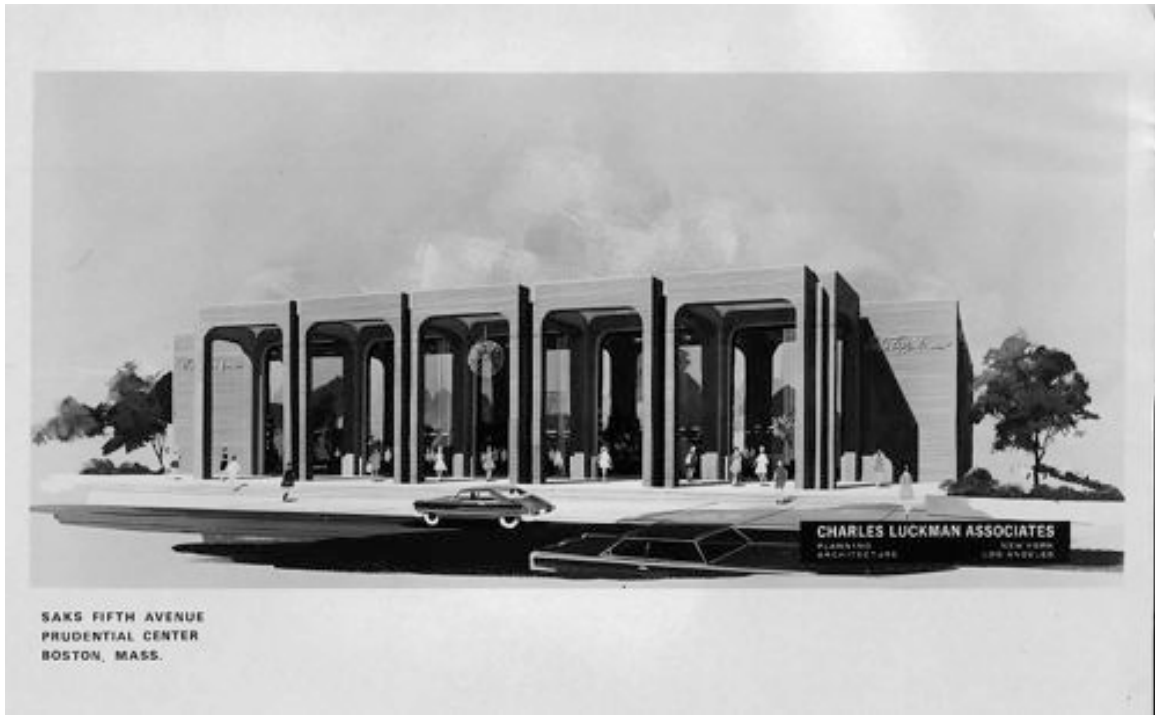


Figure 5.31. CLA's rendering of the Saks Fifth Avenue department store at Prudential Center. Source: CLP, Pru Center Tenants.

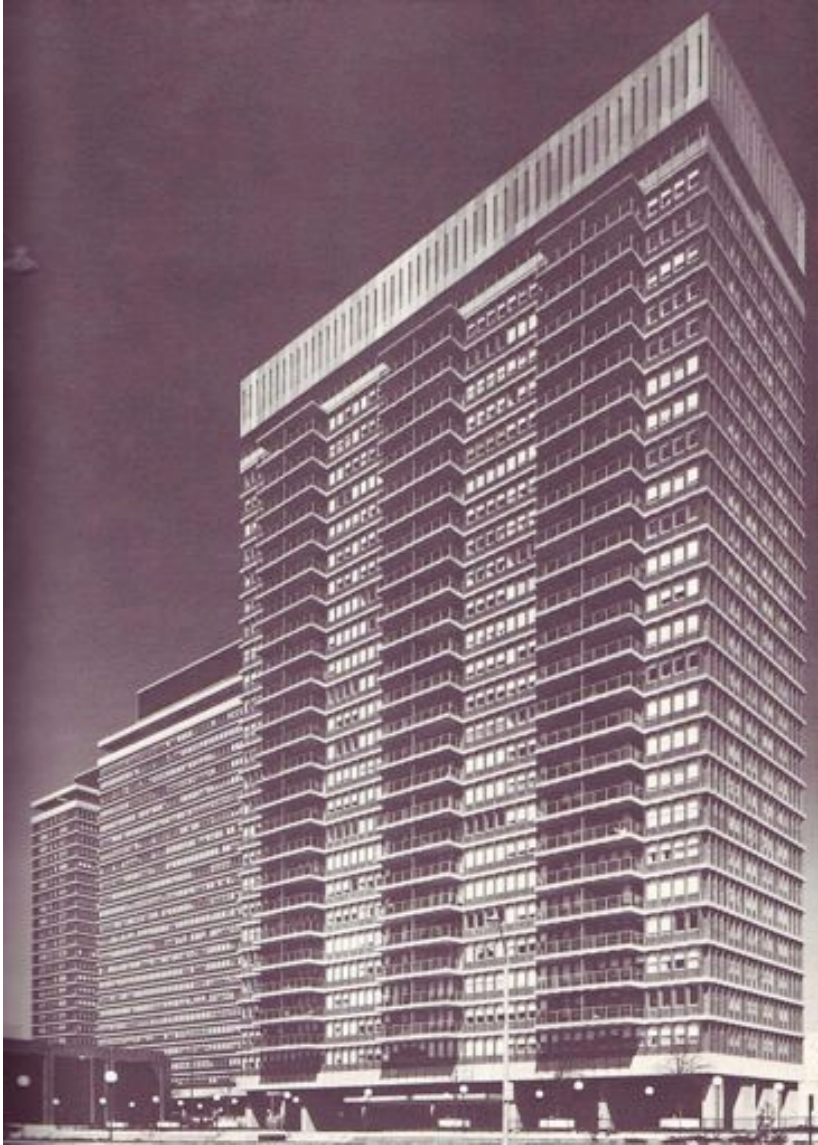


Figure 5.32. This photograph from a 1971 Prudential Center brochure shows all three of the Prudential Center apartments, the last of the three in the foreground. The first two towers were essentially identical in design, but the third included balconies, which Prudential considered to be an additional luxury. Source: PA 18–57.

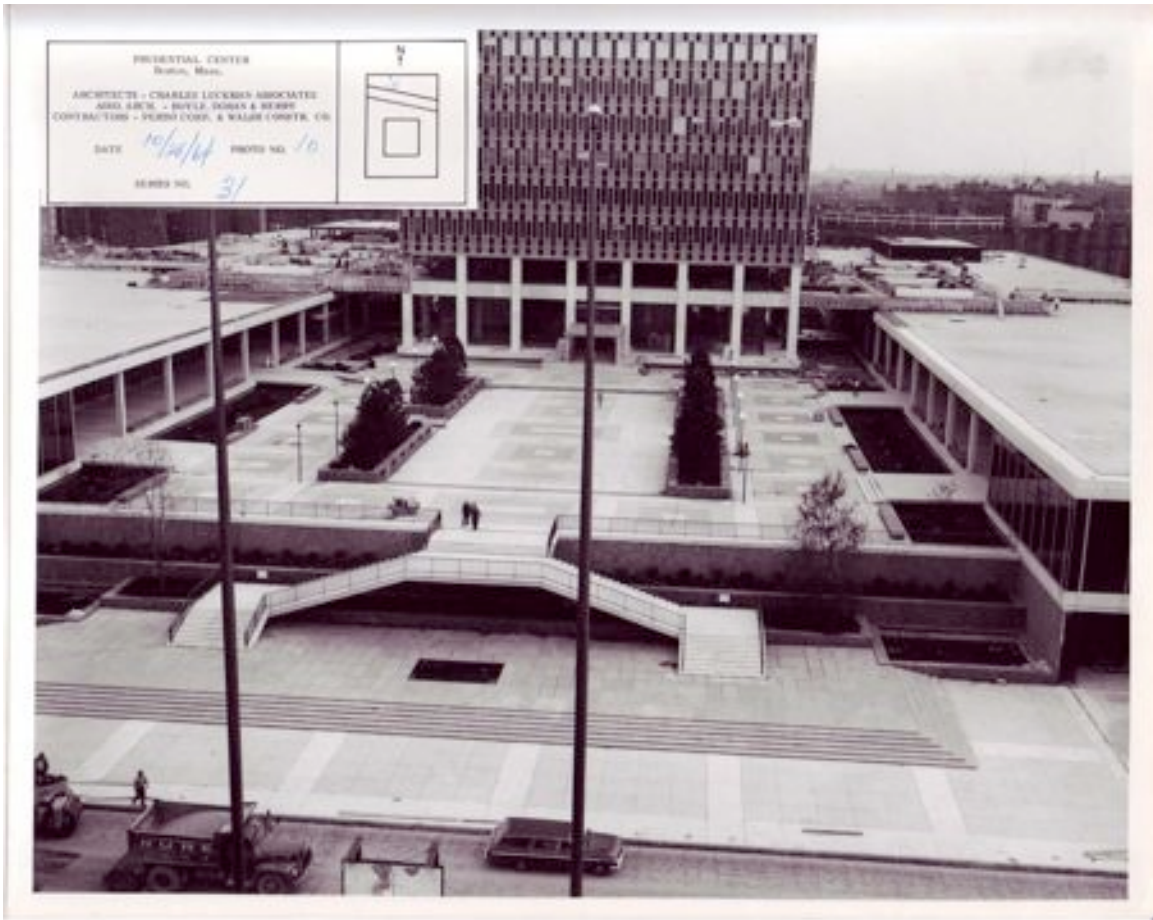


Figure 5.34. A construction photograph of the north plaza from October 28, 1964. The truck and car in the foreground are positioned in the “ring road.” The commercial blocks are set off from the plaza by rectangular pools that a shopper must cross to enter the covered shopping arcade. Source: Perini Corporation Archives.

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