

INTERVIEWS: RFE

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I'm ready,
Columbia Univ
Housing

March 24, 1952

AUG 31 1957

Columbia: Institute for Urban Land Use and Housing Studies

E. M. Fisher came in to report with quiet pride two evidences of real progress toward permanent recognition and financing:

1. The accompanying book "Housing Market Behavior in a Declining Area" * by Leo Grebler being published March 31 EMF counts a milestone in what the universities should be doing in the housing field. The accompanying mimeographed draft manuscript on Housing Market Analysis done under HHFA contract likewise represents basic work and in EMF's opinion the first real advance in studying the field of housing market behavior. EMF stresses the combination of theory and application of theory (not practice) for he counts them one and inseparable. Others are moving along through the mill.
2. As against the \$53,000 level called for by RF grant, Columbia has underwritten a \$68,000 budget for the Institute next year, not including contracts - and a strong Finance Committee headed by Samuel Walker, VP of the City Investing Company, and backed by an Advisory Board chaired by T.I. Parkinson (succeeding Bruere) is confident of raising \$200,000 by the end of this academic year to make good this level of operation over the next three years. EMF has had moments of feeling that he made a strategic error in feeling he could get started as rapidly as he thought possible with the RF grants made, but as things are shaping up, is grateful for our foresight and pressure through him upon his committees.

Subsequent letter-report is attached confirming some of the foregoing.

Public Housing in the United States: A casual question by RFE regarding the scope and significance of the public housing program opened up a situation which may be worthy of careful exploration. EMF said that in New York City alone, public housing constitutes 70% of the housing undertaken since the war, and when the program now underway or on the boards is realized in 3 or 4 years, 400,000 NYC families or 5% of the city's total population will be so housed. Similarly the program is ramifying significantly not only throughout the nation's urban centers, but also in suburban and rural areas. To RFE's direct question EMF said that he feels the program is making net for a better America. A factual off-the-record statement by EMF on the situation recently to the Public Housing Committee of the NYC Real Estate Board

*Sent to RF Library

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also brought thanks from those members known as the most hostile to the Government program. The trouble is that the program is burgeoning ahead raising substantial problems of tax exemption, etc. but more seriously is charged with aiming administratively to serve political ends as through redistribution of wealth - without any objective audit or public scrutiny and consideration. To RFE's naive query as to why this had not been an early concern, R.U. Ratcliff's HHFA Research Division, EMF said that it was proposed but immediately ruled out because no auditing by a coordinate division within the same Federal Security Agency would be tolerated. Who could do it? None better than the Columbia Institute, drawing in 2-3 good people for 2-3 years, e.g., Leonard Silk, experienced HHFA economist who himself proposed the foregoing study; a good sociologist; and perhaps a third on the technical and designing or planning aspects. It will take little work to pull together EMF's own notes in this direction - and they are now attached in informal form. No commitment beyond a willingness to look at it. When JHW and LCD have read it, may we discuss in staff meeting? //

Miscellaneous:

HHFA Research: The SS grants to Wisconsin and SSRC helped give a running start to this Division. Of some \$2,300,000 granted the agency in its first year 3 years ago, R. U. Ratcliff of Wisconsin (taking the directorship when EMF declined the first bid to see Columbia through) had some \$700,000 for social studies. Of this the Columbia Institute got \$21,000 for the above-mentioned Housing Market Analysis, (supplement for publication is likely) and shared with Columbia's Bureau of Applied Social Research an additional \$50,000 for a study of Residential Mobility. The draft of this is in process of revision but has been delayed since Rossi, in immediate charge, went to Harvard. The second year, the HHFA got about \$1,600,000 but the lion's share of this went to technical problems. The current year, ending June 30, the research budget was axed to a nominal \$33,000. In result R. U. Ratcliff returned to Wisconsin in September 1951 - being succeeded by Joseph Ohrendorf, an architectural engineer mainly concerned with technical subjects.

Other growing University centers of housing research: EMF lists:

Harvard-MIT hookup of the School of Design under Wm. Wheaton with MacLauren's MIT work in the economics of innovation aided by the Bemis Foundation. Lloyd Rodwin also is there and Coleman Woodbury has recently joined the group to head the division of economic and social research.

Cornell: where Glenn Beyer, formerly of EMF's FHA and NHA Washington staff, has been since 1946 or 47 working primarily on problems of farm housing, including the possibilities of prefabrication: also "The Journey to Work".

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Speaking of pre-fabrication, EMF says that E. W. Pavey is still trying. Engineers agree that P has good ideas and they recently attracted the attention even of Starrett Brothers and Eken for possible adaptation to taller buildings with important cost savings - but EMF fears that EWP just does not have the organizing and promotional ability needed to swing it.

EMF is negotiating with UN the possibility of spending his sabbatical due 1952-53 in Beirut. He served there with AUB 1914-17. He is not concerned with continuity of the Institute, since Grebler will be there and by then it is expected that funds being raised by the Finance Committee will permit a permanent replacement of Robert Mitchell, who went to the University of Pennsylvania.

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