

# Corpus Christi Chronicle

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## STUYVESANT TOWN

On June third the Board of Estimate of the City of New York approved the form of contract and plans for the Stuyvesant Town housing project to be constructed by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company on the East Side of Manhattan at a cost of about \$50,000,000. The Company will be accorded the right of eminent domain to secure the needed properties, a partial tax exemption for twenty-five years that will total a considerable amount, and 739,000 feet of the City's streets will be ceded to the project. The development is intended to house 24,000 persons and more than 8,000 families. It is evident, therefore, this proposed plan is not wholly private but is a semi-municipal enterprise. This is an advantage in that large reservoirs of capital such as life insurance companies possess will help solve a vital need — urban re-development.

The problems Stuyvesant Town will create, however, if the present plans stand will be greater and exceedingly more fundamental than any it will solve. One of the several features that have been adversely criticized is the provision of excluding Negroes from the project. This demands some detailed consideration.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company has let it be clearly understood that no Negro tenants will be admitted. It must be borne in mind that the Company was not asked to admit any stated percentage of Negro tenants or were they requested to forego their right of selecting from among those who would wish to rent. The objection was made that the mere quality of color should not be made the determining factor in accepting applicants. The

Company was adamant and its representative declared that the exclusion of Negroes was a condition for the undertaking of this project. Fortunately, this discrimination was challenged, even if unsuccessfully, at the Board meeting on June third. The arguments of those supporting the stand of the Company in this question were amazing. One speaker declared that it was good business for the City to accept this offer for redevelopment and therefore it would have to accept it on the Company's conditions. A similar defense was made for slavery but that was many years ago. Furthermore, it would seem that since the investment is not purely private and needs public subsidy the City should have the right to safeguard the very minimum social requirements of this State, namely that any citizen regardless of race, creed or color, has the right to share the benefits of public aided projects. A spokesman for the Company was quoted as saying, "Negroes and whites do not mix. Perhaps they will in a hundred years but they don't now." Concerning this statement three observations may be made: First, in the public housing projects of this City people of all races are living side by side as neighbors and fellow citizens. Secondly, an adequate answer to the time element in the statement quoted above is, furnished by the well known inscription "it is later than you think." The Negro soldiers and sailors rendered valiant service to their country at Bataan, Guadalcanal, and the Solomon Islands. How will a statement to the effect that black and whites do not mix affect them? If this country belongs wholly to the white race what reason have the colored for defending it? It can be objected that in the Armed Forces there is segregation. And if this can be tolerated why should the

barring of colored from a housing development be so dangerous? While Jim Crowism in the Army and Navy is indefensible there is no analogy between that and segregation in post-war housing development in New York City. The colored boy in the armed forces presumably has been intelligent enough to understand that segregation existed previously to the war and that while it ought to be abolished the Negro is not going to employ it as a weapon of sabotage to undermine his country's program in a war in which the very existence and freedom of all races are at stake. To sanction such discrimination with the subsidy and blessing of the public authority, however, in the world which the colored are fighting to help bring into being is quite a different matter. Thirdly, some years ago a non-Catholic minister in Brooklyn let it be known that Negro worshippers were not welcome in his Church. That stalwart champion of all victims of injustice, the late Heywood Broun, devoted his newspaper column to an examination of this manner of acting. He concluded with the statement that a clergyman had the right, if he so wished, to conduct his Church as an exclusive organization or lodge, but if he chose to do so, in deference to decency and propriety he ought first to remove his surplice and cease to call Christ his Master. The logic of that argument is irrefragable. With the obvious changes this reasoning applies also to the public authority in the instance of the housing project under consideration. No one denies there are difficulties involved in even admitting the possibility of accepting Negroes, and there is undeniable prejudice on the part of some white citizens towards the colored, but this is no justification for the City to acquiesce and implicitly accept a

condition that is intolerable. There are countries in which this problem can be solved simply because a superior race is recognized. The United States of America is not numbered among these countries. Pearl S. Buck writes: ". . . our democracy does not allow for the present division between a white ruler race and a subject colored race, and we ought to make up our minds as to what we want and then move to accomplish it. If the United States is to include subject and ruler peoples, then let us be honest about it and change the Constitution and make it plain that Negroes cannot share the privileges of the white people. True, we would then be totalitarian rather than democratic; but, if that is what we want, let us say so and let us tell the Negro so. Then the white Americans will be relieved of the necessity of hypocrisy, and the colored people will know where they are. They may even settle down into a docile subject race, so long as we are able to keep the weapons of rebellion from them — and these include education."

The barring of Negro applicants is by no means the only feature of Stuyvesant Town that is open to criticism. The advisability of erecting what will be to all intents and purposes a walled city or company town within New York has been questioned. The density of population in the proposed development, the lack of provision for the 11,000 families living in this area now, and the fact that these blocks have not generally been considered a "slum" are some of the further objections that have been made.

In conclusion another fundamental question presents itself: A housing development with sufficient government subsidy to encourage the entrance of private capital into the field is desirable. Is this present pattern, however, to

set a precedent for future developments, i.e. will public authority have to bow to the conditions that powerful and wealthy companies will dictate even if these conditions undermine the basic structure of American democracy? At the present time a petition has been filed in the State Supreme Court. A group of property owners are seeking to enjoin Mayor La Guardia and other city officials from approving the project because the area does not constitute a slum and the project would evict more than 10,000 families "without due process of law."

All things save virtue and truth can be bought at too high a price. It would seem that New York City is bartering with the Metropolitan Insurance Co., and if the plan stands, the gain to the City will be incomparably less than its loss.

## PEPPER AND SALT

*We Salute —*

THE RT. REV. MONSIGNOR FRANCIS J. HAAS, Dean of the School of Social Science, Catholic University, Washington, D.C., whose qualities of mind and heart and accomplishments in labor conciliation almost demanded that President Roosevelt request his services, and whose patriotism and genuine affection for his fellow citizens, black and white, compelled him to accept the most difficult chairmanship in Washington, that of the FEPC.

REV. H. A. REINHOLD for the excellency of his pamphlet entitled "Our Parish." It is incomparably the best of its kind in English.

THE REV. PHILIP BOND, our parishioner, who will afford us the privilege of assisting at his first solemn Mass in our Church on June 27th. To his family also we extend our congratulations on this happy occasion. To Father