



“The federal government viewed public housing as ‘projects’ to manage and contain, rather than neighborhoods to nurture and knit to the cities around them. Inspired by Le Corbusier’s Plan Voisin, most of the projects consisted of towers in a park, sequestered from existing street grids. But the idea failed because the government neglected to maintain the towers and the parks, and tenants weren’t compelled to take care of territory they could not clearly call their own” (McKee 96).

In 1960, 4 housing towers rose from 3 city blocks on some of Philadelphia’s most recently desired real estate. Built of concrete, brick and glass, they were intended to stand for generations with little maintenance or further care. Forcefully inserted as a foreign urban object, one might have thought they would, in time, assimilate.

The Martin Luther King Plaza (MLK), as it is known today is more than a failed example of Modernism, it is a visual symbol of crime, and concentrates some of the city’s most unfortunate citizens. The project has been labeled, “...‘severely distressed’ by the federal government. So you can imagine what regular folks call it” (Ferrick B1). Nearly 200 of the 576 units are vacant despite the 3700 families on the Philadelphia Housing Authority’s waiting list. From statistics taken in 1996, MLK Plaza ranked first in crime over every PHA development in the city (Flander 6).

The failure and success of any housing environment cannot rest solely on the shoulders of architectural solutions. MLK Plaza, like many other housing projects throughout the country, has had similar faults. They lack an attachment or bridge to the community. They were conceived as urban prisons, holding their inhabitants away from the diversity of society. For one reason or another, the families who live here find themselves in situations they are unable to escape. Some of the greatest contributors to their plight is lack of jobs, community resources, child care, legitimate community retail and reliable education for their young people. Without a solid foundation upon which to build, no architectural solution will make even the slightest difference.

