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Housing Haussmann’s Paris: the politics and legacy of Second Empire redevelopment

Yonah Freemark a, A. Bliss b and Lawrence J. Vale c

a Urban Institute, Washington, DC, USA; b Research Assistant, USA; c Urban Design and Planning, MIT, Cambridge, MA, USA

ABSTRACT
Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s tenure as Prefect of the Seine from 1853 to 1870 has been widely associated with the modernization of Paris. In this paper, we contextualize and evaluate the prefect’s intentions and policies related to housing by bringing archival documents into conversation with nineteenth-century commentary on Haussmann’s activities, ensuing scholarship investigating the era, and spatial analysis, with a focus on a case-study site in the 13th arrondissement. This examination yields three core claims. First, in exploring the context of Haussmann’s projects, we argue that the Second Empire’s expropriation, clearance, and construction were partly motivated by an interest in ensuring a greater quantity and quality of housing in Paris at reduced costs, or, at least, were presented as such. Second, in evaluating the impact of Haussmann’s work, we argue that projects did not solely result in mass displacement and social recomposition through urban redevelopment, but also sometimes reaffirmed pre-existing demographic distributions, or were constructed on greenfield land. Finally, in reflecting on Haussmann’s legacy on contemporary social housing politics, we argue that the prefect’s enduring influence can be read both in the rhetoric used to justify present-day projects and also, in select cases, the location of sites chosen for them.

KEYWORDS
Haussmann; Paris; housing

Introduction
Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s tenure as Prefect of the Seine under Napoléon III, stretching from 1853 to 1870, has been widely associated with the modernization of Paris. The prefect’s transformation of the city left in its wake novel infrastructure systems, newly created neighbourhoods, and the tenets of a recognizable Parisian image. Beyond these physical attributes, Haussmann’s projects received a mixed immediate reception and have sustained abundant ensuing scholarship – reflecting a range of perspectives – regarding their purpose and ultimate impact. While some historical analyses depict Paris’ transformation as the result of an autocratic, ruthless planning regime helmed by Haussmann, others cast Haussmann as the driving force behind the creation of a more healthy, organized, and attractive capital city, while many characterizations draw on a combination of these characterizations. Despite differences, these evaluations largely coalesce around a shared assumption or argument that the interventions carried out under the Second Empire resulted in the social stratification of Paris, manifested notably by displacing poor residents from the city centre.

CONTACT Yonah Freemark yfreemark@urban.org

For clarity’s sake, we refer to the person who led the French state from 1848–1870 as Napoléon III. His birth name, used prior to him becoming emperor in 1852, was Charles-Louis Napoléon Bonaparte.

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In this paper, we focus on Haussmann’s role as it relates to the destruction and development of housing in the context of the construction of new boulevards. Through a case-study neighbour- bourhood, we supplement archetypal descriptions of Haussmann’s transformative vision for nineteenth-century Paris and the deleterious effects its implementation incurred with a nuanced view of the city’s remaking, without discounting either the destruction or modernization Haussmann wrought, but complementing such extreme depictions with perspectives and cases that fall outside of – perhaps, in between – both categories. We also assess the era’s complex legacy by showing how present-day efforts in Paris to construct social housing – and to oppose it – invoke Haussmann as a trope a full century-and-a-half later, with patterns of city life perpetuated over time and today’s conditions reflecting policy choices and rhetorical themes that originated long ago.2

Our examination of Haussmann’s context, impact, and legacy yields three core claims. First, we place the motivations for Haussmann’s housing policies and projects in the context of the prevailing contemporary consensus that living standards were unhealthy for the poor inhabitants of the Parisian centre. We argue that the expropriation, clearance, and construction of housing under the Second Empire was motivated by an interest, shared between Haussmann and Napoléon III, in ensuring a greater quantity and quality of housing at reduced costs, or, at the very least, was presented as stemming from such an interest. Second, we evaluate the impact of Haussmann’s reconstructions on the city’s social composition and question the common claim that the period resulted in the creation of class-compartmentalised neighbourhoods. We argue that Haussmann’s projects did not result solely in mass displacement and social recomposition – a claim not intended to dismiss the segregative effects of Haussmann’s work, but to deepen criticism of the era through a textured depiction of the social and geographic contexts in which such effects occurred. We show, for example, that projects often were constructed on greenfield land, or in a manner that reaffirmed pre-existing demographic distributions. Finally, we reflect on Haussmann’s enduring influence, as viewed through the present-day politics of integrating lower-income households in to affluent city neighbourhoods. We argue that the prefect’s impact can be read both in the rhetoric used to justify recent social-housing projects and, in select cases, the location of sites chosen for them.

To support these claims, we bring archival documents into conversation with nineteenth-century commentary and ensuing scholarship. At the City of Paris Archives, we examined parcel-level data on building footprints, property sales, and expropriations, as well as historical material collected during the late 1800s by the Lazard brothers, who led an international financial services organization. At the French National Archives, we explored the records of the Seine département (encompassing Paris and its near suburbs) relating to expropriations, including correspondence between Haussmann and government ministers, as well as almanacs of commercial firms dating from the late 1800s.3 While rich in material, our examination likely reflects the limitations and biases of nineteenth-century record keeping – namely, public records may have failed to encode data on many of the most vulnerable workers and residents, and our findings may accordingly be limited in their representativeness.

Our examination of present-day Paris, finally, included a review of news articles for mentions of Haussmann in contemporary debates over housing policy and an interview with civil servants involved in housing development today. We use spatial analysis to locate Haussmann’s

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2See Fourcaut, *La Ville.*
interventions in the context of their demographic surroundings and physical landscapes, as well as in relationship to the sites selected for contemporary social-housing construction.

Harnessing these sources, we assemble a case study of a site along the Boulevard Arago in Paris’ 13th arrondissement, selected because it illustrates the housing politics of both Haussmann’s period and our own. The site is located on a road completed in the late 1860s at the edge of urbanized Paris, where an apartment building constructed under Haussmann was converted into social housing in 2007.

Tracking the recorded movement of people living at expropriated addresses, we illustrate how views on the relationship between public health and housing channelled by Haussmann and Napoléon III shaped how Parisians lived. We conclude by reflecting on how the legacy of Second Empire projects has reverberated into the present, including the legacy’s influence on rhetoric used to justify the location of social housing. Ultimately, the Boulevard Arago property represents but one site where parallel political currents in the nineteenth century and today informed the use and design of residential buildings.

**Haussmann’s admirers and critics: shifting, mythologizing, and polarising**

Unsurprisingly, given the extent of redevelopment that occurred in Second-Empire Paris, the scholarship on Haussmann’s interventions is diverse in its assessments of the prefect. Some scholars depict Haussmann as the definitive author of a modernized Paris, pointing to the scale of transformation achieved, while others contest this mythologization, undercutting its emphasis on construction by foregrounding, instead, these projects’ destructive social effects. Others assert, moreover, that planning action during the period changed over time, with Parisian public works following varying logics over the decades. The full historiography of haussmannisme reveals how subsequent scholars’ own contexts have shifted as well, with evolving theoretical traditions casting and recasting the Second Empire in new light.

Regardless of whether arguments valorise Haussmann’s achievements or argue for the primacy of negative social ramifications, they tend to cohere around Haussmann’s agency and impact, while marginalizing the political and cultural contexts that shaped the prefect’s actions. They also provide few details as to how infrastructure investments manifested on the ground with respect to housing.

The scholarship that commends Haussmann – more common in work from the 1940s through 1960s – emphasizes the novelty, scope, and enduring resonance of projects associated with the prefect. As economic geographer Harvey notes, such accounts flow from Haussmann’s own:

> Haussmann’s Mémoires, upon which most accounts have relied, are full of dissimulation … He needed to build a myth of radical break around himself and the Emperor … he needed to show that what went before was irrelevant; that neither he nor [Napoléon III] was in any way beholden to the practices of the immediate past.4

Among reflections on the force of the prefect’s modernization efforts, Chapman and Chapman depict the prefect’s interventions as producing widespread benefits. Statistically, they note, new construction exceeded what was destroyed; 27,500 dwellings were demolished, but more than 102,000 were built or rebuilt, and the city created public facilities for resident benefit, including town halls, theatres, markets, abattoirs, and schools, all while digging a sewer system. Gaillard, writing more recently, also affirms the dominance of construction over destruction in her promotion of Haussmann’s work: the

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city added 71 miles of new or wider roads, four new bridges, and doubled the number of planted trees. Given this scale of intervention, mid-century scholars such as Giedion and Pinkney suggest Haussmann’s modernization served as a universalizing investment, affecting all residents.

Influential English urbanist Hall, too, emphasizes the prefect’s enduring effects. He argues that Haussmann’s interventions ‘made Paris’ with commendable speed and permanence. Contributing to the practice of mythologizing the prefect, Hall writes, ‘no one in the entire history of urbanism, neither Pericles nor the Roman emperors nor the Renaissance Popes, ever transformed a city so profoundly during such a short space of time’. Taken together, these characterizations emphasize the unprecedented scale, swift implementation, and lasting impact of Haussmann’s efforts, suggesting a reverence for the prefect who ushered in the historic transformation. Such scholarship devotes less attention to the Second Empire’s destruction of housing and re-distribution of residents, or else relegates these to the realm of necessary trade-offs.

Much of the scholarship since the 1980s, on the other hand, has framed Haussmann’s efforts to alter public space services in the context of nineteenth-century class conflict. Paccoud argues that the initial stages of Haussmann’s modernization were informed by the proto-socialist theories of Saint-Simon, which prioritized the broad needs of ‘productive’ people which Saint-Simon defined to include the working class, over the then-dominant upper class, property owners among them. Loyer argues that Second-Empire projects served to subdue a restless citizenry; Haussmann and Napoléon III anticipated a changing economy, and ‘attempted to reconcile social reform and economic growth within a single urban space’. Scholars focusing on the social ramifications of the interventions use a class analysis approach to cast the prefect and his work in a negative light, arguing that Second-Empire projects resulted in profound – and perhaps intentional – displacement of the poor. Harvey, for one, describes the ways that major interventions stimulated, and relied upon, a wealthier consumer class, as evidenced by project funding mechanisms. He argues that property ownership, once shared among small-scale investors, became consolidated among large-scale landlords between 1840 and 1880 as speculation fuelled land purchases adjacent to public works, ultimately producing ‘bourgeois quarters’. Simultaneously, this shifted ‘middle- and low-income housing’ production to outlying areas, without ‘intermingling with the upper classes’. Ultimately, Harvey argues, ‘the fine mesh of quarters were much more clearly class or occupationally defined in 1870 than they had been in 1848’.

Art historian Kirkland, for his part, emphasizes the role of eminent domain, routinely deployed during Haussmann’s tenure, in spurring class-based segregation by transforming packed low-income neighbourhoods into attractive communities for the wealthy.

Others working from a historical tradition have described class-based segregation from a second angle, focusing on conditions experienced by working-class Parisians. Sutcliffe reminds us that, it is doubtful whether public works did much to improve public health throughout the city, for, unaccompanied by a public housing programme, they resulted in the overcrowding of surviving areas of cheap accommodation in the centre and the creation of slums on the outskirts.

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6Hall, *Cities in Civilization,* 706.
9Kirkland, *Paris Reborn,* 137. The legal foundation for eminent domain extended to an 1807 law, but street-reconstruction efforts between the 1789 Revolution and the Second Empire involved few takings other than formerly royal or religious land. Eminent domain became a more powerful tool due to an 1841 modification, a formal recognition of the practice in the 1848 Second Republic’s constitution, and an 1852 decree granting the government greater leniency in determining what could be expropriated.
10Sutcliffe, *Autumn of Central Paris,* 42.
For some, this stratification was not simply an effect of Haussmann’s agenda, but rather its aim. In Fishman’s view, for example, Haussmann promoted the interests of an expanding bourgeoisie with the time and means to appreciate the benefits of living in a modernized economy.11 Merrifield suggests that Haussmann operated with a class-based hatred fuelled by the state bureaucratic apparatus’ antipathy toward the working class and the poor. He accordingly characterizes Haussmann’s actions as aimed at shifting the poorest out of central districts, where they were viewed as thwarting redevelopment.12

Another strand of analysis, while acknowledging the class impacts of the prefect’s work, rejects the mid-century characterization of Haussmann as all-powerful, focusing less on classifying the prefect as either a champion of modernization or a catalyst for segregation, and underscoring, instead, the role of Haussmann’s predecessors, his contemporaries, and broader economic systems in shaping the interventions. Bourillon notes that the prefect built on earlier efforts to reduce congestion in the centre, a concept that had been simmering since 1789.13 Pinon, for his part, frames Napoléon III as the mastermind behind Second-Empire improvements, citing contemporaries’ characterization of the emperor’s role in driving projects Haussmann executed and the fact that projects like an extension of the Rue de Rivoli were carried out prior to Haussmann’s tenure. Pinon points to the influence of the future emperor’s two-year stint in London during his youth; that city’s parks, markets, and streets impressed Napoléon III, and his subsequent plan for Paris used London as a template. The prefect can be most accurately depicted, Pinon suggests, as a civil servant embroiled in conflict between competing interests, including those of the Interior Minister, who approved public works investments.14 Kirkland similarly argues that Haussmann took his orders from the emperor, relaying as evidence the story of Napoléon III directing Haussmann to undertake interventions using a specific map that the emperor intended to use as a template for improvements (it was subsequently destroyed in a city hall fire).15

While Pinon and Kirkland point to other actors to hedge the characterizations of Haussmann as the orchestrator of Paris’ transformation, others cite the political and economic processes that shaped the Second-Empire agenda as evidence for limits on prefectoral power. Paccoud demonstrates that Paris’ reconstruction was, in fact, the product of negotiations between multiple government agencies and stakeholders involved in a bureaucratic tug-of-war. He shows that Haussmann’s reconstructions transformed over time; during the 1850s, the prefect held more power over planning outcomes, but, faced with the rising influence of landowners, he lost authority as his tenure progressed, a narrative undermining claims that Haussmann was capable of autocratic action.16 Shapiro, too, notes that Second-Empire development – both public and private – suffered from delays and budgetary constraints due in part to competing government emphasis on laissez-faire economic principles and public entrepreneurialism.17

In addition to citing such political processes as instrumental in shaping nineteenth-century Paris, scholars point to economic systems as core factors in the city’s transformation. Harvey focuses on the role of speculative building in increasing property values, a finding consistent with the claim that Haussmann had limited influence on how Parisians lived. He notes that spatial segregation manifested because ‘it proved hard to attract bourgeois property owners or tenants’

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11Fishman, Bourgeois Utopias.
12Merrifield, New Urban Question.
13Bourillon, ‘Changer la ville.’
14Pinon, Atlas du Paris haussmannien, 28–9; Pinon, Mythe Haussmann.
15Kirkland, Paris Reborn, 2.
16Paccoud, ‘Planning Law.’
17Shapiro, ‘Housing reform;’ Shapiro, Housing.
into increasingly low-income areas. Seen this way, novel patterns of demographic distribution stemmed from a capitalist real-estate system, not an all-powerful state.\textsuperscript{18} Shapiro argues that Haussmann’s use of the market to produce housing, rather than rejecting such a \textit{laissez-faire} approach by directing public investments to affordable housing, ultimately failed to relieve the pressure of seemingly ever-increasing dwelling costs or to resolve the sanitation problems facing the poor.\textsuperscript{19}

While much of the scholarship on Haussmann focuses on its citywide impacts, some analyses use neighbourhood-level studies to construct a more nuanced understanding of the prefect’s influence. Bourillon, for example, leverages a case study of a central neighbourhood to argue that Haussmann’s renovations allowed older districts to retain many pre-existing residents, producing new coexistence between classes.\textsuperscript{20} The degree to which this experience was replicated in other parts of the city, especially those at the edge of development, however, remains less examined.

Ultimately, these varied analyses of Haussmann’s agency and impact collectively suggest that Paris’ transformation resulted from ‘the convergence of a whole array of social, cultural, and economic factors’.\textsuperscript{21} Still, given the prevalence of myth-making surrounding Haussmann, which serves to diminish the identification of such ‘factors’, the context of Haussmann’s tenure merits further examination. What were the rationales that informed contemporary perspectives on public health, housing, and economic conditions and served as the basis for projects pursued by Napoléon III and his prefect? To what extent were these rationales manifested in housing projects in redeveloped areas? And what influence have tropes derived from perceptions and realities of Haussmann’s work wielded in present-day discussions?

**Haussmann’s context: nineteenth-century views on the Second Empire**

During the Second Empire, Paris was under the \textit{tutelle} (control) of the national government, a monarchy under Napoléon III’s rule. The city of Paris, newly enlarged in 1860 through the annexation of several suburban areas, served as an administrative subdivision of the larger Seine \textit{département}. Paris had no mayor and, while it did have a city council, its members went unelected throughout the Second Empire. Haussmann was appointed as Seine prefect by Napoléon III and managed the \textit{département} under the supervision of the similarly appointed interior minister. Guided by Haussmann, the \textit{département} oversaw street widenings and could conduct urban redevelopment projects.

Haussmann’s interventions can be understood as a response to the intertwined physical and economic conditions of mid-nineteenth-century Paris, especially their relationship to public health. Amid growing concerns in the public discourse about the link between urbanism and quality of life, many commentators viewed housing as key to the material well-being of the population.\textsuperscript{22} Contemporary economist Horace Say, for one, noted that death rates from diseases such as cholera in the central medieval-era street warrens were far higher than those in the rest of Paris.\textsuperscript{23} Say cited evidence for environmental determinism: the city’s built form, he argued, encouraged unhealthy living. In 1845, he noted that in the centre,

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\textsuperscript{18}Harvey, Paris, 139.
\textsuperscript{19}Shapiro, ‘Housing Reform.’
\textsuperscript{20}Bourillon, ‘Rénovation.’
\textsuperscript{21}Kirkland, \textit{Paris Reborn}.
\textsuperscript{22}Bourillon, ‘Changer la ville;’ Shapiro, Housing.
\textsuperscript{23}Say, ‘De l’administration,’ 121–41. These health-based justifications—questionable, given lack of scientific controls—were similar to those used by U.S. public-housing proponents decades later; see Vale, From the Puritans.
Houses are close together, all the land is built-up, many houses do not have access to courtyards, and have access to sun and air only on narrow streets; it’s there that live, in small houses, the most miserable workers.24

Louis Lazare, editor of La Revue Municipale, specialist in Paris’ history, and a fierce critic of Haussmann, shared a similar perspective. Though he objected to the prefect’s methods, Lazare wanted to ensure that people living in cramped neighbourhoods did not succumb to problems resulting from their environment:

For centuries, the centre of this city was traversed by narrow and unhealthy alleys. An entire population of artisans and workers were born, suffered, and died without leaving this putrid environment. It was performing an act of humanitarianism to put an end to this mess of human flesh.25

Any such changes would likely require direct action by the government, and its potential to serve as a means for achieving physical and social improvement informed Napoléon III’s choice to appoint a Commission des embellissements on the heels of Haussmann’s ascension to prefect.26 A 1853 Commission report waxed poetic about ‘a city where craftsmen would live in healthy and airy houses, where they would find an abundance of water meeting their needs … where, having left their workshops, they would encounter well-planted promenades, monuments …’27 As this optimistic vision suggested, and Lazare’s depiction of working-class neighbourhoods attested, unhealthy physical conditions were concentrated in poorer areas, with class informing Parisians’ access to both ‘airy houses’ and public amenities like promenades. The imbalance between wages and living costs cemented this disparity: economist and proto-anthropologist Jean-Lechevallier Saint-André determined that people suffered because of high rents and pricey essential goods.28

As these contemporary accounts demonstrate, unhealthy physical environments and financial strain plagued working-class Parisians; Second Empire leaders tasked themselves to address these challenges.

Napoléon III himself retained a long-term interest in taking on such tasks. From a young age, the future emperor had signalled interest in community spatial reorganization. In an 1844 pamphlet, Extinction of Pauperism, he proposed workers’ colonies throughout France’s rural areas to provide ‘food, education, religious instruction, and work, to all who required them’.29 The largely unrealized idea of such ‘charitable institutions’, offering healthy discipline and diversion to working-class French people, drew the support of socialist leaders including Louis Blanc and George Sand, and revealed the future emperor’s burgeoning interest in cheaper, healthier living.30

Second-Empire officials expressed the urgency of bettering working-class living conditions, mirroring the emperor’s earlier writings. Beginning in 1849, Napoléon III promoted cités ouvrières, worker-focused affordable housing developed through charitable means rather than the government. The goal, Shapiro argues, was a defence against socialism.31 In an 1857 letter (Figure 1), Pierre Magne, Finance Minister, argued that the capital required urgent improvements in low-income neighbourhoods, and criticized both the under-provision of housing and high housing costs for all, but ‘principally for the working class’. Paris suffered from its housing inequalities,
Magne wrote, demonstrated by ‘sumptuous apartments on one side, and on the other, uninhabitable houses, and ghettos [cités] outside of the city, not responding to all of life’s needs’. Magne proposed solutions similar to those Haussmann implemented. Narrow streets and old buildings should be eliminated, he argued, predicting such improvements would lead to a ‘great softening in living costs’. The goal for Paris’ reconstruction, these writings suggested, might be understood less as an attempt to dislocate the poor so that the wealthy could live in certain areas, but rather as an attempt to develop newly healthy neighbourhoods to allow those same needy people to remain.

Figure 1. Letter from Pierre Magne, 1857. Magne, Letter to Minister of the Interior.

32Magne, Letter to Minister of the Interior.
This ambition – to improve, rather than replace, working-class neighbourhoods – is captured, too, in the assertions of Haussmann, who describes his actions as motivated by a desire to benefit the working class. Whether Haussmann’s claims were sincere, as Paccoud argues, or simply lip service to the perceived necessity of addressing poor housing conditions, the prefect substantiated them with data on Second-Empire reconstructions to defend his actions.

This dynamic was clearly illustrated during the 13 August 1861 inauguration of the Boulevard Malesherbes, as evidenced by first-hand accounts of the public ceremony. Haussmann delivered a speech describing the residences under construction along the boulevard as the initial building blocks of a larger vision: ‘This is not a new district’, he stated. ‘This is an entire city that is being created, and no one can calculate how much development will occur!’33 He emphasized the project’s aim of encouraging new housing construction on the heels of demolitions, and illustrated this commitment by favourably comparing another project he had led, the Boulevard de Sébastopol, to the Rue de Rivoli extension, completed prior to Napoléon III’s tenure. That project required demolishing 230 houses to provide only 89 reconstructions, he explained, while Haussmann’s Sébastopol necessitated demolishing 2494 buildings – but produced 17,821 new housing units.34

His critics, Haussmann complained, overlooked the scale of this housing construction, focusing instead on the demolitions that often preceded such projects. Such detractors unfairly downplayed the wide cross-section of Parisians benefitting from new buildings, focusing instead on the small subset of luxury units created.35 But residential construction, the prefect insisted, would address the demands of a broad array of residents: of the more than 9000 housing units that opened in 1860, 58 percent cost between 250 and 500 francs to rent, and another 19 percent cost less than 250 francs – figures that he claimed demonstrated their affordability. ‘The grands travaux of Paris, far from having caused high rents … have had the unceasing effect of moderating them … by slowly provoking competition that cannot help but turn, finally, to the advantage of renters’.36 The Emperor’s speech on the same occasion reaffirmed Haussmann’s commitment to improved, financially accessible housing.37 ‘The mission of the administration’, the emperor assured the assembled, ‘is to protect the least well-off classes’.

This housing construction was not subsidized in the manner of present-day social housing. Though new laws in 1850 and 1852 allowed the government to invest in reconstruction, the dépar-tement established a commission to renovate housing, and the emperor promoted worker housing, Haussmann’s emphasis was on incentivizing market investors. None of the new housing had explicit income limits or any means-based entry requirements.39 Nevertheless, both Haussmann and Napoléon III stressed affordability as the rationale behind housing construction along the Boulevard Malesherbes, revealing, if their comments are taken at face value, the motivations underpinning such projects. But how did their understanding of nineteenth-century working-class living conditions and aims to remedy them, whether purported or true, intersect with specific sites? To what extent were project properties affected by the unhealthy living conditions Haussmann and Napoléon III decried, and how effective were Second-Empire solutions in addressing them?

33Haussmann, Speech, 10; see Paccoud, ‘Badiou.’
34Ibid., 13.
35Grasset, ‘Boulevard Malesherbes.’ One reporter agreed, noting, ‘we must reaffirm an important point: We should not imagine that there are only palaces on this long axis.’
36Haussmann, Speech, 15–16. The reader might find that the prefect’s supply-and-demand rhetoric shares a thesis with that presented by ‘Yes in my backyard’ (YIMBY) groups in U.S. cities today.
37Kirkland, Paris Reborn, 140.
38Napoléon III, Speech, 19.
39Shapiro, ‘Housing; Bourillon, ‘La loi.’
To examine this, we consider the case of the Boulevard Arago in the 13th arrondissement, built partly on a viaduct elevated above former quarries and one of the marquee new roadways of Second-Empire Paris. The 40-meter-wide street is illustrative of Haussmann’s transformations, as were its adjoining handsome buildings and tree-lined sidewalks, both made possible by the expropriation of land from former users. The new Boulevard Arago traversed the Bièvre, a stream that had flooded the neighbourhood for centuries but been constrained to a channel in the 1840s. The channel’s banks were largely agricultural and industrial in nature, conditions captured by famed photographer Charles Marville in the 1860s (Figure 2). Despite improvements, the area remained a nuisance: as Le Moniteur noted in 1846, the Bièvre ‘produces putrid miasmas that increase the stagnation, the uncleanliness, and residues of fabrics’ created by the adjacent artisans.

Responding to these conditions, Second-Empire officials announced in 1860 that the channel would be tunnelled. The construction of the Boulevard Arago, a new circumferential route, ushered in a combination of street infrastructure improvements, sanitation upgrades, and opportunities for new, stone-façade apartment buildings. These investments were complementary; increased housing demanded greater accessibility and less pollution. The evolution of this

40Le Moniteur, July 18, 1868.
41Lazard, Lazard, and Lazard, ‘La Bièvre,’ Multiple authors, Pétition.
42Le Moniteur, October 10, 1846.

Figure 2. The Bièvre at the level of the Rue des Gobelins, 1860s. Marville, Banks of the Bièvre River. See Gagneux, Anckaert, and Conte, Sur les traces.
neighbourhood mirrored the broader contemporaneous characterizations of working-class communities; the common remedy to existing conditions prioritized housing in dense buildings, one of which – to which we will return – was eventually converted to social housing in the twenty-first century. As we investigate in the next section, however, the transformation of the area around the Boulevard Arago was not purely the displacement-and-replacement process often ascribed to Haussmann.

**Haussmann’s impact: evaluating claims of class-based displacement**

While the Second Empire is commonly associated with widespread class-based displacement and deepened segregation, this association is only partially substantiated by data from the era. Rather than negating these characterizations wholesale, evidence suggests displacement played out in the context of a range of social effects stemming from Haussmann’s work and across a broader spectrum of urban landscapes than typically captured in present-day social commentary. Specifically, accounts from the era emphasize the benefits of Haussmann’s projects to the burgeoning consumer class, but demographic patterns attest to the presence of investments in neighbourhoods both wealthy and poor, both developed and greenfield.

In observing the social effects of the period’s projects, contemporaries emphasized the prevalence of wealthier Parisians engaged in leisure activities in the city’s public realm, with some noting the apparent contradiction between the administration’s stated aims and the rise of this consumer class. Social critic Victor Fournel, for one, called into question the Second Empire’s supposed interest in working-class residents, arguing that its professed commitment to this population was a ruse intended to assuage renter anxieties. When they ‘rise up as a choir with a tone a bit more desperate than usual’, Fournel wrote, the administration ‘makes an eloquent speech, it publishes a note … that it does not demolish one house without building seven to replace it … and yet the rents still rise’. His sarcasm and resentment clear, Fournel continued,

> In just a little time, we will no longer have streets: there will only be boulevards … Avenues bordered by palaces … No longer do these men [Haussmann and developers] have to build housing that meets the needs of renters, but now they make the renters meet the needs of their houses … to avoid odours, they forbid the concierge to eat cabbage soup … to avoid noise, they forbid renters from having children.44

Lazare, similarly enraged by the gap between the interventions’ stated aims and their apparent impact, argued that Haussmann’s work inappropriately emphasized opulent structures. Low-income populations, he argued, were being pushed to the periphery, and newly constructed residential buildings failed to include the small, affordable units that members of the working class needed. In his eyes, the poor went uncompensated as their neighbourhoods were bulldozed on behalf of new arteries to serve as amenities for the consumer class.45 Taken together, these accounts call into question the true intentions or ultimate efficacy of the administration’s interventions.

The statistical evidence of such class privileging, whether it was intentional or not, does not support the same conclusion. An examination of the spatial distribution of public works in relation to the distribution of poverty (Figure 3) demonstrates that the prefect introduced new boulevards in wealthy and poor communities alike. Both the 8th and 9th arrondissements, marked by low levels of poverty, as well as arrondissements marked by high levels – including the 13th (locus of our

43Fournel, *Paris Nouveau*, 70.
44Ibid., 15, 27, 66.
45Lazare, *Les quartiers pauvres*. 
Boulevard Arago case-study site, where new apartment buildings were completed) – were heavily impacted by Haussmann’s new boulevards. In other words, the positioning of new streets cannot easily be reduced to a single-minded search for poor neighbourhoods to remake.

The breadth of interventions across communities of differing class composition is related to the fact that, though Haussmann’s most infamous boulevards may have required deep upheaval in already developed, densely settled areas, these represented only a minority of investments. A comparison of major street projects during the Second Empire with neighbourhood conditions just before Haussmann took office (Figure 4) reveals that much of present-day Paris was occupied in 1850 by land devoted to agriculture, quarries, gardens, or peri-urban uses.

Our spatial analysis of the data underlying Figure 4 shows that of the new boulevards, 26.4 percent of their overall length was completed in areas of existing, continuous urbanization; another 63.8 percent in peri-urban landscapes; and a final 9.8 percent in undeveloped, agricultural, quarry, or garden land. Thus Haussmann’s streets – and the property development that followed – partly adhere to the common narrative of the displacement of medieval Paris, with projects along the Boulevard de Sébastopol between the 2nd and 3rd arrondissements fitting this image, but also partly

Figure 3. Comparing street construction commenced under Haussmann with indigence, 1869. Streets data based on Lavedan, Histoire; Jallon, Napolitano, and Boussé, Paris Haussmann. Data on indigence from Gaillard, Paris. Since data are for 1869, there is ambiguity over whether certain lower-poverty areas resulted from Haussmanian interventions or whether lower rates of poverty preceded his transformations.

46Gaillard, Paris, notes that much construction occurred on land that had been vacant and thus not subject to constraints related to pre-existing inhabitants.
reflect a goal of replacing low-scale settlements at the city’s edge and creating new opportunities for construction on greenfield land. The case-study site is at the intersection of these three zones.

To further complicate matters, an examination of shifts in population distribution indicates that Haussmann’s reconstructions, however intrusive, did not always produce comprehensive displacement of low-income residents. Large swaths of the east side of the city, around the Buttes-Chaumont park (completed in 1867), for example, remained more than 60 percent working class, even though those neighbourhoods had been heavily impacted by street reconstructions. At the other extreme, Bourillon finds that pockets of modest living conditions lingered after Haussmann’s work even in the most luxurious districts.47

Relying on Lazare’s work for much of his analysis, Harvey argues that not only did several low-income neighbourhoods remain low-income after Haussmannian projects, but his interventions actively produced, or reaffirmed, low-income communities in affected areas since changes in the property market forced many poor people in redeveloped areas to peripheral, already-poor neighbourhoods. In other cases, modest households moved into buildings with too-high rents, and were unable to afford other needs, ultimately transforming neighbourhoods into slums.48 As Harvey suggests and the trends bear out, the social segregation often associated with Haussmann was

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47Bourillon’s study of the Arts et Métiers district shows that, despite the completion of the Boulevard de Sébastopol, 60 percent of pre-renewal residents remained in place. Bourillon, ‘Rénovation;’ Fijalkow and Oberti, ‘Urbanisme.’

48Harvey, Paris, 239.
not as clear or immediate as commonly depicted. The social impact of Haussmann’s projects cannot be characterized as the universal, unidirectional, and immediate displacement of poor Parisians, as reductive criticisms of the prefect are wont to argue.

Harvey’s analysis, however, is limited in its reliance on macro-economic explanations for Second-Empire changes in the city; ‘the problem in 1851’, he writes, ‘was to absorb the surpluses of capital and labor power’.49 Focused on the financialized speculation that paralleled Haussmann’s investments, Harvey fails to elucidate the specifics of a typical Haussmannian project and accompanying real-estate investments; he also, we shall show, overemphasizes increasing class stratification by neighbourhood and fails to show how certain boulevard-facing projects were immediately occupied by working-class residents – not the ‘bourgeois quarters’ noted above.

To better understand the mechanisms by which redevelopment occurred, the site along Boulevard Arago proves useful, once again, for tethering broader trends to a specific location and for understanding, at a finer grain, project impacts. When paving the way for construction of the boulevard and associated structures, the administration exercised eminent domain. Figure 5 shows conditions, including streets and structures, along the Bièvre in 1836, prior to Haussmann’s tenure. The map shows the peri-urban, even agricultural nature of the area, with a few small houses rather than the densely packed urbanism of medieval Paris that lies just to the north.

At Rue St. Hippolyte numbers 11 and 13 (the same location as the case-study site), on the south side of the street, three renter families shared a house with a large yard fronting the Bièvre. This included a certain Mr. Detourbe, a leather craftsman and one of several renters named in a directory of expropriated properties. Detourbe’s occupation was common for the community; of 19 proximate residents with records in 1863, 14 engaged in leather-related work. Most others nearby held similarly working-class jobs, though some of these, such as shoe making, may have required considerable expertise and training, and two held professions with higher pay that might have qualified them for the bourgeoisie (we provide details about worker classification in Table 1).50

All of their homes and workshops were displaced by 1860s public works. Figure 6 (with the same neighbourhood boundaries indicated in Figure 5) shows land taken for the Boulevard Arago right-of-way in yellow, including Detourbe’s portion of Rue St. Hippolyte, and land taken for redevelopment in blue.

This process resulted in the completion of a large boulevard in 1868 and cleared the way for the construction of apartment buildings, several of which occupied parcels lining the route. These buildings had no maximum rents or income limits, though one cité ouvrière designed specifically for working-class families was built nearby, on Avenue des Gobelins.51 In this setting, we find Haussmann’s public-works/development nexus in action. On the south side of Boulevard Arago, each of these buildings (including adjacent to Detourbe’s former workshop, at 19–21 Arago, to which we shall return as a site of social housing investment) would house many more families than the few who had been displaced, since most of the affected land had been previously unbuilt. This construction process meant a replacement of agricultural and low-scale industrial uses with residential opportunities.

The redevelopment’s full impact on the social composition of the neighbourhood cannot be fully evaluated due to loss or lack of data. Regardless of site-specific demographics, however, such

49 Ibid., 118.
51 Cités ouvrières (‘worker estates’) were developed by charitable organizations with minimal state support with the intention of creating safe, morally upstanding environments for the working class. See Dumont, ‘Logement.’
residential projects were too few in number to shift the neighbourhood’s social composition at scale, even if they were designed for a wealthier consumer class. This is confirmed by revisiting Figure 3, which suggests the area under study was not particularly well-off, even after redevelopment.

Moreover, almanac records for residents along Boulevard Arago and adjacent streets in years following redevelopment affirm our claim that new buildings housed working-class people. Comparisons of expropriation records with public household listings, revealing repeated instances of the same unique last names, suggest that several leather workers with houses destroyed for the

Figure 5. A portion of Paris’ 13th arrondissement, showing pre-Haussmann conditions along the Bièvre. Vasserot, Note that map colours do not signify anything other than lot differentiation. Le cadastre de Paris par îlot; Lazard et al., ‘Arago,’ ‘Expropriations – tableau d’offres.’
street’s construction likely moved just around the block. As for Detourbe, he appears to have relocated to 20 Rue de Montmorency in the 3rd arrondissement in the city centre.52

52First names were generally not recorded but we are relatively confident about this comparison, despite the lack of complete data. \textit{Ibid.}
In 1872, nine of 17 people with records in the case area had working-class occupations, such as leather work and shoe making (Table 1). By 1877, ten years after redevelopment, only two of 27 people with records in the area held professions associated with higher social status, amounting to a similar composition in the pre-intervention period, despite the monumental physical transformation Haussmann had undertaken. In fact, the primary demographic shift was an increase in people employed in the service industry. In 1877, 12 of the residents were working in food services, such as in stores selling wine and groceries, while none of their antecedents on Rue St. Hippolyte held similar jobs. Even by 1904, only three of 25 residents held higher-status jobs, while six were engaged in manual labour, 10 were service workers, and six continued to conduct leather work – including one at 19 Boulevard Arago. In other words, at least in this neighbourhood, Haussmann’s interventions did not house the new consumer class – they housed people who would work for that class.53

**Haussmann’s legacy: reflecting on the rhetoric of social housing today**

While Haussmann’s influence on housing patterns in the decades following his interventions was, as we have argued, less unidirectional than his most relentless critics assume, his enduring impact on today’s rhetoric surrounding the development of housing, specifically social housing, is unequivocal. It is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt a full trace of the Parisian demographic distribution from Haussmann’s era until today: such a task is fraught with complexity, given decades of war, economic depression, and transformation of the workforce. In terms of the city’s physical form, though, this temporal leap is more feasible given that the mass expropriations the prefect initiated went largely unrepeated: later highway-building campaigns and urban-renewal schemes mostly spared central Paris.54 Thus the nineteenth-century built form we have described remains visible today, specifically in the example of our case study site in the 13th arrondissement, where the historic interest in promoting housing investment continues. What seems incontestable, moreover, is that the world that Haussmann nurtured is back in the news.

Even if the city’s overall wealth has increased, spatialized economic inequalities persist, just as in Haussmann’s era. Today, the north-eastern parts of the city are relatively poor, with low-income families accounting for much of the population, whereas the city’s far west is relatively wealthy, a distribution that appears, repeatedly, in statistics and maps of the city between 1850 and today.55 Ultimately, Paris’ present-day demographic patterns arguably mirror those of mid-nineteenth century Paris. Where there has been change, contemporary critics such as Clerval and Fleury worry that today’s gentrification ‘extends the erasure of working-class districts begun under Haussmann’.56

Partly to combat these trends, the city has engaged in massive investments in the construction and renovation of residential units intended for the city’s lower-income residents – this time with specific controls on rent and maximum income requirements.57 Perhaps as a result of the significant scope – and long implementation period – of these investments, such projects are either

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53Firmin-Didot, *Annuaire-Almanach*. See also Bourillon, ‘Rénovation;’ she finds an increasing number of cafes in her examination of the Arts et Métiers district, but a departure of metal workers.

54Portions of the 13th arrondissement were remade with towers in the 1960s and 1970s through the Italie 13 operation. See Godard, *La rénovation urbaine à Paris*.

55See, e.g., similarities between Figure 3 and maps in Grabar, ‘Yes, Paris is Wealthy.’

56Clerval and Fleury, ‘Politiques urbaines,’ 3.

57Recent social-housing investments follow a century of interest in improved housing for low-income people, particularly after the 1894 Habitations à bon marché law. See Shapiro, ‘Housing.’
defended or critiqued with arguments reminiscent of those raised during Haussmann’s tenure. As in Haussmann’s time, there are reasons to be both optimistic and concerned about the government’s interest in housing.

Socialist mayors over the course of two decades have prioritized social housing, government-supported projects designed for low- and moderate-income families, producing such housing at a similar scale and rate to the Paris of Haussmann and Napoléon III. Since 2001, the council has financed more than 100,000 social housing units, a figure practically identical to the number of homes completed under the Second Empire, noted above. It is worth emphasizing that the direct investments in affordable apartments by today’s democratically elected city government are different in purpose and intention than the developer-led construction that followed the infrastructure projects of the nineteenth-century authoritarian prefect.

Nevertheless, the scale of recent interventions mirrors that of Haussmann’s projects, and present-day politicians are explicit in insisting that their aim is to counter class-based segregation tied – often, even if not accurately – to the prefect’s work. Haussmann’s legacy may be understood, then, as extending beyond the social and physical composition of Paris to rhetoric used to justify or criticize contemporary preservation and housing production efforts. There is a lingering presence of the prefect as a kind of trope – a code word for an array of politically-charged messages championed by distinctly different constituencies. Whether Haussmann conjures up a beneficent, elegant landscape or whether he stands as shorthand for brutal policies of class-based exclusion, his presence lingers in discussions of Parisian housing policy.

Indeed, from an aesthetic perspective, our review of news articles suggests that Haussmann’s work has been largely appreciated locally and, as a result, is often protected from demolition or redevelopment. The relatively standardized housing blocks, six to seven stories of lightly ornamented masonry construction, are today accepted as the quintessential Parisian look. City administrations have endeavoured to preserve Haussmannian architecture for more than a century through historic preservation codes.58

From a social perspective, however, left-wing politicians often invoke Haussmann as the figurehead of a perceived larger pattern of class-based displacement or – as contemporary trends have been labelled – gentrification, a process antithetical to the socio-economic diversity prized by recent administrations. In an illustration of this phenomenon, Ian Brossat, a communist councillor and housing policy head under current mayor Anne Hidalgo, argued that,

Exclusion through housing seems so old and so anchored to Paris that we believe it natural and inevitable. Nothing is further from the truth … This dividing line is not new. Its origins stem from Paris’ history, coming from a confrontation between a city for all and a city censitaire [city for taxpayers]. This conservative movement against Paris began in the second half of the nineteenth century, under the Bonapartist zeal whose great works so profoundly marked the capital. When Napoléon III named Haussmann to the Prefecture of the Seine in 1853, it was with the goal of rivaling the prestigious, western districts of London and to eliminate working-class, medieval Paris. The objective is to reserve the centre of the city to the wealthy and to push the people as far away as possible … [but] Paris must more than ever cultivate its uniqueness, that of being a city that makes social mixing an asset.59

This mentality – the leftist goal to distribute affordable housing throughout the city – has spread to the civil service. The overarching idea, an interview with Sophie Lecoq, a staff member of Paris’

58Briant and Lecoq, interview.
59Brossat, ‘30% de logements sociaux à Paris?’
housing policy division, revealed, is to fund more very-low and low-income social housing in _arrondissements_ where there are now few social-housing units, and – conversely – supply more middle-income housing where there is currently a lot of social housing. This is an approach that prioritizes a mix of incomes within neighbourhoods, deliberately in opposition to the popular perception (if not necessarily the reality) of Haussmann’s work. At the site-specific level, according to Lecoq, Second-Empire structures are strong candidates for social-housing conversion since they are easily renovated, allow maintenance of historic building stock, and encourage integration of neighbourhoods across multiple income types.\(^{60}\) At both the building and city levels, sites affected by Haussmann’s interventions are depicted by left-wing politicians and their staffs as fertile ground for addressing segregation through social housing.

On the opposite end of the political spectrum, Haussmann’s name is invoked as a rhetorical tool for defending or criticizing housing policy, with right-wing politicians using the prefect’s work as a symbol of effective housing construction. Rachida Dati, a member of the right-wing Republican Party who ran for Paris mayor in 2014 and 2020, noted, ‘we need a good architectural integration of new buildings, like during Haussmann’s era’.\(^{61}\) Another Republican candidate in 2014, Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, argued that the prefect defined the city, and that recent social housing constituted a ‘mediocrity [that] does not resemble Paris’.\(^{62}\) The Republican mayor of the wealthy 16th _arrondissement_, Danièle Giazzi, took excited note when pop star Rihanna bought an apartment in her district: ‘This shows that the 16th is still the nicest Parisian _arrondissement_ and that Anne Hidalgo hasn’t transformed all the Haussmannian buildings into social housing’.\(^{63}\) Right-wing politicians, like their left-wing counterparts, have embraced the Haussmann trope as a rhetorical tool, used in this case to defend the prefect’s projects rather than to condemn their effects.

Furthermore, just as the rhetoric surrounding housing policy in Paris today is polarized, the ultimate effect of such policy is similarly contested, with some politicians claiming the left has achieved its desired socio-economic diversity and others calling into question the efficacy of recent investments. Some contemporary researchers, for instance, equate social housing investment with an exodus of working-class populations: according to Clerval and Fleury, the city’s social housing is sometimes more expensive than the poor-quality units it often replaces. Thus social housing itself may result in neighbourhood gentrification.\(^{64}\)

The effects of recent social-housing production are likely more nuanced than either strand of political rhetoric might suggest: much like Haussmann’s own interventions, investment in social housing has neither wholly reinforced nor solely undermined spatialized class-based segregation in Paris. In select instances, contemporary housing policy has seemingly pushed back against the perceived effects of Haussmannization. In the case of the Boulevard Arago case-study site, an apartment building at numbers 19–21 built contemporaneously with the street is indicative of this process (Figure 7). That building sits on land located above the former passage of the Bièvre, and was completed partly on the footprint of Detourbe’s former leather workshop. The building typified contemporary construction in aesthetics and purpose.

The building remained in private hands until 2007, when the City purchased the structure and worked with the organization ActionLogement to transform it into 48 units of social housing for

\(^{60}\)Briant and Lecoq, interview.
\(^{61}\)Bertrand Gréco, ‘Dati.’
\(^{62}\)Russbach, ‘NKM.’
\(^{63}\)Eric LeMitouard, ‘Rihanna à Paris ?’ _Arrondissement_ mayors have no enforcement power over decisions such as social-housing placement.
\(^{64}\)Clerval, _Paris sans le peuple_; Clerval and Fleury, ‘Politiques urbaines.’
very low-income households.\textsuperscript{65} In its Haussmannian guise, the building has no architectural characteristics that differentiate its residents from the middle-income families who live in the privately-owned buildings on both sides along Boulevard Arago.

Prior to her successful re-election, Mayor Hidalgo’s 2020 campaign document outlined opportunities for Paris to respond to both the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis.\textsuperscript{66} Exemplifying the ways that the purposes of urban waterways evolve with policies, it codifies a vision repeatedly referenced and only partially achieved: the daylighting of the Bièvre as a way to facilitate greater

\textbf{Figure 7.} 19–21 Boulevard Arago. The authors (2019).

\textsuperscript{65}Ville de Paris, ‘Logements sociaux financés à Paris;’ Atelier parisien d’urbanisme, ‘Emprise Bâtie Paris.’

\textsuperscript{66}Courage, ‘Après le débat.’
access to nature within the city. Perhaps that will be followed one day by a restoration of (less-polluting) industrial activity along its banks and further development of social housing in buildings first completed during the Second Empire – a possibility aligned with the mayor’s goal to achieve 25 percent social housing citywide by 2025.

Despite the city’s expressed intentions, this layering of one housing production programme over another remains relatively rare and, at least thus far, the distribution of social housing projects is not clearly correlated to the siting of Haussmann’s historic interventions. Figure 8 maps the location of those new and renovated units (including the case-study site) in the context of Haussmann’s street interventions. The map shows a fairly broad distribution of social housing projects, with recent investments across all of the arrondissements including in the western, wealthier portions of the city (e.g. the 8th and 16th arrondissements). Though these projects may be arrayed across the full collection of city neighbourhoods, the units are not equally distributed, as shown in the figure’s ‘heat-map’ illustration of the density of units. Seen this way, recent investments have been concentrated in the peripheral ring, and largely on the east side, with fewer significant social-housing investments in the wealthiest neighbourhoods.

The number of units funded from 2001 to 2017 included just 5525 in the four wealthiest arrondissements (the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 16th) – equal to about half of the 10,140 units placed in the poorest arrondissement alone (the 19th). In concentrating the greatest number of units around the periphery of Paris, rather than at its core, recent social housing production thus runs the risk of

Figure 8. Social housing investments in Paris, showing a heatmap weighted by social housing units per project. Based on Lavedan, Histoire; Jallon et al., Paris Haussmann; Ville de Paris, ‘Logements sociaux financés à Paris.’
relegating poor Parisians to the outskirts – the same sort of segregation associated with the Second Empire. This pattern suggests that the broad social mixing heralded by champions of recent social housing has been far from realized; rhetoric, in this case, may have outpaced reality.

As such, the effects of recent housing policy in Paris may be understood as nuanced, even as contemporary political rhetoric has slotted such policy into polarized depictions as narrow as certain retroactive characterizations of Haussmann himself. Just as Haussmann’s residential projects neither merely created nor completely eliminated pockets of poverty in Paris, recent social housing investments have neither significantly tempered nor exclusively reinforced the city’s spatialized patterns of social stratification. In both eras, residential interventions were widely implemented, affecting wealthy and poor areas alike. Moreover, as in Haussmann’s Paris, today’s public sector housing interventions are limited by negotiations between multiple governmental agencies with varying goals.

**The death and life of affordable housing in Paris**

While salient characterizations of Haussmann’s tenure focus on the figure of Haussmann himself or on the social stratification associated with his tenure, in this paper, we have contextualized and evaluated Haussmann’s intentions and policies, arguing for a more nuanced view of the prefect. Our analysis has targeted Haussmann’s role as it relates to the destruction and development of housing, as well as his era’s rhetorical legacy in present-day political dialogue. Over the course of this paper, we have made three core arguments: that residential construction during the Second Empire was motivated by – or at least presented as motivated by – an interest in ensuring a greater quantity and quality of housing in Paris at reduced costs; that Haussmann’s projects, rather than inducing swift, encompassing class-based displacement, produced a less monolithic effect on demographic distributions across the city, and indeed, at our case-study site, created improved housing for a working-class community that largely remained in place; and that Haussmann’s enduring impact on Paris can be perceived both in the rhetoric used to justify or condemn today’s housing policy and, to a more limited degree, in the sites selected for social housing projects.

Among the opportunities for further assessing the extent to which social conditions in Paris changed during Haussmann’s own era, while also tracing longer-term effects, it would be useful to better understand how the mix of classes changed for specific neighbourhoods over the course of the nineteenth century, and across the 20th, on sites throughout the city, not just on Boulevard Arago.

Even without this granularity, however, it seems clear that the prefect’s influence on how people view and navigate Paris remains considerable. The trope surrounding Haussmann continues to inspire political debate and disagreement about housing strategy, with local politicians condemning or praising Haussmann. In such commentary, Haussmann represents either the death or the life of affordable housing in Paris, serving as a reference point or rallying cry for present-day social-housing development. Much of that dialogue remains rhetorical – more about what is said than how the city is measurably changing – but in some cases, such as along Boulevard Arago, housing today has been deeply shaped by past decisions. Haussmann’s tenure as prefect ended 150 years ago, yet his legacy continues to inspire the work of his successors.

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Notes on contributor

Dr. Yonah Freemark is senior research associate at the Urban Institute who conducts research on land use, housing, and transportation. He has recently published in Housing Studies and Journal of Urban History.

A. Bliss is a research assistant.

Dr. Lawrence J. Vale is Associate Dean and Ford Professor of Urban Design at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

ORCID

Yonah Freemark http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3622-6354

Lawrence J. Vale http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9052-6513

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