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Figure 7.21 Pruitt-Igoe prior to demolition.

\$30 million for its construction and was seeking funds for its demolition (Montgomery, 1966). By 1970 it was 70% vacant. Demolition took place in July 1972 and was hailed by architectural critic Charles Jencks as the death of Modernist architecture and the birth of Postmodernism. The failure had a major impact on the thinking of architects and city planners. Many in the architectural profession abandoned their social concern. It was just too hard. Many planners turned their attention to the improvement of social and economic issues rather than the character of the built environment (Figure 7.21).

The project, along with the similar British and French examples showed the limitations of architecture and built form as a determinant of social behaviour – good or bad. The necessity for a social support as well as a physical design agenda in urban design became clear. This need was recognized in the 1930s but was forgotten, or disregarded, by the 1950s. It was obvious in retrospect

that much more attention needed to be paid to the space between buildings – to the public realm of large-scale architectural schemes – and to the facilities provided. The design of Pruitt-Igoe was well intentioned but based on a paradigm inadequate for its purposes. Housing and urban design theory has come a long way since then. Practice lags.

Major references

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