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### "You Knew You Were Equal": Black Women Constructing Place in Pruitt-Igoe

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*Washington University in St. Louis*

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“YOU KNEW YOU WERE EQUAL”:  
BLACK WOMEN CONSTRUCTING PLACE  
IN PRUITT-IGOE

*Candace Borders*

*Mentor: Clarissa Hayward*

There is an eerie calm that accompanies the abandoned, 57-acre forest where the Pruitt-Igoe Homes once loomed over north St. Louis. Infamous for its high rates of crime and dramatic demolition in 1972, Pruitt-Igoe is both remembered and forgotten. While the project's notoriety has endured in popular thought and scholarly works, the lived experiences of Pruitt-Igoe's tenants have largely gone ignored. Within five years of the housing project's construction, the modern-era project was inhabited by a majority of female-headed households. These Black women existed at the intersection of poverty, segregation, and state-surveillance, caring for their children in a project that is heralded as the symbol of the failure of modern housing design. While two notable “You knew you were equal”: Black Women Constructing Place in Pruitt-Igoe exist that touch on motherhood in Pruitt-Igoe, one focuses on women in adolescence and the other engages a problematic Black matriarchy framework. Their complex existence, and the ways in which they navigated and advocated for their families within the space of the housing project, is an essential component in creating a complicated narrative of Pruitt-Igoe's deep impact even after its demolition. Through collecting stories and memories from their children, my research curates a narrative of Black motherhood in Pruitt-Igoe that transcends the often one-dimensional understanding of Black women and their families.