
This paper examines the legitimacy of the preservation of Sedgwick Houses. Designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Sedgwick Houses (1948-51) is one of the most significant architectural sites representing postwar New York. Influenced by European ideas on low-cost housing, most notably by Marcel Breuer and Walter Gropius, it is the first public housing project in the slab block form without any projections and applied ornaments. More importantly, it became a unique example of the American adaptation of these ideas by cladding in a traditional material, red brick, instead of modern materials. Sedgwick Houses was influential to the later developments by the New York City Housing Authority, but also by other cities’ housing authorities. However, Sedgwick Houses has been almost completely neglected by the public and preservationists, because of several factors influenced to standard used for judging buildings: the public’s antipathy toward red brick towers and the monotonous repetition of the same massing, the social stigma stemming from the failure of public housing in other American cities in the 1970s and 80s, and ultimately commonly held views regarding class values. Thus, Sedgwick Houses is facing a serious risk of deterioration, inappropriate maintenance, and possibly demolition in the future; its historical, architectural, and social significance should be recognized by local landmark designation.