1 PHOTOGRAPHS AND HOUSING HISTORY

The photographs created for the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles operate within historical investigations conducted over the past three decades in a variety of ways. Adopting perspectives ranging from those of the history of urban planning to the history of public health, much of this scholarship reads these photographs as records of public housing's promotional endeavors or as evidence arguing for immediate elimination of areas of "substandard" housing, more commonly referred to as "slums." Few studies of the Housing Authority's photographs investigate their status as objects in archives and collections today, much less consider the formation of these collections as additional "layers" in the history of housing and its photography.[1]

Building on recent scholarship about collections in photohistory, this chapter presents the utterly obscure photographic initiatives of the Housing Authority in its early years as instances of collection building that centered on contemporary notions of photographs as knowledge-carriers critical to the establishment of new housing groups as authorities in a new field.[2] As Maren Stange illustrates with the example of Jacob Riis's photographs for Lawrence Veiller's Charity Organization Society and its Tenement House Exhibition of 1900, "[p]hotography, uniquely documentary and mass reproducible, became particularly useful to reformers intent on communicating a worldview that stressed their expertise and organization," especially at a time when housing work was still an emerging field of social science.[3] As Elizabeth Bloom Avery further argues in her study of housing photographs from the 1930s, housers persisted in calling on the "appearance of objectivity" and a public belief in the "purportedly inherent realism or truthfulness" of photography.[4] More recent research on photography considers an additional dimension: as Kelley Wilder and Gregg Mitman note in the introduction to their edited volume on photographic collections, much can

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be learned about how photographs claim their "evidentiary weight" from a study of their "abundance."[5]

This chapter takes projects conducted by housing professionals to amass photographs as its point of departure. It follows photographs submitted to a 1940 photography competition from their publication in a newspaper to their application in an official report to the digitization of the winning photograph. Although historians of the Housing Authority and its photography also begin their studies with sections on the defining and surveying of Los Angeles's older, lower-income neighborhoods, on a fundamental level, this investigation goes beyond this previous scholarship by closely analyzing a greater variety of photographic objects connected with these endeavors and considering their dispersed geographic and institutional locations as part of their histories.[6] It likewise considers how the instrumentality of these objects as parts of civic collections may remain in many ways remarkably unchanged. Scholarship on photographic collections and cataloguing has demonstrated how photographs can contribute to the perceived value of museum and library collections and the cultural prestige of the regions in which they are located.[7] In light of more recent museum initiatives to situate the Los Angeles region as a globally-networked cultural center, a closer investigation into forgotten examples of what photohistorian Kelley Wilder terms "collecting practices" shows how photographs have long connected local efforts with broader histories of housing, architecture, and art.[8]

PHOTOGRAPHS AS DOCUMENTS, COLLECTIONS AS HISTORY

The little research on practices of assembling photographic collections in connection with public housing history shows that the much of the work happened at the local level. In her study of photographs made in support of public housing policy during the formative New Deal years of the United States Housing Authority (USHA), Elizabeth Bloom Avery notes that the lack of a central archive of these photographs was a result of the USHA's strategy of decentralizing photographic making similar to the way it encouraged public housing construction as a local initiative.[9] Established with the National Housing Act in 1937, under this law the USHA could not itself build public housing, as Avery indicates.[10] It could simply administer it. As Avery shows, the USHA negotiated its administrative role by encouraging local slum photography contests as well as administering slide lectures that local authorities could customize for their respective audiences.[11] This bureaucratic organization resulted in a rich and dispersed

production of housing photographs—an abundance of local activity that was influenced, but not controlled, by a central federal agency.

This focus on local housing in the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles's photographs has captured the attention of scholars seeking to understand the intricate relationships between photography, regional identity, and history. One of the earliest studies to consider the Housing Authority's photographs, Sophie Spalding's "The Myth of the Classic Slum: Contradictory Perceptions of Boyle Heights Flats, 1900–1991" weighs the evidentiary claims of Housing Authority photographs from the 1940s against "oral history" and "written history" gathered by a contemporary sociology student as well as in later interviews by the author with local residents of the neighborhoods near where the Los Angeles public housing project, Aliso Village, stood in the early 1990s. The study likewise examines the Progressive-era efforts of the Housing Authority's predecessor, the Los Angeles Housing Commission, and the Authority's own efforts with the *Housing Survey* of 1940 to assert that slums in Los Angeles were structurally different from the multi-storied tenement houses in New York, but no less bad.[12] Spalding views Leonard Nadel's 1940s photographs for the Housing Authority as an attempt to advance this thesis, describing their function as "not to record the complicated nuances of life including the compensations of solidarity and self-help in The Flats and other poor neighborhoods, but rather to depict, in the most poignant and unambiguous terms, the hopelessness and anomie of the stereotypical slum."[13] Photographs do not show history, Spalding's study implies, any more than housing conditions reflected the moral condition of a community. And yet, Nadel's photographs presented views that were remarkably similar to those Spalding saw while driving around the neighborhoods in the early 1990s. "At the end of the twentieth century, as at its beginning," Spalding concludes, "The Flats confound us with the paradox of dereliction and community, anguish and pride."[14] Thus illustrating how photography formed just one view among several in the history of this neighborhood, Spalding demonstrates how it complicates oral and textual histories while inviting a reflection on urban change (or lack thereof) in the present.[15]

Historian of urban planning Steven Moga picked up this line of inquiry in 1999 when he researched and compiled a "context statement" for the Housing Authority's photographic collection at the Los Angeles Public Library. Focusing again on Leonard Nadel's photographs of the so-called slums, Moga's study revisits Spalding's observations on the photographs as evidence of an institutional endeavor. Whereas Spalding writes that Nadel "was sent into The Flats and other local 'slum' neighborhoods, from Watts to Chávez Ravine, to 'document' the case for public housing," Moga brings this implied thesis to a point in his

distinction between the photographs' claims to "show the history of people and their communities" and their attempts to "record the activities of a government agency."[16] Writing from a perspective outside the history of art and photography, Moga offers remarkable insights into the status of these photographs as documents, especially in his acknowledgement of the usefulness of the photographs to historians today in their presentation of "information about people, places, and events that may not be recorded elsewhere."[17] But most compelling for Moga is the photographs' function as part of the Housing Authority's public relations program, specifically in their reproduction in the Authority's 1945 annual report.[18] In keeping with the notion of the photographs as records of a publicity effort, Moga offers the compelling suggestion that one might study these photographs to gain a better understanding of the "visual conventions in the photography of housing and neighborhoods."[19] How, Moga asks, might these photographs compare with those of "other similar projects"?[20] What might one learn in tracing visual conventions from archive to archive, from local housing authority to local housing authority? How might one better fathom the national and transnational dimensions of the public housing movement by not just tracing the movements of photographs as objects, but by studying their motifs, their conventions, their style?

Published one year after Moga's completion of his study, Dana Cuff's *The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism* provides historical background to some of these questions in its presentation of a wealth of primary sources on the construction of public housing in Los Angeles. Among these are the diary of a schoolteacher who watched from her classroom window as the Housing Authority completed Aliso Village in 1942 and an interview between Cuff and a former student of the same school who continued to live in the neighborhood after the construction of public housing there in the 1950s.[21] The sensitivity of Cuff's study to these personal histories is complemented by reproductions of photographs of older neighborhoods and new public housing from reports and archives, including the Housing Authority's now inaccessible collection. In a related article, Cuff studies the presence of residents in photographs of The Flats to fill a gap in records of a 1940 appraisal of the neighborhood.[22] How did these people respond to the inventory and assessment of their homes? For Cuff, the photographs and diaries record the reactions evoked by these encounters that survey results and news articles tend to omit.

In short, photography for Cuff offers a documentation of both the photographic methods of the survey but also its immediate social effects. And like the scholars before her, Cuff does not hesitate to acknowledge photography's complicity in defining and condemning the slums.[23] The modern housing that

was to replace the slums "was as clean, efficient, and rational as the domestic life it was intended to shape," writes Cuff.[24] Yet, as she also acknowledges, several photographs from the assessment survey of The Flats show houses that fit these criteria. These houses were hardly substandard according to our eyes today, she concedes, but simply old and in mixed-use neighborhoods and hence "slum houses" according to the definition constructed and wielded in the late 1930s and early 1940s.[25] Cuff recounts showing the appraisal photographs to Frank Wilkinson, the Housing Authority's former assistant to the director, in 1997.[26] Wilkinson, then eighty-two years old, could not recall the structures, but noted that they probably warranted relocation rather than demolition.[27] Writing from the perspective of a history of architecture and urban planning, Cuff concludes that "it is clear that the interpretation of older buildings has changed."[28] But as Cuff's study also suggests, the interpretation of photographs as documents of building conditions and neighborhood characteristics seems to have changed, as well.

Poet and essayist Susan Briante subjects Leonard Nadel's photographs of The Flats and Aliso Village in the 1940s to similar scrutiny in her 2010 article, "Utopia's Ruins: Seeing Domesticity and Decay in the Aliso Village Housing Project." The investigation compares Nadel's work with art photographer Anthony Hernandez's color photographic prints of the interiors of the vacated Aliso Village units made in 1999 just prior to Aliso Village's demolition. Here, Briante likens the fate of Aliso Village to that of the slum that it originally displaced, pointing to how in both instances the city received federal dollars for the new construction projects.[29] In both instances, Briante interprets the housing slated for destruction in the photographs as bearing signs of age—of "ruin"—but also as begging the question of whether the homes could have been renovated rather than torn down.[30] Looking at Anthony Hernandez's more recent color photographs, Briante regards them as "an archive that humanizes," as images in which "ruin becomes dwelling," and as a call to redress the processes by which Los Angeles's poorer neighborhoods are utterly and irrevocably transformed.[31] "Before such evidence we might consider the negative effects of development and displacement; we might consider the possibility for reassessment, relationship, and actual renewal," she concludes her essay, proffering the claims to evidence of these art photographs as deserving of the same serious consideration that Leonard Nadel's photographs allegedly received long ago.[32] Briante thus subtly offers up the boundaries between Nadel's social documentary project and Hernandez's socially-conscious art photography as open for renegotiation. Both practices present visual evidence about Los Angeles's neighborhoods—evidence which Briante reads as not of buildings, but of the lives of the people who inhabit them.

As a more recent viewer to assess Nadel's photographs of Los Angeles's slums, geographer Stefano Bloch similarly understands these objects as records, but also views photography more generally "as a practical tool in teaching and as a centerpiece around which scholars and students can discuss the morphology of Los Angeles's socio-spatial environment and political landscape."[33] Similar to historian of urban planning Robert Freestone's article, "The Exhibition as a Lens for Planning History" (discussed in the third chapter in this study), Bloch's research presents photography as a record deserving of critical investigation.[34] Again, of particular importance to Bloch is Nadel's position in the controversy of slum clearance. Like Spalding's reading of the pre-World War II reports, Briante's comparison of Nadel's photographs of slums with Hernandez's of public housing just prior to demolition, and Cuff's reading of the photographs taken during the assessment of The Flats, Bloch's analysis reveals Nadel's project to be fundamentally problematic in its complicity in the eviction of families from their homes to make way for a project that ultimately failed.[35] But Bloch also goes one step further to connect this history with the dearth of scholarship on Nadel: the controversial nature of the slum clearance he photographed, Bloch suggests, has impeded Nadel's inclusion "on the list of great social reformist photographers such as Jacob Riis."[36] Although Bloch does not pursue this hypothesis further, it offers occasion to consider the entanglement of the afterlives of Nadel's photographs with not only the subsequent history of public housing, but also that of the institutions of art and culture which define and promote photographic "greatness."[37]

Recent research in the history of photography offers productive approaches to studying photographs in archives and collections.[38] The exhibition *Subjective Objective: A Century of Social Photography* (Zimmerli Art Museum, 2017–2018) and others have encouraged examination of the discrete historical and often "networked" processes involving makers, viewers, collectors, and institutions that define such photographic "categories" as the "document" or "documentary."[39] Kelley Wilder and Gregg Mitman's call for photohistorians to look away from Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother* to the vast production of the Farm Security Administration and the "long tradition of the social science survey" of which it was a part invites a better way of understanding "the hybrid properties of photography and film as media of art, of science, and of their interrelationship."[40] Looking at the photographs produced by the United State Housing Administration in the 1930s, Elizabeth Bloom Avery remarks on how the "decidedly unaesthetic" and "pictorially unremarkable" photographs that resulted from the pursuit of a scientific "appearance of objectivity" challenge historians who approach them with traditional art historical methods.[41] Still, the solution

is not to do away completely with art historical approaches, but as Wilder and Mitman suggest and as Avery demonstrates, to look to a "mixture of methods and crossing of boundaries across the fields of photographic and film history, visual anthropology and science and technology studies."[42]

Even with an art historical approach, such boundary crossing introduces new narratives. For instance, in his art historical investigation of the graphic and photographic production of three surveys sponsored by the United States government in the second half of the nineteenth century, Robin Kelsey makes a compelling case for an "archive style" by examining how the hired photographers often approached the problems presented by survey assignments in ways that reflected personal and social concerns. Although his analysis tends to avoid the word "document" in its discussion of individual photographs, Kelsey nonetheless suggests that these entire projects constitute documents in the history of photography: "the archives document their [the photographers'/illustrators', N.K.O.] economic plight," he writes of the clues left in the archives regarding the roles of the photographers and graphic artists in making them.[43] Such readings based in individual images certainly risk bringing these images to the surface of the archive when they in fact might not have stood out in their time.[44] Nonetheless, in its firm grounding in the graphic objects and their historical circumstances, Kelsey's study presents a method that ultimately challenges the categories of art and survey photography while also offering a more critical perspective on how these archives have since operated for historians of art.[45]

Finally, not to be forgotten among the strengths of these new approaches is their invitation to historians to consider local documenting practices within greater geographic networks. In *American Photography: Local and Global Contexts*, Bettina Gockel traces appearances of ears of corn in photographs from the nineteenth century to photographs taken of President Barack Obama's 2012 campaign as signs of the enduring "usefulness" of photography "as a medium of social and political content as well as of patriotic motives."[46] This reading of a visual motif, as Gockel further demonstrates, urges an understanding of the photographic medium that extends beyond America's borders to a global context with which America, not least through its corn exports, was and remains inextricably interlinked.[47]

Following Gockel's and Wilder's examples, a reconsideration of the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles's photographic production as part of a longer history of picturing homes of low-income workers for viewers situated far beyond the city limits is in order. Whereas Kelsey offers examples of understanding the function of the archive as a determinant of style and Edwards impels an understanding of the historical mutability of photographic collections' meanings and

functions, the present approach to the scattered Los Angeles collection ultimately places greater emphasis on the connection of photographic content to place as a criterium in early collection building. This specificity, as will now be shown, corresponded to a usefulness of housing photography to a variety of viewers up until the present.

THE LIBRARY OF THE HOUSING STUDY GUILD

The photographs in the library of the New York-based pro-housing group, the Housing Study Guild, offer a point of departure for understanding how the histories of photographic collections afford greater insight into the role of photography in promoting public housing policy.[48] Founded five years before the establishment of the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, the Housing Study Guild and its effort to build a library offer a direct point of comparison to the collecting of photographs connected to the housing initiatives in the years that followed.

One of the important figures in the history of the Housing Study Guild's library was Catherine Bauer. Bauer started her career in 1930 when she attended the Frankfurter Kurse für neues Bauen led by the architect and Frankfurt's director of building, Ernst May.[49] Bauer then submitted an article on the social housing she saw at Frankfurt to a contest at *Fortune* magazine and won.[50] Declaredly stopping short of suggesting a US public housing program, her prize-winning essay nonetheless boldly criticized what she perceived as the United States' general dislike of modern, economical rowhouse architecture such as that developed by Ernst May in Römerstadt.[51] As historian of architecture Taina Marjatta Rikala observes, this 1931 article "attracted national attention" to Bauer, who was then twenty-six years old, "and secured her identity as expert on European housing matters."[52] Bauer took her career a step further with the publication of her book *Modern Housing* in 1934.[53] Reprinted in London the following year, the book brought Bauer international attention in its overview of housing history from the English garden city movement to the modernist housing projects of the 1920s in Germany.[54] But it also set her the challenge of realizing a public housing program for the United States—a challenge which she would meet first in her rallying of labor groups behind the housing bill that would eventually become the Housing Act of 1937, but also a challenge with which she would continue to grapple as a researcher and lecturer for the rest of her life.[55]

More celebrated for her influence on housing policy and research, Catherine Bauer's role as a maker, collector, and exhibitor of photographs often goes over-

looked. Offering a notable exception to this tendency, historian Daniel T. Rodgers remarks on how Bauer's photographs from her trip to Europe in 1930 and a subsequent trip in 1932 "formed the backbone of social modernism's first American exhibits," which included, among others, Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson's landmark 1932 *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.[56] Bauer's biographers H. Peter Oberlander and Eva Newbrun similarly note that photographs from Bauer's collection "were displayed in 1933 in Housing Study Guild's library" and reprinted in books on housing-related topics.[57] Still, despite the preservation and public accessibility of Bauer's photographs at the Bancroft Library and Environmental Design Archives at the University of California, Berkeley, historians of art, architecture, and photography have yet to investigate this foundational collection.

Bauer's boxes of photographs and personal papers suggest that photography was indispensable in her early housing work. Of the photographs reproduced in her book *Modern Housing*, for instance, Bauer explained to Lovell Thompson at Houghton Mifflin that they "tell the whole story by themselves [...]."[58] She worked closely with the designer Robert Josephy in creating the layouts of the book's alpha-numerically-arranged plates to ensure the photographs' visibility and clarity of meaning.[59] On "the matter of bleeding at the side," Bauer wrote to Thompson,

> "I favor it (although admitting that in so far as L'Art pour l'Art is concerned, his [Josephy's, N.K.O.] layout is probably better, bleeding only at the top) because it would tend to make each page a distinct unit, which is as should be in so far as the sense is concerned, and because my way the pictures would be readily visible to anyone thumbing carelessly or hastily through the book. [...] I have made some paste-ups of both his layout and my own [...]."[60]

These pragmatic concerns are further evident in Bauer's consideration of one photograph for the book's dustjacket: it "would be effective if a trifle mystifying," she writes.[61] However banal, Bauer's deliberations posited her photographs as tools which, when wielded right, fulfilled purposes of scholarly research and promotion.

Bauer's work with photography extended to her organization of research libraries for housing groups, as well. Starting in 1932, she played a central role in acquiring materials for the library of another New York-centered group—the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA). Bauer served as the RPAA's Executive Secretary, working alongside the historian Lewis Mumford and urban planner Clarence Stein.[62] As communicated to the RPAA by Secretary Mumford

in 1932, one of Bauer's projects for that year was the gathering of "material on regionalism and related subjects" from the RPAA's members, including "any article, report or pamphlet which seems [...] of real interest in this connection."[63] "Regionalism," which Mumford championed as "a method of enforcing the political principle of States Rights by building regions and regional cities, capable of working, living, thinking, acting for themselves," was indeed a subject related to but much broader than public housing.[64] The membership of the RPAA and a newer housing-focused group, the Housing Study Guild, soon overlapped, as did the two groups' practices of pooling the resources from members' private libraries for the reference of the greater membership and the public.[65]

BUILDING A LIBRARY, FORMING A FIELD OF RESEARCH

Founded in 1933 by a group of architects and urban planners that included Carol Aronovici, Albert Mayer, Lewis Mumford, Henry Wright, and Henry Churchill, the Housing Study Guild maintained a favorably-located space at 101 Park Avenue in New York with the express goal of positioning housing issues as matters of public concern.[66] The group received funding from the New York Housing Association and the Lavanburg Foundation, then administering a building of low-income housing units in New York City, and used these funds to offer classes on housing topics as well as coordinate the publication of housing literature.[67]

Among this literature was the Housing Study Guild's bulletin, which Samuel Ratensky, a former student of Frank Lloyd Wright and current secretary of the Guild, regarded in 1934 as "the record of our activities and the mouthpiece for the social orientation which we, as a group, are slowly achieving."[68] For members of the Guild, this "social orientation" was as much about winning contracts as it was about positioning themselves as housing experts. This orientation was pervasive. Architects working during the 1930s in the Western region of the Resettlement Administration, for instance, later recounted their formation of the socially-minded San Francisco Telesis group as born of their admiration for the way a similar group in Switzerland was beating out more inveterate architects in national competitions.[69] Following the passage of the 1937 Housing Act, Bauer herself published an article in *Architectural Forum* notifying its readers that public housing "is here to stay, come boom or depression" and that twenty-three million dollars of the USHA's budget of eight hundred million were presently earmarked for "architectural services."[70] Similarly, in 1934 the members of the Guild saw little contradiction in working for the public good and getting paid for it. As Ratensky wrote to Catherine Bauer of the

Housing Study Guild's bulletin, "it's selling handsomely and I think that proves there's a big housing market."[71]

The Housing Study Guild studied this market avidly. Founder Carol Aronovici described one of the Guild's primary tasks as "the assembling of basic data necessary for the study of technical, social and economic problems connected with large scale housing and community planning."[72] Guild members gathered much of this "basic data" by conducting highly detailed surveys around New York.[73] This concern with current field research further prompted the formation of a small library dedicated to international topics in housing research and design to which Catherine Bauer contributed a sizable portion of her personal collection of housing photographs in 1934.[74]

Bauer's loan was a windfall for the Guild. With photographic prints and postcards showing housing, community facilities, and aerial views of new developments from across Germany but also other places in Northern and Western Europe, the loan consisted of many images that Bauer acquired in the course of her research that resulted in her recent book, *Modern Housing*.[75] Many of these photographs were quite possibly otherwise unavailable in the United States. During the time that the Guild acted as the custodian of this collection, it thus strove to circulate its objects among its members and the patrons of its library with great care that they be returned. The photographs that the Guild eventually returned to Bauer exhibit marks of the Guild's library administration. Stamps on photographs bear the Guild's name and address and provide places to pencil-in file numbers. Another stamp commands the reader to "Return to Catherine Bauer."[76]

The loan and circulation of Bauer's photographs aligned with the Guild's mission of making housing materials available to a greater public. The Guild regularly added new literature to its holdings and published the titles in its library in a list that was sent to the New York Public Library two blocks away.[77] One early project at the Guild involved expanding the 1935 bibliography of housing literature as compiled by another young organization, the National Association of Housing Officials.[78] The Guild also translated housing literature into English, thereby making such material as abstracts from international conferences available to a larger readership.[79]

These activities surrounding the administration of the Guild's library were further shaped by the Guild's creation and circulation of housing exhibits. Exhibits offered a way for the Guild to publicize its research as well as position itself as a contributor to this emerging international field more recently analyzed by Phillip Wagner in his study of the "internationalization" of city planning.[80] Such exhibits were also shown to political ends. Bauer, for example,

rented a Housing Study Guild exhibit to show at a meeting in 1935 of the Labor Housing Conference and the American Federation of Labor in Atlantic City.[81] A second audience of the Guild's exhibits was made up of students.[82] In the spring of 1935, the Guild loaned one exhibit of a reported "twenty-two photographic posters and illustrated charts" to Columbia University for display in Avery Hall.[83] As one student wrote in the college newspaper, the exhibit offered startling statistics gathered from a 1934 survey conducted by the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce in which enumerators tabulated information for homes across the country including the number of rooms, the presence of stoves, toilets, and showers or tubs, and whether the dwelling was "in need of minor repairs," "in need of major repairs," or "unfit for use."[84] In addition to remarking on these statistics, the student commented on three posters in the exhibit making up a section titled "The Unplanned City: what it is and what it does." "The conollaries [*sic*] of the unplanned city, delinquency, fire hazards, overcrowding, human waste, ugliness, accidents and disease hazards, are fully and strikingly illustrated," the student reported.[85] A second reviewer, although failing to comment on the visual elements of a once again "striking" and this time "effective" exhibit, nonetheless expressed confidence in its veracity: "Propaganda? Maybe—but try to disprove it."[86]

"OUR CHAIN OF PHOTOGRAPHS OF HOUSING THROUGHOUT THE WORLD"

The Housing Study Guild—and Catherine Bauer specifically—soon earned a reputation for their skills in exhibit design. In the spring of 1934, just around the time Bauer began calling on labor support for public housing at the Labor Housing Conference in Philadelphia, Samuel Ratensky wrote to her to say that the Guild had "inaugurated a study of exhibit methodology" and that he hoped to speak to Bauer about the project as well as view any relevant "material" in her personal collection.[87] Bauer responded by sending the requested "material," which Ratensky soon assured her was being cataloged and "stamped with your [her, N.K.O.] name."[88] A few months later, Ratensky wrote to Bauer again, only this time describing a project for the Federation of Architects, Engineers, Chemists, and Technicians—an organization largely responsible for ensuring regional minimum wages for employees of the Public Works Administration.[89] The project entailed "the production of a series of photographs and drawings and posters telling the housing story with good swift virile propaganda, without text, (for publication in book form 8 ½ × 11)," as Ratensky described it, adding that he hoped to discuss the project with Bauer, "since I think that's up your alley."[90]

In August of 1934, two months after the accession of Bauer's collection, Ratensky found himself approaching Bauer, again. The Guild had depleted the funds in its endowment, but still had several employees on its payroll and its Park Avenue facilities. These facilities, Ratensky reminded Bauer, housed "a Library, Reference File and the beginnings of a Technique that must not be disintegrated" (capitalization in original).[91] For Ratensky, at stake in the preserved integrity of its library was not so much the continuation of housing study as it was the Guild's chance to make better housing a part of US law: "If Government policy has put us among the ranks of the visionaries and idealists," Ratensky wrote, "we must continue as an organization to the end of transforming that ideal into a direct political challenge."[92]

Ratensky's desideratum and the ensuing action to save the Housing Study Guild Library from disintegration are indicative of the meaning the library and its contents held for the Guild. Work on the library's catalogue continued after Ratensky announced the impending financial crisis to the Guild's members and friends.[93] A representative from the Guild, Theodore Jacobs, wrote to Catherine Bauer in March of 1935 with a list of nineteen of her photographs that the Guild still had on loan from her.[94] Although brief, the descriptions of the photographs, much like Bauer's collections presently housed in the archives at the University of California, Berkeley, offer a prodigious geographic overview of housing developments in Europe until that time. Photographic content ranged from the by then famous Römerstadt to developments from Leningrad to Zurich and Berlin to Bournville. The list also included a view of one of the courts in Henry Wright and Clarence Stein's own Sunnyside development in the New York borough of Queens.[95] Jacobs's letter to Bauer echoed Ratensky's desire to maintain the connections between the library's parts in his evocation of the integral role Bauer's photographs played in it: "They [the photographs, N.K.O.] are now being classified and when catalogued will form an important link in our chain of photographs of housing throughout the world."[96]

The ensuing history of the Housing Study Guild Library reveals its continued service to the housing movement as housing issues gained heightened attention from voters and policymakers. In the late months of 1935, the library was packed-up and moved from New York to the premises of the Suburban Resettlement Division of the Resettlement Administration in Washington, DC.[97] Recently created by an executive order from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Resettlement Administration had taken to task the rehousing of America's rural and urban poor in new rural and suburban communities.[98] The RA's Suburban Division, under John Scott Lansill, would be responsible for the building of the United States' first greenbelt towns.[99] Some housers were skeptical of the

federal government's building as "incidental to an emergency relief program" and the work of "temporary agencies," as Alfred K. Stern wrote in the January 1936 issue of *Survey Graphic*.[100] For other less skeptical colleagues in Bauer's circle, however, this formation of the Resettlement Administration signaled a chance to make progress on the housing problem.[101] Ratensky himself, for instance, began working at the RA's Research Division while continuing with his Guild-related activities, the Guild's library still close at hand.[102]

The Resettlement Administration gave the Housing Study Guild's library new purpose. The library continued to grow during the first year of the loan.[103] It also soon became a classroom tool in a housing manager training program offered by the National Association of Public Housing Officials in the winter of 1935–1936. Alternately classified as an "emergency" but also a "pioneer" course, some housers were hopeful that the training, with its lessons in sociology and economics, might offer a blueprint for a related university curriculum.[104] The Housing Study Guild's library doubtlessly added to the scientific nature of the course and its attractiveness to universities who likewise sought to attract students aspiring to careers in this emerging field, and the RA extended the loan of the library multiple times, expanding its holdings and continuing to use them even at the end of the "planning period of Resettlement."[105]

In 1937, however, the question of where to house the library arose, again. Bauer suggested that the housing library be permanently moved to the Russell Sage Library in New York on the grounds that the Russell Sage Library's holdings in the areas of economics and sociology would aid in the study of the housing library's materials. Her priority, however, was that the housing library stayed current with the help of funds raised by either the Housing Study Guild (especially should the Guild hope to get the library back) or the Sage library, itself—that is, if the transfer remained permanent.[106] It was not. The Guild transferred the library from the Resettlement Administration to the Russell Sage Foundation, which in turn gave it to the fledgling Federation Technical School, founded in 1936 by the same Federation of Architects, Engineers, Chemists, and Technicians regarding whose "propaganda" Ratensky had consulted Bauer.[107] Housing matters formed an important part of the school's curriculum.[108] In 1937, the school offered a promising new home to the itinerant library in its newfound role in the housing classroom. Renamed the Henry Wright Memorial Library in honor of the recently deceased Guild founder and architect, the library of housing literature and photographs served the Federation Technical School's students in New York for two years before the Guild presented the "more than 250 books, 500 photographs, and 7,000 architectural items on planning and housing" to the Avery Library at Columbia University.[109]

Charting the history of the Housing Study Guild's library offers invaluable insight into the functions it performed in the early years of a movement that would ultimately create the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles along with other local housing authorities across the United States. The paths of these photographs link collections in New York to those in Washington and connect efforts of private research groups with those of new federal agencies. The movements of these photographs especially as parts of larger libraries reflect in material and geographic terms the pressures of the 1930s economy and progressive ideals. The various showings and printings of the photographs, themselves, moreover, offer evidence of collaboration between private and public agencies marked by a shared and enduring faith in the photographs' capacity to work alongside panels of housing statistics and within pages of planning research. Although often paling next to statistics or standing alone on pages with sparse captioning and not necessarily "telling the whole story by themselves," the value of photographs of modern housing was confirmed in their continued circulation and their desirability, especially in the case of the Guild's photographs at the Resettlement Administration.

The histories of such libraries also promise an enriched understanding of one of the most celebrated periods of photographic practice in the United States. In a letter dated from the summer of 1936, Ratensky reported to Bauer rather vaguely that "the library is being used by Management and other Divisions of Resettlement."[110] Which items in the library were being used? How? By whom? It is noteworthy that among the RA's divisions were not only the Suburban Resettlement Division, responsible for building the United States' greenbelt towns based on European garden city models, but also the group of photographers that included Dorothea Lange and Arthur Rothstein, headed by Roy E. Stryker at the Historical Section. What function might the Housing Study Guild Library and its photographs of international examples of modern housing have performed for these photographers—photographers whose work remains to this day highly visible in histories of the United States, the Depression years, and the history of photography? Such questions require a careful examination of photographic collections, the processes by which they are assembled or scattered, and the cultural work they continue to perform.

FROM THE "SLUM PHOTO CONTEST" TO THE REGIONAL COLLECTION

Returning to Theodore Jacobs's metaphor of the "chain of photographs of housing throughout the world," one cannot help but notice the invocation of geographic scope in his celebratory description of the Housing Study Guild Library. Housing in the mid-1930s, Jacobs seems to say, was a geographically far-reaching object of study. Jacobs's metaphor of the chain is also noteworthy: the photographs of housing, his remark suggests, forge global connections in photographs compiled in a small Manhattan office far away from the offices of the mainly European architects and planners whose work the Guild followed with keen interest. Jacobs's metaphor, in other words, casts housing as a transnational subject and ascribes a special role to photographic collections in articulating this geographic reach.

The scope of these collections of photographs of housing from the 1930s is easy to forget upon closer inspection of the first photographic projects of the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles following its establishment in 1938. As Elizabeth Bloom Avery explains, housing reform continued largely on a regional basis following the passage of the Housing Act of 1937, with local authorities sponsoring amateur photography contests to encourage local citizens to seek out and photograph low-income housing conditions in their respective regions as well as evaluate others' photographs displayed at their local libraries.[111] In reference to an early contest sponsored by the Washington Housing Association, Avery also observes that the contest format "inexpensively provided the Association with photographs they could use in subsequent publications and exhibitions."[112] A closer look at the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles's adoption of this practice of holding contests and circulating contest photographs reveals the stylistic breadth of the photographs it produced in the early years of the local public housing program.[113] It also reveals the extent to which these early exercises in collection-building aided in housing research and promotion beyond the local region.

HOUSING SURVEY, 1940

The construction of public housing in Los Angeles following the establishment of the local authority in 1938 began with the collection of not photographs, but much needed "statistics," as historian Don Parson observes, by means of a survey of the city's housing conditions conducted by the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles together with the Work Projects Administration.[114] The purpose

of this survey was to locate substandard housing in the city in a way that "would permit the U.S.H.A. to work on a scientific basis with the local Authority in the latter's endeavor to rid our city of slums and to construct new, safe and sanitary housing in their place," the Housing Authority and WPA later explained.[115] As housing historian Gail Radford and others have noted, the 1937 Housing Act's requirement for "equivalent elimination"—that is, the clearance of slums by the city roughly equivalent in size to planned public housing projects—was not part of the proposed housing bill, but a compromise on behalf of housing proponents to win conservative support.[116] Equivalent elimination did not allow the government to increase the housing supply and in turn lower rents. It allowed housing authorities to modernize this supply.[117] Yet, the slum clearance requirements, in contrast to the stringent rules for public housing construction, were rather lax. The number of demolished structures needed only to be about the same as the number of public housing units built, and, quite problematically for evicted residents who were promised new homes, the demolished slums did not need to be replaced by new buildings on the same site.[118] Unlike the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles's first project at Ramona Gardens, the sites for Pueblo del Rio, Aliso Village, William Mead Homes, Estrada Courts, and Rose Hill Courts were already built on when they were purchased for the public housing program.[119] By the fourth year of its operations, the Housing Authority's construction projects had forced the removal of sixteen hundred families, approximately twenty percent of whom owned their homes.[120] When families resisted for financial reasons, the Housing Authority claimed to have extended aid.[121] But following the start of the Second World War, the policy of slum clearance left many of these uprooted families fending for themselves. As the Housing Authority openly admitted in its annual report covering its activities from the summer of 1941 to the summer of 1942, "Under procedure forced by the war, only war workers are eligible for the new homes. Thus the former residents of the cleared land must wait until after the war when all the regular developments will be returned to their original low-income, slum clearance status."[122] Giving hope to the situation, the Housing Act did not require demolition to keep pace with construction in locations suffering from an acute housing shortage.[123]

As Don Parson's study deftly explains, the stakes in proving the presence of slums in Los Angeles at the end of the Depression decade were high. With the passage of the 1937 Housing Act, the United States Housing Authority set twenty-five million dollars aside for slum clearance and public housing construction in Los Angeles alone. To obtain these funds, the city needed to provide the USHA with evidence of the presence of slums and a plan for its local program that demonstrated support for the new local housing authority by the City

EDITORIALS

Attention City Council

Here is a picture of a home that is obviously unfit for human habitation.

Persons live in that home and others like it, not because they want to but because they have to do so.

Such homes present a grave danger to this community; they encourage ill health, juvenile delinquency and a variety of other ills.

Obviously, the Slum Clearance laws were passed in order to provide better homes than these and to give low income groups a chance to better themselves and their communities by giving them decent homes in which to live.

Los Angeles, thanks to state laws and expressions of willingness of the government to appropriate funds, has a chance to take advantage of this slum clearance legislation and build better homes for his citizens.

But, that chance is being dissipated by the unwillingness of the City Council to appropriate $20,000 for a necessary survey to determine needs.

The survey is demanded by the federal government and until it is made government officials insist that they will not release the amount now earmarked by housing authorities.

It seems silly to think that our councilmen will not appropriate such a small sum when its appropriation would mean the release of twenty-five million dollars for local slum clearance.

The spending of that amount would mean not only better housing for those who need it; it would mean that many workmen would find employment and that many million dollars for materials would be spent.

The Sentinel urges that every reader phone, wire, or write his councilman and demand action.

After all, a municipal election is scheduled for next spring and if the councilmen knew that we demand this action many of them will reverse former stands and vote for the amount necessary to make the survey.

3] "Editorials: Attention City Council," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 20, 1938, Los Angeles County Library, Black Resource Center.

Council. Yet, as Parson also shows, this process was slowed by City Council members who insisted that the city was slum-free.[124]

One of the greatest challenges housing proponents perceived in making the slums visible to local voters and policymakers was the Southern California region's own myth. As relayed by historians of the region, in the late 1930s Southern California business groups still circulated imagery inspired by that created in the booster decade of the 1920s to advertise the region as a tourist destination and health resort complete with miles of fragrant orange groves, warm sunshine, and affordable bungalows.[125] Slums were simply not a part of this picture. In one of the earliest efforts to expose the presence of substandard housing in the city, the African American newspaper, the *Sentinel,* described this problem as a "theory that there are no slum areas in Los Angeles that need clearance."[126] At the root of this theory was a prevailing notion that slums were a problem unique to New York.[127] In 1937, the *Sentinel* reminded readers that "poor housing can exist even where there are no tenements" and soon called on visual evidence in making this point.[128] Now available only as a grainy scan from a microfilm, this image—almost certainly a reproduction of a photograph—shows a single house, the details of its condition now obscure (fig. 3). In 1938, however, the editors of the paper presumed that the visual details of this image and their meaning were clear in their designation of it a "picture of a home that is obviously unfit for human habitation."[129] The *Sentinel* published this photograph together with an editorial that explained how members of the City Council had failed to approve a budget of twenty-five thousand dollars for the planned housing survey needed by the Housing Authority and urged each reader to "phone, wire, or write his councilman and demand action."[130] Thus positioned as comprehensible evidence that a greater problem of slums existed in the vast reaches of the city, the image of the single abode reproduced in the *Sentinel* invokes notions of not only the news photograph, but also the social-scientific document.[131] Such applications of photography in the news, and specifically the African American press, deserve further study as practices often forgotten in photography's social history, but also as comparisons for the practices that soon followed.

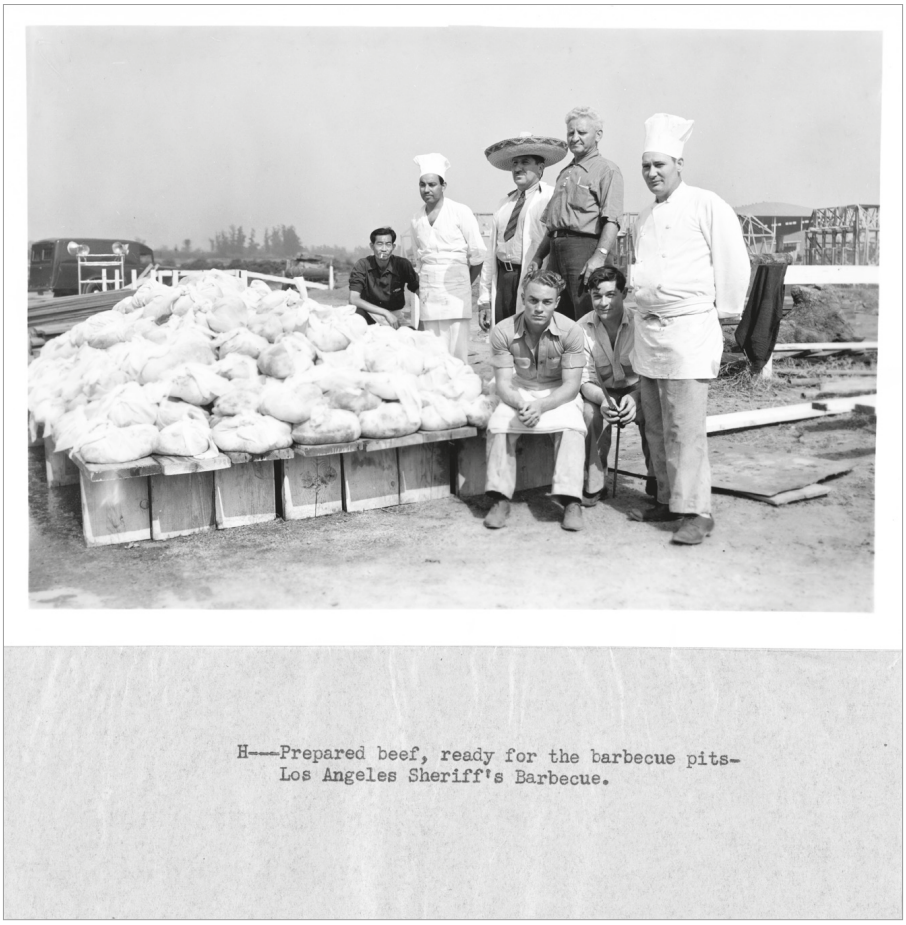
The WPA enumerators finally took to the streets of Los Angeles's neighborhoods in the spring of 1939 to commence work on what the *Los Angeles Times* called "the most intensive survey ever conducted in Los Angeles."[132] Covering an area of twenty-nine square miles bounded by "Hoover Street on the west, a line in extension of Fountain Avenue on the north, Indiana Street, extended, on the east, and the Vernon city limits and Jefferson Boulevard on the south," the survey employed a total of 575 people to study maps from the Los Angeles Gas

and Electric Company, the Southern Counties Gas Company, the City Planning Commission, and the County Regional Planning Commission, and visit the areas to record the desired housing "data" using checklists.[133]

This WPA housing survey was critical for the Housing Authority in providing satisfactory evidence of slums that opened the door to the federal funding of ninety percent of public housing construction.[134] The Housing Authority expressly wanted to survey the entire city to these ends, but financial constraints forced it to concentrate on "the oldest section of the city" and an area for which it hoped to compare current findings with those of the 1930 census.[135] Whether a building was substandard was determined with regards to two categories. The first considered the physical structure of the building, including the state of repair, the presence of a private bath, "flush toilet," "running water," and whether the building was "equipped for lighting by either gas or electricity."[136] The second category considered the occupancy, including the number of persons per room and the number of families per unit, as well as the "rental value."[137] In the end, the surveyors found 58,709 (24 percent) of the units surveyed fulfilled either or both of these criteria.[138]

The Housing Authority had already begun to redress this lack of good affordable housing just one month prior with Ramona Gardens, the first public housing project constructed in the history of the city.[139] The start of construction at Ramona Gardens was a celebratory affair: heralded by an announcement in the *Los Angeles Times*, the groundbreaking ceremony kicked-off on Saturday, March 16, 1940, at two o'clock in the afternoon with the pro-housing Citizens' Housing Council President Monsignor Thomas J. O'Dwyer providing the invocation.[140] The afternoon's program included speeches by Mayor Fletcher L. Bowron and Governor of California Culbert L. Olson. The "Spanish Dancers" of the Catholic Welfare Bureau and the Musicians Protective Association #47 provided entertainment for the twelve hundred people who attended the ceremony.[141] Those who could not attend were able to tune their radios to a live broadcast.[142]

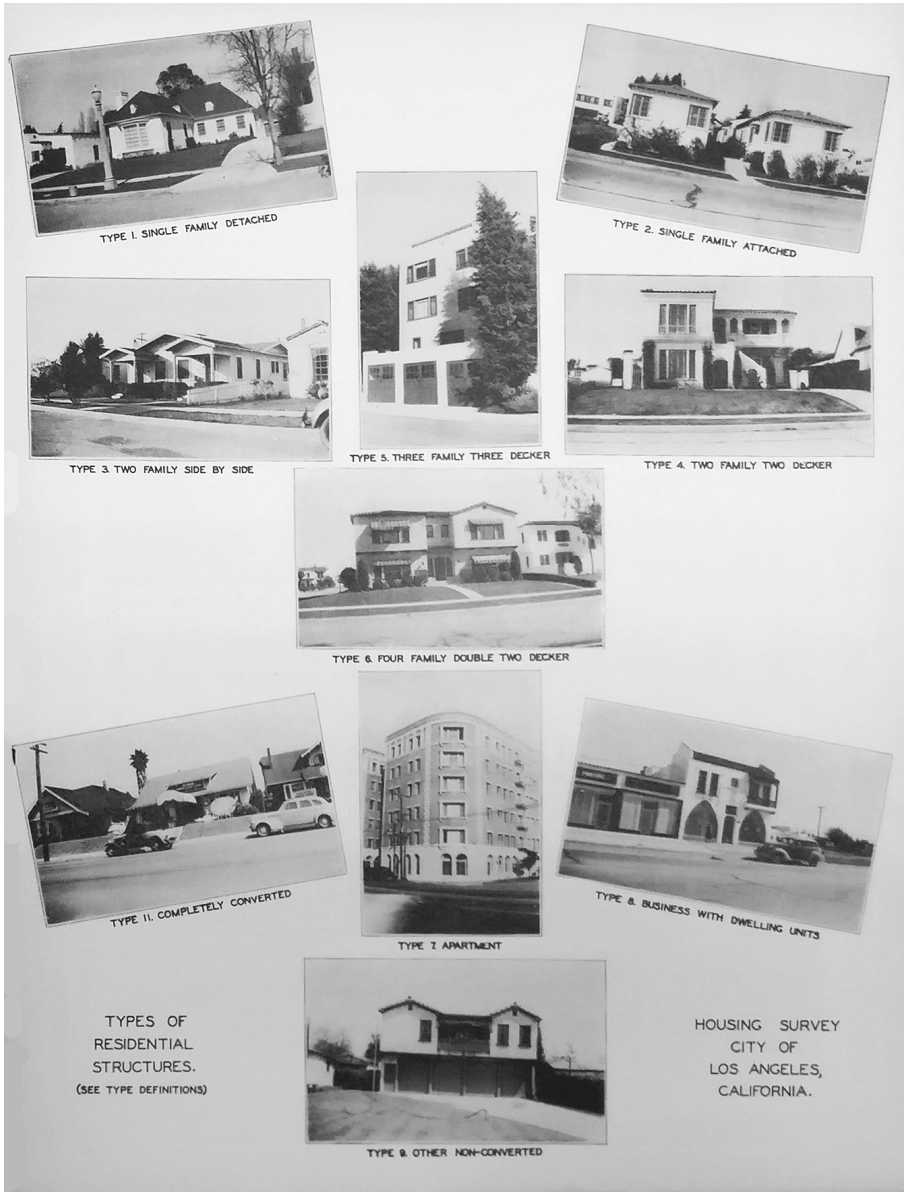
With checklists, ceremonies, radio broadcasts, and announcements in the press, many of these initial activities surrounding the construction of public housing in Los Angeles were anything but dependent on photographs in the achievement of their respective aims. In an untitled memo composed prior to the publication of the final report, the Housing Authority anticipated that the WPA project would create jobs for "messengers, clerks, field workers and squad leaders," but made no mention of photographers.[143] This is noteworthy, especially because another WPA initiative happening in the region—the Federal Writers' Project follow-up to its guidebook series with research on regional foods—produced a handful of photographs now in the collections of the Library



4] Photographer unknown, Prepared beef, ready for the barbecue pits—Los Angeles Sheriff's barbecue, [between 1930 and 1941], gelatin silver print mounted on paper, Federal Writers' Project photographs for the "America eats" project, Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ds-01517.

of Congress.[144] One such photograph showing men gathered near a mound of meat for the Los Angeles Sheriff's barbecue uses a visual formula later taken up by the Housing Authority photographers after the war: the group portrait of people of diverse heritage, all working together toward a shared aim (fig. 4).[145] With photographers in its employ who could capture these portraits of Los Angeles's residents, the question of why no known records suggest that the city sent a photographer door to door with the WPA survey's enumerators as it would in an appraisal survey of the future site of Aliso Village later that year remains puzzling, but also a reminder that not all surveys were necessarily photographic, nor photography a ubiquitous tool of housing work.[146]

In the late spring of 1940, the Housing Authority and the WPA published their final report, *Housing Survey Covering Portions of the City of Los Angeles, California*, with only two pages of photographs. One, titled "Types of Residential Structures," offered illustrations for the "definitions" of the different residence



5] Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, Work Projects Administration, and A.E. Williamson, *Housing Survey Covering Portions of the City of Los Angeles, California*, vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, April 1940), n.p., Oakland Public Library, Oakland History Room.

"types" outlined on the previous pages (fig. 5). By no means distinguishing between "good" and "bad" structures, these "types" established categories for all housing, whether standard or substandard. Structures range from "single family detached" to "apartment," according to the captions, and architectural styles from the so-called "Spanish Colonial Revival" style to a more sparsely decorated modern architecture.[147] The symmetrical arrangement of the photographs on the page at various angles as opposed to the more rigid structure of the grid suppresses any invitation to comparison among these types while at

the same time distancing the project from more celebrated forms of modernism, including the *grilles* developed by the international group of architects at the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne.[148] Indeed, much might be read into this small collection of photographs in its strange combination of the formal characteristics of the amateur album page with a scientific evocation of categories and types. But such a reading would miss some of the most important questions this page raises about how and why the Housing Authority collected or commissioned these few photographs in the first place.

To think of the Housing Authority's photographs as a collection-building project is also problematic because nowhere in the Authority's publicly accessible literature from the late 1930s and early 1940s is any reference made to their administration of a centralized collection of photographs. Quite similar to the earlier practice of the Housing Study Guild and the Suburban Division of the Resettlement Administration, the Housing Authority began to operate an office library at as late a date as 1947, occasionally publishing the titles of accessioned books in its monthly newsletter, *Los Angeles Housing News*.[149] The only photographic material mentioned in these lists was University of Southern California film student Chester Kessler's *What We Can Do for Joe*, a "16 millimeter housing film complete with sound-track" that the Housing Authority added to the library in 1948.[150] *Los Angeles Housing News* announced that the film was "available at the Housing Authority Library for showings by any interested group or organization upon request," thereby suggesting that much like the library's books, the film was accessible to the greater community.[151] Still, the dearth of records detailing the Authority's earlier operations offers little insight into when and how this library began, or whether photographic prints counted among its holdings much like Bauer's did at the Housing Study Guild.

A "CONTEST REVEALS WRETCHED CONDITIONS"

One of the Housing Authority's first photography-centered initiatives was a contest held in April 1940 together with a local paper, the *Los Angeles Daily News*. The winning photographs published in the paper under the title "Contest reveals wretched conditions" exhibit a similar variety of photographic approaches as identified by Elizabeth Bloom Avery in her study of amateur competitions centered on this theme (fig. 6).[152] Consider, for instance, Earl Bench's fifth-place photograph, captioned "a study in desolation." The barely discernible reproduction shows children with a woman and another larger figure obscured beneath the shadows of a stairway in a dirt yard. The woman and one of the two children look up at a pair of children playing dangerously close to the

THE NEWS, SATURDAY, APRIL 27, 1940 THREE

Contest reveals wretched conditions

FIRST PRIZE WINNER BY BOB PLUNKETT
Awarded $25 for photo of untidy interior

"STAIRWAYS," BY GEORGE DODGE
Wins third prize and $10

TOM GARCIA WON $15 FOR THIS
"Palos Verdes" takes place money

A SORRY SIGHT, BUT A WINNER
Fourth prize, $7.50 to Bill Shouler

FIVE DOLLARS FOR EARL BENCH
Fifth prize for a study in desolation

SIXTH AWARD FOR HY SOLOMON
Spruce street scene wins $2.50

OLD FOLKS IN POVERTY
By Diana Merrill, rates seventh

WALL STREET, NORTH OF NINTH STREET
Ninth place, taken by A. R. Tipton

Disorder, dirt win first prize

Disorder and dirt as recorded by the camera of Bob Plunkett today won for him first prize in The News Slum Photo contest.

Plunkett, of the city health department, was granted the $25 award for his picture of the interior of a shack at 627 Ceres street.

Tom Garcia, 314 South Pickett street, collected the $15 second prize for his shot, taken at Effie and Brooks streets. This section, ironically, bears the same name as the swank Palos Verdes hills residential development.

In the heart of Los Angeles, at the northeast corner of Seventh and Main streets, George Dodge of 414 South Gramercy place found his subject. The picture won for him third prize of $10.

Bill Shouler, 1512 West 65th street, found a deplorable condition at First and Kern streets, photographed it and won the fourth prize award of $7.50.

Rickety ruin was caught by North Avenue 53. He made his photo at the rear of 6360 Mission road and won the fifth award, $5.

Hy Solomon, 5813½ Carleton way, found his desolate subject in the 600 block on Spruce street. His efforts were rewarded with a $2.50 prize.

Seventh place award on down to 25th place received $1 each. The 19 best photographs, in the eyes of the judges, were published.

The old folks photographed by Diana Merrill were picked in the No. 7 spot. Miss Merrill lives at 4171 South Figueroa street, and made her picture at 518 North Hill street.

A Bunker hill back yard scene was selected for prize No. 8. It

ELAINE DRAPER'S ENTRY
Judges picked it No. 8

A PRIVY IN THE WATTS DISTRICT
Jack Print snapped it, got 10th rating

6] "Contest Reveals Wretched Conditions," *The News [The Los Angeles Daily News]*, April 27, 1940, 3, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, BANC MSS 74/163 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

edge of the exterior stairway one story above. A child on the stairs leans over the railing, while a boy on the landing clutches the single rail just below his chin as he peers down to the group below. The boy's light trousers are completely visible for lack of any additional enclosure of the stairway. He extends his left foot dangerously over the edge of the platform. Shot at an angle to the

building, the photograph captures the exterior landing without the reassuring backdrop of the solid wall. Instead, it appears as an exposed ledge from which the child might fall. Bench's photograph is a study not just in desolation, but more specifically in dangerous living conditions presented by a multi-storied structure to its inhabitants.

Stairways also play a prominent role in George Dodge's third-place photograph reproduced in the upper right corner of the page. In Dodge's photograph, the stairways wending up the side of a multistoried complex appear devoid of life; inhabitants of the building are absent or hidden in the shadows created by the raking light. Instead, Dodge's photograph takes the exterior of the tenement as subject, aligning the facade of the building with the surface of the negative inside the camera. Most visually pronounced in this composition are the light wooden stairways as they zig-zag their way in sharp diagonals up the side of the building and contrast with their background of shadowed balconies. The result is not a study in "disorder," but an orderly and dynamic geometry of diagonal lines and strong contrasts. At the same time, this straight-on looking seems set up to capture this building neatly as a "type" in housing science, much like the biological specimen placed flat under a microscope.[153]

Such winning photographs doubtlessly would have reminded Los Angeles's readers of the recent news about the new Housing Authority's WPA survey, the findings of which were published that same month. Still, nowhere in the description offered on this page does the newspaper mention any connection between the contest and the recent activities of the local Housing Authority. Nor does it suggest that these revealed conditions can be changed, much less should be changed, at all. This omission of any political context points to a painful fact of this early photographic project—namely, that as much as the contest's theme and timing might have helped rally support for public housing, it also was a strategic undertaking in the paper's operations as a business. Contests conceivably offered a cost-effective way to build the photographic archives of not just housing groups, but also newspapers. A capitalization on the luridness of slum photography was doubtlessly at work here, as well. Many of the winning photographs offer a not-so-subtle invitation to voyeurism, or a satisfying act of looking, as concisely defined by Michelle Henning, "dependent on the object of this gaze being unaware, not looking back."[154] This "not looking back" is especially apparent in Tom Garcia's second-place photograph showing a man with his back to the camera as he stands on crutches in front of an unpainted building in the Chávez Ravine neighborhood of Palo Verde.[155] With his shoulders squared to the picture plane, a gap where his right leg should be is painfully obvious beneath the man's dark cloak. As he leans onto his crutches, making

his way towards the pool hall up the hill—perhaps to the company of other veterans of the Great War or survivors of debilitating work accidents—his body appears an analogue for the weary building itself, its windows shuttered, likewise not returning the viewer's gaze.[156]

With the contest's invitation to voyeurism came a violation of privacy. As in the case of the prize-winning photograph shot at 627 Ceres Street, some of winning photographs included captions that offered substantial identifying information. Such information might have been read as a testament to the depicted housing's existence and a presentation of the photographs as social-scientific documents. It also implied an invitation to masses of non-specialist readers to seek out the address and take a look.[157] The Ceres Street photograph, furthermore, offers a relatively rare view of not a front yard or housing court more commonly found in the Housing Authority's photographs, but an interior. Aiming the camera into the farthest corner of the room, the photographer reveals a small, closed, and cluttered space. A rumpled bed stands next to a hutch filled with canisters and paper that spills from the shelf onto the floor. A single kerosene lamp placed dangerously close to a stack of newspapers indicates a lack of adequate electric lighting (and a fire hazard). A large bottle in the lower left of the composition might be read as a vestige of alcoholism. Captioned an "untidy interior" and printed in the upper left corner of the layout at a slight angle to add dynamism to the scene, the newspaper lays the housekeeping captured in the photograph open to derision. And for readers still not sure why the photograph was selected, the second title to the layout assures that "Disorder, dirt win first prize."[158]

Until now overlooked in histories of the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, the photo contest was not just a project running parallel to the more closely scrutinized WPA housing survey. The two efforts overlapped. Along with the page of housing "types" published in its final *Housing Survey* report, the Housing Authority and WPA team also included a single-page reproduction of a "photographic montage" (to borrow a term devised by photohistorian Matthew Biro to differentiate this cutting, pasting, and assembling of photographs from the more blatantly absurd or fantastical modernist photomontages of the Dadaists and Surrealists).[159] On the montage's facing page, the Housing Authority and WPA included a note that the photographs "reproduced on the following page" were printed "[t]hrough the courtesy of Manchester Boddy, publisher of The News" and had been submitted by "amateur photographers" to a contest held the same month the report was being finalized (fig. 7). "They [the photographs, N.K.O.] afford a graphic illustration of substandard housing conditions existent in certain portions of the city of Los Angeles today," the compilers

7] Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, Work Projects Administration, and A.E. Williamson, *Housing Survey Covering Portions of the City of Los Angeles, California*, vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, April 1940), n.p., Oakland Public Library, Oakland History Room.

of the published *Housing Survey* attested, alluding to the photographs' factuality and currency.[160]

Historians of photography in housing reform tend to read montages much like city planners interpreted unplanned neighborhoods—as "chaotic," obscure, and illegible.[161] The Housing Authority/WPA montage challenges this reading. Comprised of what one might deem the "losing" photographs from the competition that the Authority and WPA referred to on the facing page as the "'Slum Photo Contest,'" the montage published in *Housing Survey* presented a more

tightly arranged montage than that in the single-page layout in *The News*. It also offered a distinct set of photographs of the city's older neighborhoods. These photographs of weathered wooden houses with patched roofs and propped-up fences are trimmed, some carefully following the outlines of roofs, another simply creating rounded borders around a tree-framed view down a dirt street. Several of these photographs are then outlined in a thick, white line and superimposed upon one another in an imaginative arrangement showing houses on top of houses. Some photographs are pasted on an angle, making the houses appear as though they are leaning and unstable on their foundations. Rooflines converge on the towering, if somewhat leaning, bright white facade of Los Angeles's City Hall—the location of the Housing Authority's first offices during these years—at the montage's center.[162] The effect is a juxtaposition of old and new, but also an overt visual statement that the conditions of private housing are both a public problem, as Steven Moga notes in his evaluation of photographs of City Hall in the Housing Authority's collection, and a problem that demands the government's intervention.[163] The superimposition on the lower part of the facade of City Hall of a photograph of three children engaged in what appears to be a game of marbles in a dirt yard adds to this rhetoric. The visual theme of play juxtaposed with the symbol of governance, like the tilt of the tower, itself, undermines the notion of governmental stability and reliability. Also like the tower of City Hall, a boy stands watch over the competitors below him. Be it a competition of skill at marbles, or a real-life challenge of making a home on limited means, the photomontage deftly opens up multiple readings of the relationship between public entities and private lives.

The Housing Authority's inclusion of this photographic montage in *Housing Survey* offers itself up to multiple readings, as well. On the one level, the borrowing of the photographs already collected by a different agency, even if this agency's aims were partially at odds with the housing movement's, was well within the scope of the movement's pragmatism.[164] The Housing Authority approached the mass of collected photographs much like a stock of images for illustrating its second annual report published in 1940.[165] As also shown in its report on its operations from 1942 to 1945, even after several years of building public housing and commissioning photographs, the Housing Authority continued to reproduce photographic material from newspapers in its publications.[166] On another level, however, with this reproduction the Housing Authority also presented the 1940 photography contest in new terms. Whereas the compilers of *Housing Survey* simply thanked *The News* for the permission to print photographs from its contest, in the annual report the Authority took credit for having "fostered" the competition; *The News,* on the other hand, "conducted" it.[167] Thus

rewritten, the Slum Photo Contest figured strategically within the Authority's operations as an "undertaking in the field of public relations" for that year.[168] "Many [photographs, N.K.O.] were published and additional thousands of residents became conscious, hundreds of them for the first time, that 'Cabbage Patches' have developed in Los Angeles, some so old they have gone to seed," the Housing Authority reported, alluding to the same processes of seeing and knowing that other housing authorities hoped to encourage with similar contests.[169]

DIGITIZED HOUSING PHOTOGRAPHS AS REGIONAL HISTORY

Historians of housing photographs have remarked on the functions of photography to raise public awareness of slums as well as the civic role played by the newly established local housing authorities.[170] As one of the first major activities led by the Housing Authority, the 1940 housing survey posed an opportunity for the Authority to articulate the many benefits that the project—and, by extension, the future work of the Authority—would bring to other municipal departments and local businesses. In the published findings, the Housing Authority outlined the benefits of the survey to the broader community, naming such civic bodies as the Department of City Planning and the City Engineer, but also, of course, the United States Housing Authority (USHA), the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), and the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC).[171] First mentioned among the private entities that the Housing Authority hoped the survey would benefit were newspapers, who "could spot on rental maps the location of their subscribers and use these maps as an indication of the income levels reached in their circulation," the surveyors claimed.[172] Finally, among the supporters of the survey the Housing Authority and WPA listed such diverse groups as the Catholic Welfare Bureau, the Department of Water and Power, the Japanese American Citizens League and Japanese Chamber of Commerce, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, the Mexican Chamber of Commerce, and the Southern California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.[173] These lists of groups relay the broad audience the Housing Authority perceived for public housing, but also suggest the importance it placed on positioning itself as part of a larger network of government offices and interest groups.

Photohistorian Sally Stein notes that montage practices in the United States between the wars "captured the imagination of conventional amateurs" who often combined these photographs into visual messages of "cooperation" and "collectivity," especially in response to crisis.[174] Given the amateurish appearance of the Housing Authority's reproductions of the Slum Photo Contest submissions and the Authority's emphasis on the community connections forged

by the survey project, it is tempting to read the photographs reproduced in the montage and in the pages of the report along similar lines.[175] But more profound still is the network of public institutions evident in these photographs' circulation. When the Housing Authority produced the compilation of the report's findings, it filed these volumes at the Doheny Library at the University of Southern California, at Occidental College, and at the University of California, Los Angeles.[176] The public library in Oakland, California, where the city established a local housing authority around the same time that Los Angeles established its city housing authority in 1938, added copies of at least the first two volumes of the report to its holdings in 1941.[177] The Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles further produced a shortened *Digest of Final Report*, currently in the holdings of libraries in California, but also at the University of Chicago and Harvard.[178]

Not to be forgotten in this distribution is the circulation of the winning photographs, as well. Currently, a clipping of the first page of the contest feature can be found in the personal files of Catherine Bauer at the Bancroft Library. Assuming Bauer acquired the clipping shortly after its publication, this connection raises several questions. Bauer, who in the spring of 1940 taught her first courses on housing at the University of California, was deeply engaged in the task of turning housing's longer but also recent history into teachable material, as the fourth chapter of this study explains. Bauer's possession of this clipping adds to the "layers" of meaning in the Slum Photo Contest by positing it as not simply a business endeavor or attempt to collect photographs to illustrate reports, but also as a source of useful visual material in housing research and education.[179]

The utter obscurity of the Slum Photo Contest in histories of photography and housing in Los Angeles raises the question of why this early photographic project deserves mention in this study, at all. Printed in the newspaper, the widely circulated *Housing Survey*, and in the Housing Authority's second annual report, the photographs indeed appear to have garnered a large audience in their time. But this moment of public attention was brief. In the Housing Authority's third annual report detailing the work completed the following year between July 1, 1940, and June 30, 1941, the Authority cited the housing survey in several instances, but made no mention of the photo contest or any allusion to the ways in which the photographs contained in the current report were made or collected.[180] Any concerted collaboration between the Housing Authority and the community to assemble a body of photographs, in other words, appeared to be old news. The presence alone of the photographs in the newest report hinted at the Authority's continued engagement with photography. Unattributed, sparsely

captioned, and with few textual references to their making other than descriptions of the events they depict, the photographs challenge the historian seeking to understand the meaning they had for the Housing Authority, and how this apparently untheorized photographic practice figured strategically in the Housing Authority's processes of slum clearance and public housing construction.

But as the scholarship outlined above shows, much as one might learn about the history of photography from a study of the context of a photograph's making and initial reception, its history as an object in a collection illustrates how it continues to perform cultural work in surprisingly similar ways. Consider, for example, the first-place photograph in the Slum Photo Contest, Bob Plunkett's "photo of untidy interior."[181] Aside from the accolades it received from *The News*, Plunkett's winning photograph stands out visually as the only winning photograph of an apparently vacant interior (fig. 6). It also, however, deserves attention for the pressure it places on the Housing Authority's claims to the contest participants' amateur status. Plunkett, the caption in *The News* noted, worked for the City of Los Angeles Health Department.[182] As both *The News* and the Housing Authority fail to mention, Plunkett also had some experience photographing substandard housing conditions in his work in this position. During his time at the Health Department, Plunkett fulfilled several functions from that of a café and soda counter inspector to that of the "Health Department Editor" for the University of Southern California's newspaper.[183] As late as 1947, Plunkett also led a session on food poisoning at a "Food Handlers' School" in Long Beach, according to one news report, "illustrating his talk with slides."[184] These slides, almost certainly photographic, may well have been made by Plunkett, himself. In 1938, Plunkett had already produced original photographic prints for a survey for the Los Angeles Bureau of Housing and Sanitation—a survey requested by the City Council to determine whether a city housing authority was needed in the first place.[185] And among them was none other than the photograph of the "untidy interior," which would be published two years later as the winner of the Slum Photo Contest in *The News*.

Pasted by hand into an album titled *Pictorial Representations of Some Poor Housing Conditions in the City of Los Angeles* which is now digitized on the website of the Oviatt Library at California State University, Northridge, the photograph is part of a unique object created to accompany the 1938 report that offers further layers to the obscure Slum Photo Contest, connecting it to a longer history of photographs of slums.[186] As the studies of the Housing Authority's history outlined at the beginning of this chapter indicate, housing reform and health reform prior to the Second World War were closely interrelated initiatives. In Los Angeles, the city's earliest official housing department, the Housing Commission,

operated alongside the Health Department from 1913 until 1922 when its operations became completely incorporated.[187] When the California Housing Authorities Law of 1938 made possible the establishment of a separate housing authority, the City Council called on the Bureau of Housing and Sanitation to furnish a survey predating the published *Housing Survey* of 1940 to determine the "need."[188] The establishment of the Housing Authority in 1938 again separated the offices for housing and health reform, but each continued to provide the other with statements and acts of support in their overlapping missions. With the publication of *Housing Survey* in 1940, the Housing Authority listed the City Health Officer among the multiple officials who could benefit from the data in that he "will have made available to him the specific location of substandard housing, and thus will be able to more efficiently isolate the causes of diseases due to lack of sanitary facilities."[189] Late in the following spring when the Housing Authority commenced demolition of the old housing on the site of the future Pueblo del Rio housing project, the director of the Bureau of Housing and Sanitation who led the survey, M.S. Siegel, was reportedly in attendance to witness "the brief ceremony," including the "actual wrecking" of the first house, as the Authority recorded in its annual report for that year.[190]

The histories of collecting practices explained in this chapter reveal the instrumentality of photography in early housing reform while providing a context to the Housing Authority's practice that extends beyond the Los Angeles region. As the case study of the Housing Study Guild showed, collecting and the international exchange of photographs stood at the center of early housing research, education, and training in New York and Washington, DC. The Housing Study Guild members took pride in their collection of photographs, books, and other housing materials as a symbol of their cosmopolitan practices and starting in 1934 strove to ensure that it grew, stayed together, and circulated before audiences of students and new housing professionals. In 1940, the Slum Photo Contest might have appeared to depoliticize early housing reform in Los Angeles had not the Housing Authority selected from and presented the losing photographs as a form of public education and a star on its own record of public relations. Catherine Bauer's possession of the photo contest clipping further points to the possible research and educational purposes that the contest winners—or even the contest format more generally—presented to an international housing expert and avid maker and collector of photographs of housing from around the world.

Comparisons of photographic collections may thus seem to offer simply another way of charting the collaboration between public housing and public health departments in the years after the new housing laws established housing

as its own entity. But these comparisons are also profoundly revelatory of the meaning of these intersecting practices in the administration of photographic collections today. In 2014, a student worker at the Oviatt Library composed an entry for the library's blog featuring pages from the *Pictorial Representations* album. With the title "Peek in the Stacks," the blog invites readers to take a brief privileged look into such special holdings at the library as historical objects from local high schools, old magazines helpful in researching a history of guitar competitions, or documents pertaining to the establishment of the university's own ethnic studies programs.[191] The preparation of these blog entries by different students furthermore fulfills an educational imperative in providing a platform for them to engage with these noteworthy objects and present these findings alongside representations of the objects in the form of digital photographs and scans. Most remarkable, however, is this student blogger's positioning of the album, itself. Situating the album in the context of the Great Depression, the student claims, "This period in our regional history comes to life through M.S. Siegel's *Pictorial Representations of Some Poor Housing Conditions in Los Angeles*," thereby attesting before an international internet audience to the perceived ability of the photographs to animate a local history.[192]

Such digitizations of photographs showing Los Angeles's lower-income neighborhoods reveal a "historical slippage" of function and meaning, to borrow a phrase from the historian of photography and curator Christopher Morton.[193] As the photographs created in connection with Los Angeles's housing movement moved into the special collections of regional libraries and state research institutions and then into their online holdings, their function changed from that of public education on the presence of slums to that of public education in the promotion of a regional library and state university. But through these changed functions run continuities, as well. As Kelley Wilder writes, "the theme of region" in photographs and their functions in collections is "never very far away."[194] Consider again the clipping in Bauer's collection at the Bancroft Library. When it was pulled for the research for the present study, the "Slum Photo Contest" article was filed in a folder of clippings labelled "California: Los Angeles." One wonders whether this organization reflected that of Bauer's papers when they were accessioned, and in turn whether the clipping concerned Bauer for its references to the Los Angeles region or the larger region of the "West Coast" that she studied avidly in these years.[195]

The Housing Authority's photographs have also noticeably contributed to efforts to promote the study of a regional photographic history. In 2005, the photographer and theorist Allan Sekula together with photographers James Baker, Anthony Hernandez, Karin Apollonia Müller, and filmmaker Billy Woodberry

grouped the results of five years of creative work into a 2005 exhibition at the REDCAT center titled *Facing the Music*.[196] Funded by a research grant from the J. Paul Getty Trust, the project was, as Sekula recounted in a 2005 interview, "to document the building of Walt Disney Concert Hall" in downtown Los Angeles.[197] The photographers adopted what Sekula termed a "contextual approach" in their photographs of transplanted trees and filmic montages of footage shot at the Los Angeles River with that of the Hall's construction.[198] Part of the aim of this "contextual approach" was to address "a retreat from civic memory," Sekula claimed, as well as the forgotten, civically-minded work of Angeleno photographers.[199] Describing "a great period of social documentary in Los Angeles stretching from the 1930s through the early 1960s," whose photographers "gave us distinctive Los Angeles versions of Lewis Hine and the Ashcan School," Sekula counted Leonard Nadel among these photographers, thus deploying him as a figure to broaden the history of "social documentary" and specifically inscribe local Los Angeles practices within a history understood by many scholars as distinctly "American." [200]

In addition to providing context to Sekula's project, the Housing Authority photographs play a vital role in the more recent activities of the Photo Collection of the Los Angeles Public Library. In 1990, the group Photo Friends began working with the Photo Collection librarian and staff "to improve access to the collections and promote them through programs, projects, and exhibits."[201] Under this banner, the group exhibits photographs, publishes books, and writes blog entries interpreting photographs from the library's collection of several hundred digitized images depicting Housing Authority and housing-related activities.[202] Also in Los Angeles, the more specialized Southern California Library likewise promotes access to their Housing Authority photographs by digital means. A sizable portion of their over two-hundred photographic prints can be viewed on the Online Archive of California—a digital database of collection guides, finding aids, and digitized objects from archives throughout the state.[203] In this online archive are also links to digitized photographs of Housing Authority projects in the collections of the photographers Leonard Nadel and Julius Shulman, both acquired by the Getty Research Institute in the early 2000s.[204] Searches for Nadel and Shulman's names on the internet lead to countless additional appearances of their digitized photographs.

Still, at the time of writing this study, other photographs made for the Housing Authority such as the sizable collection of black and white negatives in the collection of Otto Rothschild's studio remain freely accessible only in person.[205] While versions of Rothschild's photographs can be found in the digital collections of Housing Authority prints and negatives at the Los Angeles Public Library

and the Southern California Library, his personal collection at the University of California, Los Angeles, adds further context to his practice as a photographer of public housing and the Housing Authority's practices as commissioners and collectors of housing photographs.[206] The collection of Esther Lewittes Mipaas, still in private stewardship, likewise promises a better understanding of the role of public commissions in the portfolio of a woman designer and photographer.[207] Still missing, and perhaps never created, is an inventory of the Housing Authority's photographic collection at the critical moment in 1990 in which the Los Angeles Public Library created copies of an unspecified selection of the Authority's holdings. As Sekula alludes, there is much historical work yet to be done on these collections. And as the response to the digitization projects of other Housing Authority collections shows, the digitization of analogue collections is a promising first step.

The history of photographic collections in housing reform as well as in the more recent promotion of public and cultural institutions charted here is as much about the building of the collections as it is about their disintegration, to borrow a word from Samuel Ratensky of the Housing Study Guild, and the continued circulation of their individual parts. With a focus on one of the first photographic projects of the Housing Authority from 1940, this chapter traced related objects made during the New Deal to a variety of actors and institutions to show the complexity of the category of the "housing photograph" as identified by previous scholarship, as well as the breadth of contributors and contexts for the reception of photographs of local substandard housing and modern "housing throughout the world." Bearing in mind the geographic and political dimensions of the housing movement, itself, as well as the institutional and personal, digital and analogue collections that now house its photographs, the following chapter now examines the transnational and interdisciplinary connections forged in the Housing Authority's photography upon the United States' entry into the Second World War.