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Blighted Ambitions: Federal Policy, Public Housing, and Redevelopment on the West Coast, 1937-1954

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Blighted Ambitions:
Federal Policy, Public Housing, and Redevelopment on the West Coast, 1937-1954

By

Alexander Benjamin Craghead

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Professor Andrew M. Shanken, Chair
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Abstract

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In 1937, the U.S. Congress passed the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act, authorizing federal funds for the development of public housing. Twelve years later, Congress reauthorized this legislation with the American Housing Act of 1949. In the process, Congress converted a federal housing program into a redevelopment program that only sometimes funded housing.

Key to understanding this change is the rise of a planning concept called "blight." In the first half of the 20th century, planners, public officials, scholars, and intellectuals struggled to reshape the word "blight" into a description of urban conditions, with little resulting consensus. Despite this, Congress included no legislative definition for "blight," allowing local leaders great discretion about where and what parts of the city were suitable for clearance and replacement. While previous legislation had restricted federally funded intervention to addressing "slum" conditions, "blight" freed cities from this requirement.

This dissertation has two components. First, at the national scale, it examines struggles to define "blight," how this term came to be excluded from the Housing Act of 1937, and how pressure from the real estate industry placed it into the Housing Act of 1949. Second, it examines two case studies from the U.S. West Coast: Oakland, California's efforts to map "blight" citywide from 1949-1951, and Portland, Oregon's first attempt to create an urban redevelopment program from 1950-1953. Both show how cities without "slum" conditions attempted to leverage the logic of "blight"–seemingly empirical, but actually political–to achieve goals that had little or nothing to do with public housing.

This, then, is the twin story told in this dissertation—first, of how the term "blight" appeared to have empirical meaning without in fact having empirical dimensions, and second how the real estate industry made use of the slipperiness of "blight" to justify projects that largely supplanted public housing.

Dedicated to Paul, whose kindnesses I will never be able to repay.

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Alexander Benjamin Craghead
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INTRODUCTION
National Forging and Local Use: The Twinned Story of "blight"

In 1937, United States based advocates of public housing praised the passage of a new federal bill supporting their cause. Known formally as the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act of 1937, this legislation authorized the federal government to directly construct low-cost housing for the poorest of Americans, as well as to supply funds to local housing authorities doing the same sort of work. In 1949, this legislation was reauthorized under the Taft-Ellender-Wagner bill, a feat that at first glance might appear to be a renewal of the New Deal spirit of public housing. While it is true that public housing authorities could and did secure federal funds through this bill, which became the American Housing Act of 1949 when signed into law, these projects competed for federal funds alongside others that had little or nothing to do with improving the living conditions of the nation's poor and working classes. The 1949 Act allowed municipal governments to receive money, under the guidance and approval of the Housing and Home Finance Administration, to *destroy* housing, and then replace it with stadiums, shopping centers, performing arts facilities, civic centers, and so on and so on. Where from 1937 to 1949 the federal government had a public housing program, the 1949 Act created a redevelopment program that only sometimes funded housing. How did such an apparent contradiction come to be federal policy?

This dissertation proposes that one answer lies in the rise of a single word in urban planning terminology, the concept of urban "blight." Originally a term from agriculture, in the first half of the 20th century, planners, public officials, scholars, and intellectuals struggled to reshape the word "blight" into a description of urban conditions. This culminated in the enshrinement of the term into federal law with the passage of the Housing Act of 1949 (hereafter the 1949 Act). However, crucially, neither Congress nor the federal agencies charged with administering the act set down a definition of blight. Despite four decades of struggles to give this word a specific meaning, federal policy in effect rejected all previous definitions and allowed municipalities seeking federal funding to make their own definitions. This, in turn, gave two powerful gifts to members of the real estate industry in cities across the nation. First, it gave these parties a powerful degree of discretion about where the extant city could be declared a public problem and therefore suitable for clearance and replacement. Second, in turn, this significantly increased the amount of urban areas where federally funded intervention was applicable. Before the inclusion of "blight" in the 1949 Act, the only way for municipalities to access federal funds was to find the much narrower and more specific condition of the slum. "Blight" freed cities from this requirement.

Two limitations on this claim are necessary. First, it is entirely plausible that what we now call "urban renewal" would still have occurred even if the 1949 Act had made intervention contingent only on slum clearance. The 1949 Act did include sweeping provisions that financed "redevelopment," a regime of architectural and infrastructural reinvestment that had

been born during the defense economy of the early 1940s as a manifestation of elite anxieties over the pending postwar world. [1] However, the redevelopment provisions of the 1949 Act, had they been tied to slum clearance, would have been severely limited in scale and scope. The inclusion of "blight" alongside the slum was a way of expanding the applicability of the federally funded redevelopment program. Such a program, without something like "blight" as a qualification, would not have had significant impact outside of a few large and old industrial cities, places such as Boston, New York, or Philadelphia. By implication, "blight" is thus a key to the expansion of a federal redevelopment program to cities that are far younger and less industrialized, such as those found in the western half of the country.

The second limitation involves the word "blight" itself. Those who advocated for redevelopment during the defense economy years did not do so *because* of the rise of the term "blight," but they did *use* the term as a frequent justification for their positions. If the word "blight" had not existed as a planning term, it is in my view likely that these same parties would have had to invent something like it, to adopt some other word for a similar purpose, given that the "slum" would simply not have sufficed. This illustrates one critical point about "blight"—its adoption within federal legislation in 1949 is evidence of how the term blight, supposed to describe an extant negative condition or extant problem requiring a solution, was in fact a piece of rhetorical opportunism. Put more bluntly, advocates of redevelopment wanted *first* to get access to federal monies, and *second* to invent an urban problem that justified that action. The problem was fashioned to fit the solution of federally-funded intervention. Regardless, these parties might have chosen another word. It did not *have* to be blight that was inserted into the 1949 Act in order to facilitate a wide-ranging redevelopment program.

However, even with these limitations, what remains critical is this: It *was* the word "blight" that was used. In making this choice, and not another, those who advocated for redevelopment (be they earnest planners, self-interested developers, or any number of other parties in between) also adopted with that word a specific rhetorical logic, rooted in the metaphorical functions of the word "blight." Untethered from specific meaning thanks to the actions of Congress, "blight" sounded like it had the precision and empiricism of the sciences—it was, after all, borrowed from the world of botany—but it was in fact a piece of poetry, a loose metaphor that, like all metaphors, carried with it implied systems of thinking. As the linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have noted, metaphors are more than language play, they are the way we describe and therefore understand the world, and thus help "govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details." This is in part because metaphors are a way of "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another," and thus the system of thinking from which a metaphor is borrowed can, in turn, bring to bear implications and mental baggage from that donor system. War metaphors, for example, can structure arguments into win/lose binaries, or imply justifications for hostile behavior.[2]

"Blight," as an organic metaphor, can through associative implication bring in larger organic systems of thinking. The most stunning example is the most specific: Fire blight, a viral infection of fruiting trees, is treated by pruning away the infected branches—including significant healthy tissue adjacent to the infection—and then destroying that removed material. In its place, the tree will grow new, healthy limbs. "Blight" within an urban context was, under the auspices of

the 1949 Act, typically met with plans for clearance, with the empty lands then to be rebuilt upon with urban forms that were considered to be economically and socially productive. In short, this was pruning with a bulldozer, and just as with pruning of fruit trees, clearance justified by the presence of something labelled "blight" included both buildings that seemed, by surviving records, to have been in a deep state of decay, *as well as* buildings that were in perfectly fine shape but which were to be removed merely because they were adjacent to urban "blight." I want to be both careful and explicit here: I am not arguing that "blight" was the sole reason that planners sought to implement broad and sweeping programs of clearance. I am, however, suggesting that as Lakoff and Johnson note, the metaphorical baggage that "blight" carried with it as a loanword from the botanical sciences was legitimacy, authority, and empiricism, even in cases where the word was used in wildly subjective or non-empirical ways. "Blight" thus has a very specific set of rhetorical values, and while advocates of redevelopment might have found other words to justify their programs, "blight" was the word that was actually chosen, and thus it was "blight's" specific metaphorical baggage that helped to structure debates about the use of federal funds for intervening into the American city.

There are two parts to this story. The first is how the word "blight" was given an urban meaning within the profession of city planning. This story is part intellectual history, part the history of the development of a new profession, and while it stretches from the late 19th century through to the early 1940s, the most significant events begin with the landmark academic study of blight by Harvard students C. Earl Morrow and Charles Herrick in 1925, and culminate with the completion of the American Public Health Association *Appraisal Method for Measuring Quality of Housing* in the mid 1940s.

The second part of this story involves the rise of the redevelopment movement. In this narrative, elite members of the real estate industry—mortgage bankers, developers, general contractors, property brokers, and so on—accommodated themselves to the idea of using federal subsidies to stabilize and control urban property markets. To do so, they successfully pressed Congress to fund urban redevelopment as an activity—often specifically and intentionally at the expense of federal funding for public housing—and then linked that funding to a carefully undefined version of "blight." As a result, in cities across the nation, it became possible for local members of the real estate industry to bend federal funding towards projects that suited their interests, with little or no regard for whether those projects had any provision for the residents displaced through redevelopment, much less for the construction of public housing.

The hinge of both stories is the term "blight." Without understanding the specific history of this term, it is difficult to understand how the 1949 Act was a vehicle for the widespread development of federally funded urban interventions that went beyond the provision of public housing. Yet, without looking at how federal policies were interpreted and adapted by local actors, in local contexts, for specific local interests, it is difficult to understand why the inclusion in the 1949 Act of just one word—"blight"—had such importance to the development of American cities after midcentury. By putting these two stories into conversation with each other—an intellectual history of a single planning term, and a set of discrete and even "weedy" case studies of how that term helped shape specific redevelopment projects—we can arrive at a key claim of this dissertation: That "blight" was the essential ingredient in making the federal

public housing program into the program of federal redevelopment, or "urban renewal."

The Archive and pre-existing literature

As an historian, I ground my work in archival research. This project is thus based in very specific kinds of primary sources. For the story of how "blight" became a planning term, most of these materials consist of conference proceedings, articles in contemporaneous design journals, documents produced by city planners, correspondence, and legislation. A particularly valuable source has been the Bancroft Library and specifically the papers of Catherine Bauer Wurster (Figure 0-1). Bauer, an advocate of public housing, a city planner, and an academic, was both a participant in and observer of many of these events. She regularly, almost obsessively collected materials relating to city planning in general and the idea of blight in specific, and without her, this dissertation would not exist. The second story, of how "blight" played out as a planning concept in specific case studies, is rooted mostly in meeting minutes, official public planning documents, contemporaneous journalism, and correspondence. No single source dominates, but two have proved invaluable, the first being the Environmental Design Library at the College of Environmental Design, UC Berkeley, and the other being the Portland Archives and Records Center, an arm of the Office of the Auditor at the City of Portland.[3]

A great deal of secondary literature comes to bear on the twin story this dissertation is meant to tell. Several bodies of scholarship have touched on aspects of this topic, although none have directly addressed the rise of "blight" as a planning concept, nor how this concept was specifically used by various parties to support redevelopment programs. Many scholars,

FIGURE 0-1: Catherine Bauer Wurster in the 1940s. A writer, "houser" activist, author of legislation, and later professor of city planning at both Harvard and Berkeley, Bauer is a remarkable figure who was directly involved with numerous struggles over U.S. housing policy and planning practices for more than thirty years. Her papers, a vast collection of pamphlets, plans, documents, legislation, and correspondence, form a vital source of material for this dissertation. Photograph courtesy of the Environmental Design Archives, College of Environmental Design, UC Berkeley.

however, have "nudged" up against these topics, or have attempt to tell portions of this story, and these works have proved influential to this project. There are, generally, four types of work that bear on the idea of "blight" in a historical, U.S. context. The first is scholarship relating to the use of words in professional practices, especially in fields relating to architecture, urban planning, and design. The second is found in histories of urban planning. A third field of relevant literature comes out of a subfield of this, from historians of public housing. The fourth and final field is that of urban historians, whose work focuses on specific cities rather than on national policies or planning concepts. In each can be found traces of the story of "blight" and the birth of redevelopment or "urban renewal," but none put into conversation both the development of the planning term "blight" and the ways that redevelopment occurred in the wake of the 1949 Act.

Among the historians of words and design, the most important and relevant text is Daniel M. Abramson's *Obsolescence: An Architectural History* (University of Chicago Press, 2016). Abramson traces the idea of obsolescence, from its origins as an investment concept in the 1910s New York real estate industry, through to several iterations relating to the structural integrity of buildings, the life cycle of planned areas, and the issue of sustainability. Abramson identifies "blight" as a byword for obsolescence that was frequently employed by planners from the 1930s through to midcentury. However, Abramson's project is to trace obsolescence, not "blight," and thus he does not discuss the origins of the latter term.[4] Another contribution made by Abramson is to examine the development of the American Public Health Association's (APHA) standards for measuring housing conditions. The creation of the APHA method was a critically important event in the history of "blight," and Abramson acknowledges that "notwithstanding the scientific method, determinations of obsolescence were fundamentally political." However, due to the focus of his project, Abramson does not significantly engage with the history of the 1949 Act, much less on how numerous cities only partially adopted the APHA standards, or ignored them altogether.[5] Although Abramson's work does not directly engage in the history of "blight" itself, it nevertheless is an important precedent for considerations of planning terminology, such as this dissertation.

Similar work has been accomplished by Adrian Forty, whose *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (Thames & Hudson, 2004) traces the histories of several words and their relationship to architecture and design, such as "memory," "history," "form," and "nature." Forty does not include "blight" among the vocabulary examined in *Words and buildings,* but his work makes a strong case for examining the role of word choice in the process of design. Quoting architectural theorist Tom Markus, Forty notes that "'language is at the core of making, using, and understanding buildings,'" adding to this his own view that, all too often, "it is generally supposed that what is spoken or written about works of architecture is merely a tracing of them," an attitude that words in design are transparent.[6] As Forty goes on to note, "in architecture, architects themselves do much of the talking and writing – which indeed constitutes a significant and sometimes major component of their 'production.'"[7] While Forty's project is an investigation of architecture rather than a broader, more urban understanding that takes into account the urban fabric, his insights could easily apply to the profession of city planning. Another, more recent example is that of Andrew M. Shanken, whose history of the word "unit" and its relationship to architecture and space.[8] To some

degree, these lexicographic histories owe their existence to the pioneering work of Raymond Williams, whose *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Croom Helm, 1976) was a kind of cultural (rather then dictionary-like etymological) history of popular words in the English language, such as "art," "civilization," "expert," "ordinary," and so on. Lexicographic and taxonomic histories such as those produced by Abramson, Forty, and Shanken, owe a great deal to Williams' work.[9]

Moving from lexicography to theory, two other lines of thought relating to language are important to this project. The first is the work of linguist George Lakoff, who along with Mark Johnson wrote *Metaphors We Live By* (University of Chicago Press, 1980). Lakoff and Johnson argue that, first, one of the main underpinnings of the English language is the metaphor, and second that metaphors are more than turns of phrase, they are systems that structure thought through implication and association.[10] It is my contention that "blight" must be understood as such a metaphor. Building on this, I argue that the metaphor "blight" is a kind of tool, to be wielded, used, and applied to the built environment for specific purposes, typically to strip value from a location in order to justify its clearance. This dissertation thus also takes as an influence the work of Bruno Latour, a sociologist who studies empirical sciences. Latour has long argued that the tools scientists use are not neutral, and do impart changes, biases, and interpretations even upon the most empirical of data. By extension, Latour has argued that there is a similarity between these scientific tools and the linguistic tools of law, noting that "both domains emphasise [sic] the virtues of a disinterested and unprejudiced approach, based on distance and precision; in both domains participants speak esoteric languages and they reason in carefully cultivated modes."[11] As Latour notes, legal terms—and blight is such, thanks to its inclusion in the 1949 Act—serve as stopping-points for inquiry, so that a decision maker "will no longer have to learn anything more from the fact, and which, on his return, will allow him to transport an unquestionable decision."[12] Blight is such a term, its function thus of critical importance in understanding the process of federal urban intervention in the American city.

The second body of literature that touches upon "blight" is that produced by historians of the profession of urban planning. M. Christine Boyer's *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning* (MIT, 1983) tackles the intertwined issues of housing reform, slum clearance, and urban redevelopment. Kenneth T. Jackson, in his landmark work, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1985), dedicates an entire chapter to the creation of the Wagner Steagall Housing Act of 1937, as well as the subsequent two-decade period of 20th century public housing.[13] More recently, Sara Stevens' *Developing Expertise: Architecture and Real Estate in Metropolitan America* (Yale University Press, 2016) connected the rise of the term "blight" with the rise of the real estate industry's involvement in urban planning, noting that this occurred in part "because 'blight' defined an economic condition—declining property values—whereas 'slums,' which could be profitable for slumlords, were associated with social problems that fell outside the professional agenda of real estate developers."[14]

Each of these scholars, however, approach the study of "blight" tangentially, and with significant limitations. Boyer conflates "slum" and "blight," even though, as I will show, planners from the 1920s through the 1950s rarely saw them as equivalent.[15] Jackson only briefly touches on the idea of blight, focusing more on how public housing came to

be perceived as the "ghetto." Rothstein repeats Boyer's conflations, arguing that "by the mid-twentieth century, 'slums' and 'blight' were widely understood euphemisms for African American neighborhoods," despite the fact that this could not account for planners also applying the logic of "blight" onto neighborhoods that were not even slightly African American in demographic.[16] Sara Stevens notes some differences between "blight" and "slum," as well as the importance of the former to the real estate industry, yet assumes a single definition for blight. "Blight" was, as this dissertation will show, never a unitary term with a commonly agreed-upon meaning, more parts epithet or aspersion than science.

Among historians of urban planning, in a broad sense, the most accomplished study of blight comes from Robert Fogelson, whose *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (Yale University Press, 2001) ably links the birth of the urban redevelopment movement with the efforts of the central-city members of the real estate industry at "inventing blight." In Fogelson's history, during the 1940s, downtown members of the real estate industry awoke to the potential of using slum clearance authority to benefit themselves, as a means to clear land (typically adjacent to downtown) and make room for redevelopment projects that would strengthen their own holdings. Fogelson goes to great pains to relate the long and contested history of "blight" as a planning term, noting that there was little consensus about what "blight" actually was. Fogelson notes that "it was hard to defined blighted districts, it was easy to find them," a not unreasonable conclusion when "blight" itself was subjective, and therefore a quality (or lack of quality) to be located not in the landscape at all, but in the eye of the beholder.[17] Fogelson also describes how the redevelopment movement managed to shape the federal legislation that became the Housing Act of 1949.

Yet Fogelson's scholarship also has limits. First, he does not discuss the development of the American Public Health Association methods for measuring housing quality, and thus missed one of the more remarkable and, in my view, genuine attempts to give a scientific definition to the term "blight." The consequence is that blight, for Fogelson, is almost exclusively a term of convenience that serves the interests of the downtown investors whose story he tells, as if no other alternative had existed. As this dissertation will show, the way that Congress left "blight" undefined under federal policy in 1949 was, in fact, a rejection of several entirely plausible alternatives, including the adoption of the APHA standards. This dissertation thus builds on and strengthens Fogelson's argument through deeper engagement with 1920s-1940s struggles to define blight. Second, because Fogelson ends his study of American downtowns at 1950, he largely is unable to examine much less discuss the actual effects of the 1949 Act. We are left uncertain as to the outcome of the struggle that Fogelson so well relates. This brings us to the third limitation to Fogelson's story: By not examining more closely the actual struggles that flowed from the 1949 Act, we do not see the way that "blight" itself was a controversial term, often engendering resistance from local actors, not only among the "people who lived in the redevelopment sites" who were, from the perspective of the downtown interests, "in the wrong place at the wrong time," but also from those not located in redevelopment sites, and from other members of the real estate industry who had little to gain and sometimes a great deal to lose if their more well-heeled colleagues succeeded in turning federally funded intervention towards redevelopment. Failed redevelopment projects, such as the two case studies in this dissertation, help us to see how the real estate indus-

try's diversion of housing monies towards redevelopment was frequently weakened by the very tool that had made it possible, the enshrinement of an undefined "blight" into federal legislation.

Scholars of public housing and its related legislation have approached the history of blight from different angles. In 1957, Timothy L. McDonnell wrote an exhaustive legislative history of the 1937 Act in *The Wagner Housing Act: A Case Study of the Legislative Process* (Loyola University Press, 1957). While quite dated, McDonnell's work is valuable in that he was able to interview or correspond with several of the participants in passing Wagner Steagall. Yet McDonnell's project is to trace the passage of the 1937 Act, which excluded the word "blight" altogether. He, like many later scholars, conflates blight with slums—his index entry for the former reads "Blighted areas. *See* Slums."[18] Gail Radford, in *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (University of Chicago Press, 1996) likewise touches mostly upon the development of housing legislation, and does not take her study of housing issues up through the Second World War, thus missing discussion of the 1949 Act and the inclusion of "blight" within it.

An entirely different perspective from which to tackle issues of "blight" is that of metropolitan histories. This is a deep scholarly tradition that ranges from local histories produced by amateur historians through to academic works by eminent scholars. This dissertation relies on two case studies: The 1949-1950 efforts by planners in Oakland, California, to create a citywide "blight" assessment, and the 1950-1953 attempts by the real estate industry in Portland, Oregon, to create that city's first urban redevelopment project. Metropolitan histories for both cities thus are important to this dissertation.

The "standard" text of Oakland's history is *Oakland: The Story of a City* (Presidio Press, 1982) by journalist Beth Bagwell. Although Bagwell's text comes up to the year 1952, neither the Oakland Housing Authority nor any of the other 20th century Oakland redevelopment entities appears in the book. By contrast, Edward C. Hayes, in *Power Structure and Urban Policy: Who Rules in Oakland?* (McGraw-Hill, 1972), deeply delves into the nature of political decision-making in Oakland, with significant attention paid to the OHA and the later Oakland Redevelopment Agency, but pays relatively little notice to the actual terms of what counted as "blight" in Oakland, much less the city's first 1949 attempt to define and locate this condition. Robert O. Self's *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton University Press, 2003) tackles these same issues at even greater depth, but Self's conception of blight is limited. Presaging the definition later offered by Sara Stevens, Self wrote that "most local officials and business leaders understood decline as a physical and economic problem, that they termed 'blight," rather than as a symptom of social inequality."[19] Yet the actual events of Oakland in 1949, as will be shown in Chapter 3, complicate this, showing how the city drew up a definition of blight that included social factors such as juvenile crime rates and delinquency, as well as public health issues such as communicable disease infection rates, alongside the structural integrity of buildings.

In Portland, the most expansive metropolitan scholarship comes from E. Kimbark MacColl, whose *Growth of a City: Power and Politics in Portland, Oregon, 1915 to 1950* (The Georgian Press, 1979) remains a formidable text more than forty years after its publication. As with several other scholars, however, MacColl ended the periodization of his text at 1950. The development of the city's first urban rede-

velopment project, Vaughn Street, *began* in late 1950, and thus almost entirely escapes MacColl's work. The result is that although MacColl *does* engage with the history of housing, redevelopment, and political power in Portland throughout the 1940s, the way that the 1949 Act played out in Portland is not contained in his work. Carl Abbott, in *Portland: Planning, Politics and Growth in a Twentieth-century City* (University of Nebraska Press, 1983) does relate, briefly, the history of redevelopment in Portland, but barely mentions the Vaughn Street project or the political battles of 1949-1953, describing them only as a case of a "reform drive [that] sputtered to a halt in part because [Portland mayor] Dorothy [McCullough] Lee was not a credible executive," thus echoing the smear-campaigns of Lee's opponents of the era.[20] Jewel Lansing's *Portland: People, Politics and Power, 1851-2001* (Oregon State University Press, 2003) is an almost encyclopedic masterwork of the official political history of the city, and contains brief histories of the city's housing authority, redevelopment authority, and first foray into urban redevelopment in 1950-1953, but does not have a fine enough resolution to understand the actual history of how redevelopment was first broached in Portland, much less how "blight" acted as a locus of political controversy that shaped that first attempt.

How this dissertation intervenes

The purpose of this dissertation, then, is to fill in the gaps in pre-existing scholarship, to offer small yet significant correctives, and to bridge between these two different bodies of work, those that (like Jackson, or Fogelson, or Stevens) concentrate on planning, public housing, and redevelopment as seen from a national scale, and those that (like Self, or MacColl, or Abbott) look primarily at local historical events and only secondarily engage with national cultures, policies, and politics. This dissertation tells both stories, and in the process, links them, showing how national policies are given shape both in national arenas (such as professional journals and conferences, political lobbying by interest and advocacy groups in Washington, D.C., or in the crafting and passage of federal legislation) as well as in local contexts, where the words and deeds of a relatively unknown planner, a real estate developer, a small landlord, or a city councilor might be just as potent at realizing those policies, or at defeating them.

This is, then, two stories as one. It begins in Chapter 1, where I will explore the history of the word "blight," its origins in botanical practices, and its slow adoption by members of the nascent city planning movement as a word to describe urban conditions. In Chapter 2, I will examine how the term "blight" was caught up in struggles over federal intervention into American cities, especially in relation to the construction of public housing projects. Here, we will see how "blight" was excluded from federal policy in the Wagner Steagall Housing Act of 1937; how planners and the real estate industry embraced the concept in the defense economy of 1940-1945, and then how the term was ultimately made a part of federal policy when Congress incorporated it into the Housing Act of 1949.

I then turn to the second half of this story, the local context as seen in the case studies. In Chapter 3, I examine the attempts by planners in Oakland, California to create a city-wide assessment of blight. The next case study appears in chapter 4, which looks at Portland's first attempt at an urban redevelopment project justified by claims of blight. Both of these case studies help to show the consequences of the development and federal endorsement of the planning term of "blight," and illustrate how federal policies

were given shape by local actions as much as by distant decisions in the national capitol.

My choices of case studies, as well the periodization for examining these locations, is constrained in two important ways. First, I have limited my time frame to a start in the 1940s—when the idea of redevelopment began to gain traction among both planners and those drafting legislation in Washington—and 1954. This latter date was chosen as it is the year that Congress passed another "housing act"—this time known as the "National Housing Act"—reauthorizing the program of federal intervention yet again. By concentrating only on projects that were authorized under the auspices of the 1949 Act, my examples are, in each case, the *first* deployment of the concept of blight in their respective locations. Second, I have picked two case studies from places that, at first glance, might seem like relatively unlikely choices: Oakland, California, and Portland, Oregon. While both proved convenient choices for research, their selection goes beyond the pragmatics of writing a dissertation. Both are western cities, both are relatively young, with founding dates in the late antebellum period. They are, then, younger cities, cities without the dense factory districts of Chicago, or the tenements of New York. These are cities without slums. Moreover, they are cities barely possessing anything that might be termed "old" at all. Here, then, where the built environment at midcentury was rarely older than the century itself, it is possible to most easily see the way that "blight" is a constructed concept. Put differently, in an eastern seaboard city such as Boston or Philadelphia, the built environment was often several centuries in age, and words that cast a negative light upon the old might seem, at first glance, to be axiomatic and natural. Of course, we might still know, deep down, that something like "blight" is a construct, even in such aged contexts, but it might not feel so unreasonable. In a young city of the West, the matter is changed. These cities can barely make claim to age, and claims about the obsolescence of the built environment—claims of "blight"—may feel so counter-intuitive as to be uncomfortable. If blight is a subjective rather than empirical quality—as I maintain it was after Congress's 1949 anti-definition—then examining it in a place where its existence can barely be established is a way to better see the specific terrain of the concept.

Following the case study chapters, a brief conclusion summarizes the dissertation's argument. Its purpose is to make connections between the history of blight, and the actions of planners and the real estate industry in the late 1940s and early 1950s. What this dissertation with its twin stories hopes to show is that understanding the ramifications of including "blight" in the 1949 Act is the same as understanding how a program, originally designed to help those who had the worst of all living conditions, became a venue by which the richest and most powerful of the real estate industry were able to finance pet projects of many kinds, very few of which had any provision for the housing of the working class, the working poor, and the poor. It is through understanding "blight" that we understand how public housing gave way to urban redevelopment and urban renewal, and it is through understanding how federal policies were given shape by local actors that we can see the process itself at work. Federal legislation such as the Housing Act of 1949 had a profound impact upon American cities, but it was local action, not federal action, where those policies translated into reality. "Blight," then, was a tool, its capabilities crafted at a national level, but like any tool, it is not those who design and make it, but those who *use* it that give it its most lasting character, or, in this case, its most lasting definitions.

In her 1934 book, *Modern Housing*, Catherine Bauer wrote that

> *...a housing program in a capitalist democracy which began with slum-clearance would inevitably compromise every one of the essentials—and result in very few new dwellings to boot.*[21]

Bauer was right, but with a twist, for it was the clearance of "blight," not slums, that served as the compromise that brought down the public housing program. This, then, is the twin story told in this dissertation—first, of how the term "blight" appeared to have empirical meaning without in fact having empirical dimensions, and second how the real estate industry made use of the slipperiness of "blight" to justify projects that supplanted public housing.

NOTES to the INTRODUCTION

1. I use the periodization of "the defense economy" to mean approximately 1940, as U.S. manufacturers began in earnest producing war materials for the UK, to the end of the war in 1945.
2. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 3-5.

3. The Bauer papers at the Bancroft provided an excellent source for national policy, as Bauer was not only an academic who studies urban planning, but also an activist and direct participant in matters related to housing and city planning from the mid-1930s until the 1950s, when her efforts centered more on academic work. I was unable to secure access to the private records of the Urban Land Institute, or those of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, both still extant and active organizations.

4. Daniel Abramson, *Obsolescence: An Architectural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 42-43.

5. *Ibid.*, 47.

6. Adrian Forty, *Words and buildings: A vocabulary of modern architecture.* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 11-13.

7. *Ibid.*, 13-14.

8. Andrew M. Shanken, "Unit: A semantic and architectural history," *Representations 143,* Summer 2018, 91-117.

9. Forty, *Words and buildings,* 7.

10. Lakoff and Johnson, 3-6.

11. Bruno Latour, "Scientific objects and legal objectivity," *Science and Law English*, 1.

12. *Ibid.*, 31.

13. Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985), 219-230, especially 223-224.

14. Sara Stevens, *Developing expertise: Architecture and real estate in metropolitan America.* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2016), 87.

15. An example, in one passage: "It was becoming apparent to planners during the 1930s that a blighted area of a city was an economic liability to the whole and that the community paid for this expensive form of housing. However great the cost of replacing these slums, it was not so great as the cost of maintaining them." M. Christine Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning.* Originally published 1983. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1986), 244.

16. Richard Rothstein, *The color of law: A forgotten history of how our government segregated America.* (New York: Liverlight Publishing Corporation, 2017), 127.

17. Robert Fogelson, *Downtown: Its rise and fall, 1880-1950.* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001), 347-348.

18. Timothy McDonnel, S.J., *The Wagner housing act: A case study of the legislative process.* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1957), 454.

19. Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the struggle for postwar Oakland* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), 139.

20. Carl Abbott, *Portland: Planning, politics and growth in a twentieth-century city* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 157-158, 169-171. More alarmingly, Abbott has a tendency to willfully ignore the city's redevelopment authorities in most of his work, the Housing Authority of Portland and, after the late 1950s, the Portland Development Commission. In Abbott's *Greater Portland: Urban life and landscape in the Pacific Northwest,* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), HAP and the PDC, much less issues of redevelopment or "blight," are nowhere to be found, despite the book being intended as an investigation of the city's place as a role model for urban planning. Similarly, Abbott's *Portland in three centuries: The place and the people* (Oregon State

University Press, 2011) does not mention HAP, mentions the PDC only once in passing and not by its proper name, and spends no time investigating how the city's redevelopment efforts hinged on where and how "blight" was declared to exist.

21. Bauer did admit that it was possible that a blighted area could be suitable for a housing program, given that such areas were, in Bauer's framing of this concept, places where the land values were depressed. Even then, however, clearance itself would add to the costs, and might also cause owners of nearby blighted areas to raise their prices based on their anticipation of eventual government purchase. Further, such clear and replace strategies rarely served the extant populace well, as Bauer noted that British housers had found out through experience. Thus even building on areas that Bauer defined as blighted were not the ideal conditions for establishing a strong, publicly-owned, low-income housing program. Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1934), 243.

CHAPTER 1
From metaphor to method: Blight and the development of planning terminology, 1900-1945

Terminology is the result of professionalizing words, the outcome of struggle. On the surface, terminology can appear unitary, fixed, a descriptive tool that carries authority. "Blight" is such a word. Within the realm of city planning and urban policy, to call some place "blighted" is to devalue it, or to claim, conversely, that such a place has *been* devalued, and therefore has become "blighted." It is similar to other terms for the description of cities, such as congested/congestion, or dense, or sprawling—all common planning nomenclature, but all also loanwords from other systems of meaning within the English language.

In examining the specific history of how "blight" came to be a planning term, rather than a poetic metaphor borrowed by a speaker or writer for a moment of colorful description, several important issues emerge. First, although planners, policy-makers, urban thinkers, and public intellectuals throughout the first half of the 20th century, frequently used the word "blight" to describe conditions in American cities, there was rarely any consensus on what "blight" actually was. Like the proverbial blind men and the elephant, those observing urban America frequently knew that something they called "blight" was there, but were incapable to agreeing on precisely what that thing was. Second, although "blight" was thus what I term "slippery," it implied scientific precision, in that the term was borrowed from the agriculture and the botanical sciences, where blight, as an infection of orchard trees, was an empirical and measurable condition with specific and effective treatments. Thus, to use "blight" as a description of a city was to imply a comparable condition, a kind of organic affliction that ideologically supported a vision of civic health as growth, and stasis or decay as civic danger. Third and finally, only *once* did any party successfully marry the concept of "blight" to a repeatable, rigorous scientific method of measuring urban conditions, that being the American Public Health Association's "Appraisal Method for Measuring Quality of Housing," developed from 1937-1945. Ultimately, this is a story of how terminology such as "blight,"—to borrow another organic metaphor—is not born, but raised, is not nature but nurture, the result of a slow process of struggle, argument, and experimentation within a community.

As I will show, from the late 19th century through to the late 1930s, several parties attempted to give "blight" a meaning within the discourse of the emerging profession of city planning. Despite these efforts, by the end of this period, little shared definition for "blight" was established. Most in the planning professions did share the idea that a "blighted area" was not equal to a "slum," and that the "slum" was far worse. Beyond this, little consensus emerged—was "blight" economic, or social? Was it a condition of architecture related to tangible matters such as dry rot, paint failure, and physical decay? Or was it a matter of how buildings were used and, by extension, who used them? Despite "blight" seeming to have the dimensions of a tangible and scientific term, its use during this time was more parts pejorative than quantifiable. Only one effort to define "blight," that begun

by the American Public Health Association in 1937, came close to establishing a measurable definition for the term. As further chapters will show, however, the APHA's efforts were largely ignored, and the specific ways that the term "blight" had been shaped in the prewar era went on, in turn, to have a profound impact on the way that American cities were shaped in the postwar era.

The origins of blight

To Americans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, blight was not a condition of urbanity, but a malady of the orchard, one that, moreover, arose from mysterious circumstances. It was, in the 1876 words of one scientist, "a phenomenon which hitherto has defied successful investigation."[1] As Louis Fourniquet Henderson observed in 1905, the unknown cause of the problem was a persistent source of speculation from numerous parties, so much so that its discussion was frequently suppressed "unless someone had something of absolute knowledge to offer about it."[2] Blight descended from unknown sources, spread in unknown ways, and served to infect and then kill everything that it touched, unless blighted material was physically and ruthlessly removed and destroyed.

This meaning is an old one. Etymologists believe that the word blight comes from an old Norse word, describing a "stain, spot, or blot," and is related to words like "bleak," "black," "blow," and "blast," suggesting some sort of phonetic or onomatopoeic relationship.[3] As far back as the 17th century, it was also an agricultural affliction, a name given to a phenomenon found in corn, wheat, and fruiting plants. John Worlidge's *Systema Agriculturae* of 1668, an early horticultural guidebook, notes a "blighting" that attacks corn, especially in wet conditions, but that differs somehow from mildews and other more well-understood setbacks. The most well-known instance of blight was the so-called "fire blight," the very affliction that botanist L.F. Henderson had studied at the University of Idaho in 1905. As advances in germ theory matured and spread to the study of horticulture, investigations such as Henderson's, undertaken at the Agricultural Experiment Station in Moscow, Idaho, showed that fire blight was a "contagious bacterial disease," a germ infection that kills blossoms and fruits, then progresses through the new twigs to the bark, larger branches, and then the trunk. [4] It was this disease of the orchard that most Americans of the Progressive Era associated with the word blight, if they knew any meaning at all (Figure 1-1).

When discussing unsound conditions in cities, Anglophones of the late 19th century (including Americans) were more likely to use the word "slum," for blight had no currency then as an urban term. The Oxford English Dictionary places its first attribution of blight in an urban context as Lewis Mumford's *The Culture of Cities*, published in 1938, and while I will show that this is hardly the first instance of blight being used in this way, it does give some indication of how young the word's urban connotations are.[5] Slum, by contrast, has an older and almost exclusively urban meaning. The OED attributes it as a slang or "cant" word, suggesting the term itself rose out of the city, with even its earliest meanings associated with crowded, ugly, unsafe, unsanitary urban spaces.[6]

Let's consider, for example, one of the seminal texts of American urbanism, Jacob Riis' 1890 book *How the Other Half Lives.* This book, which is also one of the first examples of photojournalism, combined the power of Riis' pen with his new-found pursuit of photography to document the living conditions of thousands of New Yorkers at the bottom of the

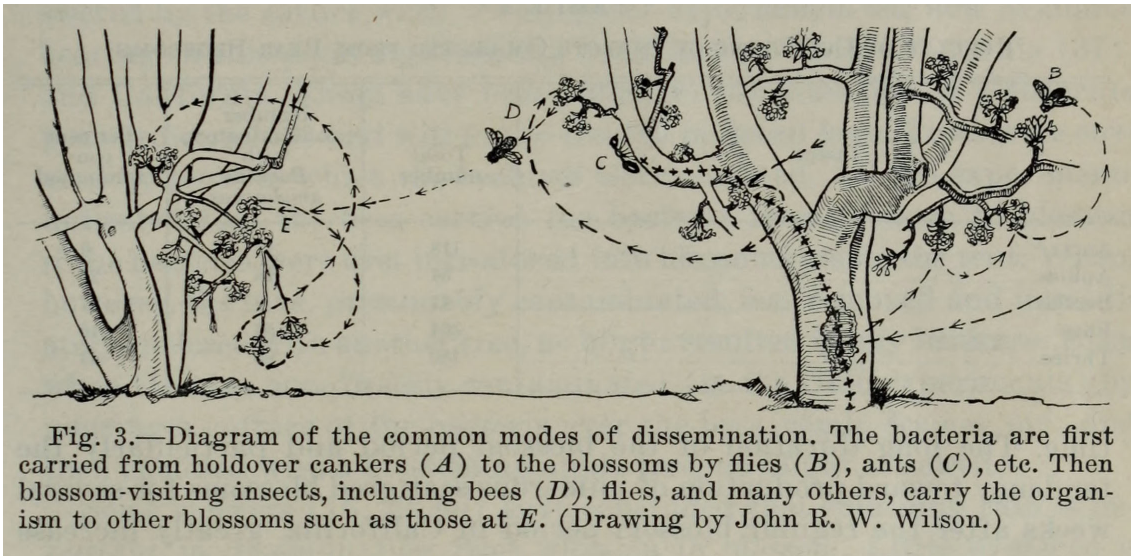


Fig. 3.—Diagram of the common modes of dissemination. The bacteria are first carried from holdover cankers (*A*) to the blossoms by flies (*B*), ants (*C*), etc. Then blossom-visiting insects, including bees (*D*), flies, and many others, carry the organism to other blossoms such as those at *E*. (Drawing by John R. W. Wilson.)

racial, ethnic, and class system within that city (Figure 1-2). Riis, an immigrant from Denmark, had experienced those conditions personally, having worked his way up in his American life from homelessness to being a star reporter for the *New York Tribune* and confidant of young political star Theodore Roosevelt. Riis had thus seen the bottom of society, and was now in a position to at least spectate if not join in with those at the top of the city's society. For him, the blindness of the latter was the primary impediment to improving the lives of the former. In the opening of his book, Riis castigated New York society for their unfamiliarity with the lives and living conditions of the working poor and the destitute.[7]

Despite this harangue—or perhaps even because of it—Riis' work was a sensation. His photographs of the poverty-stricken undersides of the city—often the product of intrusive and adventurous documentary methods—propelled his work into fame. The book promulgated speeches, and the speeches in turn begat "magic lantern" slide shows that would accompany Riis' lectures. In the pre-cinema era, these shows became one of the first mediated, exposé-style shock-dramas.[8]

FIGURE 1-1: Diagram of fire blight in pears. Until the 1920s, the word "blight" most often referred to a condition that attacked fruiting trees, primarily pears and apples. This malady had been observed for centuries, but was not identified as a biological infection until the advent of germ theory in the 19th century. Once successfully identified, blight was typically treated by removing the infected limbs back to healthy wood, then burning the pruned material. This illustration, from the mid-1930s, shows how scientists came to understand the spread of the bacterial infection. H. Earl Thomas and P.K. Ark, *Fire Blight of Pears and Related Plants: Bulletin 586*. Berkeley, California: University of California College of Agriculture, Agricultural Experiment Station, November 1934, 17.

FIGURE 1-2: Jacob Riis was a pioneer of photojournalism, using a camera to make extensive images of the social and material problems of New York during the 1890s. Riis typically made images of interior spaces, the better to show to his upper-class audiences how the working poor, the poor, and the itinerant homeless lived. Some of his work does concentrate on the wider built environment, such as this image, titled "Hell's Kitchen and Sebastapool." The apparently unpainted homes at right, constructed on what appears to be a mixture of debris and uneven land, is no doubt the central subject, as well as what appears to be some make-shift sidewalk vending at center. Another concern is the clash between different scales, densities, and uses of land, as seen in the contrast between the old homes and the relatively new tenement structure with its stark, blank wall, and its lack of side lights or visible side ventilation. Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897, 6.

What is notably missing from Riis' book is the idea of the blighted area. Riis rarely applied taxonomic labels to the places he explored, but when he did, he referred to them by their chief descriptor in that time: "slum." The word appears in Riis' book thirty-eight times. Blight, however, appears only twice, and neither time as an urban description. [9] Speaking of childhood alcohol abuse, Riis writes that "there is no escape from it; no hope for the boy, once its blighting grip is upon him."[10] Riis moves on to quote from a New York area doctor, who describes the inhabitants of the city's poor asylums as "only gnarled, blasted, blighted trunks, insensible to moral or social influences."[11] Both uses of the word blight are metaphoric, verbal imagery rather than technical terminology, and both are applied to people, not places.[12] Slum, however, was different, for though Riis' project was to force middle-class and upper-class New Yorkers to familiarize themselves with the living conditions of the city's poorest inhabitants, the fact that Riis did not have to explain what "slum" meant is indicative of how well understood and imbedded that word was in the American popular vocabulary.[13] As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth, the slum was something Americans at least vaguely understood, and blight was an affliction of fruiting trees, and little more.

The birth of city planning as profession

To understand how blight emerged as a concept of city planning, we must first understand the relative youth of the profession as a whole. Like Riis's slum documentation project, the American profession of city planning is a product of the 1890s, and more specifically, flows from Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. This assemblage of ceremonial buildings was the work of the country's best designers, working under the supervision of Chicago architect Daniel H. Burnham. Open from May 1st to October 3rd, the fair attracted more than 27 million visitors, who were impacted by the carefully studied classical beauty of the so-called White City that they could not help but find their home towns—whether Manhattan or Mobile, Boston or Bellingham—compare poorly. [14] Chicago itself was the most obvious example. A correspondent of the London *Spectator*, after waxing poetic about the fairgrounds, went on to castigate the host city, contrasting it as the "Black City" to the fair's white one. Smoke choked its skies, haphazardly built transportation networks ran down its citizens daily, and the river was "an abomination, which can be smelt but not described."[15] As for the housing?

> *...all the dirt, squalor, and misery of... all the great cities of the world was as nothing compared with the dirt and misery of those in Chicago, for such houses are there made of wood, which sucks in the dirt and infection and never parts with either.*[16]

Indeed as several observers then and after have pointed out, the contrasts of the White City were part of its appeal, part of how it worked.[17] As art historian Hélène Valance observes, the White City came to be seen by visitors as "a glimpse of... [the] glorious future" and an "epitome of order, a beacon and a model for future cities."[18] When the fair finally burnt down in a series of suspicious fires during the summer of 1894, it only served to strengthen its hold upon the American imagination, propelling to legendary proportions.[19]

Riding the popularity of the fair, Burnham added city planning to the stable of services his architecture firm specialized in. Several colleagues and competitors followed suit—including fellow fair designer Frederick Law Olmsted—and an entire profession was born. Politically, the moment was right for the kind of

large-scale urban intervention that planning represented. The two-decade period centering on the turn of the 20th century was a time of popular progressive reform, a deepening belief in professionalization, and the rise of a politically active middle class.[20] In 1897, Johns Hopkins lecturer on art George Kriehn spoke to a young civic arts organization in Baltimore about a new urban reform movement that he called "City Beautiful," a movement that for all intents and purposes embodied the program of civic architectural embellishment that Burnham and other nascent professional city planners typically advocated.[21] The speech was republished in the reform journal *Municipal Affairs,* a publication that, at only three years old, was also a product of the progressive era. [22] In 1901, Charles Mulford Robinson—a journalist who had cut his teeth writing about the White City—penned the nation's first city planning guidebook, *The Improvement of Towns and Cities*, (subtitle: "Or the Practical Basis of Civic Aesthetics"), which the author opened by lauding the "great new awakening of enthusiasm and concern for city beauty" and called on citizens to join the "regiment of fighters in the battle for urban beauty." The book, aimed at a popular audience, was published not by an obscure or vanity press, but by Putnam.[23]

Burnham was not the only designer to expand his services to the urban scale, but he was perhaps the most visible, and his City Beautiful vitae included plans for Washington (1901), Cleveland (1903), San Francisco (1905), and Chicago (1909). Like the fair, the cities his plans called for were filled with breathtaking monuments and picturesque views, aesthetic masterpieces meant to convert the horsehair and plaster-of-Paris temporalities of the White City into more permanent Parises to be written over the great cities of the United States.[24] Beyond Burnham, city planning professionals—or at least, individuals purporting to have such expertise—seemed to appear all across the nation. *The Town Planning Review*, a British publication, noted with chagrin:

> *...it appeared as though there were springing up accommodating experts who could produce a report on any city in a week, with a smattering of historic preface, a photograph or two of Paris and a plan of the town scored through with boulevards, vistas, and civic centers.*[25]

This popularity of city planning proposals is in many ways emblematic of the first decade of the 20th century. Prominent social reformer Jane Addams, in a May 1910 speech, described the end of that decade as a "moment of human conservation and city planning." For her and others with similar reforming agendas, however, it was also not enough. There remained chronic injuries and disabilities (because insufficient health care), rampant infectious diseases (because poor civic sanitation), persistent poverty (because lack of job security), and massive homelessness (because of said poverty and a lack of decent, affordable housing). Addams saw city planning's moment of vogue as an opportunity about to be squandered.[26] Other social reformers, especially those who worked in the settlement house movement that Addams had done so much to popularize in the United States, felt a constant frustration over a lack of large-scale progress towards what was, even then, being called "social justice." It was the classic question of "what is to be done?" that had confronted Leo Tolstoy in Russia some twenty-three years earlier: The resources of the charitable could not meet the needs of collective poverty, and that poverty, in turn, was a product of systems that activities like settlement houses had little power to change.[27] As *The Town Planning Review* described it, this inadequacy brought settlement workers "face to face with the subject of city planning." The result was a meeting of the Commit-

tee on Congestion of Population in New York, held in May 1909. As *The Town Planning Review's* unnamed United States correspondent noted, "all previous efforts in this country had been prompted by the less powerful, although worthy motive, of aesthetic culture."[28]

A year later—the same month as Addams was addressing charity workers in St. Louis—the settlement-worker led planning group reconvened in Rochester, New York.[29] Delivering the opening address to the conference was Frederick Law Olmsted, Junior, joint heir (with brother John Charles Olmsted) of his father's landscape architecture practice and one of Daniel Burnham's colleagues from the design of the White City. Olmsted laid out for the attendees his vision of planning, one rooted in pragmatic issues such as the circulation of vehicles, relationships between railroad logistics and industrial sites, the impact of sanitation and light on housing qualities, and so forth. Planning was to

> *...reduce the conflict of purposes and the waste of constructive effort to a minimum, and thus secure for the people of the city conditions adapted to their attaining the maximum of productive efficiency, of health and of enjoyment of life.*[30]

This was a pragmatic approach to planning, and one that was far less enamored of aesthetics. Beauty, Olmsted noted, could not be "applied like a pink ribbon" on a "previously created and otherwise unlovely work." Neither could it be a work of genius that preceded any consideration of usefulness or utility. "Beauty must neither precede nor follow regard for the practical ends to be obtained, but must accompany it step by step."[31] Olmsted's address carefully avoided pointing fingers, even in a general way, concentrating on ideas rather than practitioners, but it was a clear rebuke to the prolific Burnham and the City Beautiful movement at the head of which he stood.[32]

In the words of historian Joan Draper, "Realism replaced idealism," and members of the young profession—Olmsted included—were moving planning into the more pragmatic realm of science.[33] Two years later, at the fourth annual city planning conference, architect and urban planner Arnold W. Brunner admonished that planning was "not an artist's dream, it is a scientific reality," and the next year fellow architect and urban designer George Burdett Ford delivered a paper titled "The City Scientific."[34] The science at stake was twofold: On the one hand was the social science that undergirded the settlement house movement, especially that revolving around Addam's Hull House experiment in Chicago, while on the other hand was the growing scientific field of public health.[35] A link between the spread of disease and dirty, congested conditions within cities has long been known; with the late 19th century discovery of germ theory, it was at last possible to craft scientific approaches to urban space.[36] The emerging science of efficiency also helped to influence this scientific turn in planning, from the "scientific management" ideas of Frederick Winslow Taylor, to architect Louis Sullivan's rationalist dictum that "form ever follows function."[37]

The tactics of this new phase of American city planning were, given their association with a new "scientific" approach, far more methodical in nature. One of the most prominent examples is "zoning," a technique for controlling land use, (especially in newly built portions of the city), that had originated in Germany.[38] In general concept, zoning was meant to rationalize the city by separating conflicting uses, e.g. by ensuring that residential districts and industrial districts did not comingle, causing all manner of perceived social and health problems. The first formal adoption of

zoning in the United States, dating to 1916 in New York, regulated both building form (through height and sunlight controls) and use, and was driven in part by the concerns of department store owners along Fifth Avenue, who felt that the proximity of soft goods factories caused congestion—and class mingling—that hurt their retail business.[39] Rationalizing land use so as to push the factories further from the high-class retail districts was seen as a shared economic win.[40] Another example of rationalization—in this case, an efficiency-driven one—was an increased interest in traffic circulation and congestion. At the 1911 American City Planning Conference considerable time and attention was spent on the merits of street design, with landscape architect and planner John Nolen arguing for "a scheme for the scientific standardization of street widths, to be determined by the traffic they would be called upon to carry," while the Commission on Congestion of Population in New York included within its purview addressing transit functions as a factor in residential congestion.[41]

Blight and the lexicon of planning

If planners were adopting tactics inspired by the rationalism and objective viewpoint of the sciences, the terminology of their new profession was similarly influenced. Building a lexicon was a critical part of establishing the profession; for as Adrian Forty notes, "language is present not just in the final stage [of design], but at every preceding stage." Instructions from patron to architect or, at the urban scale, from the public, leading citizens, and civic officials to the planners, are typically conveyed in written or spoken words. [42]

This lexicon that architects and planners were constructing in the teens and twenties was filled with scientific metaphors. Zoning, for example, comes down from meteorology (as when referencing global climactic zones, e.g. the temperate zone, the tropical zone), and from anatomy, zoology, and biology (as in reference to an "encircling growth or structure.")[43] "Circulation," meanwhile, entered planning through the influence of architects, who had in turn borrowed the word from medicine in order to describe the movement of people through structures and spaces. [44] Congestion, meanwhile, moved from a description of restricted or blocked pulmonary systems in the body to a description of why a journey across town took increasingly longer periods of time.[45] The concept of the "cell" as a framing of segments of the city, such as neighborhoods, dates at least to 1929, as deployed by American planner Clarence Perry, and French architect Le Corbusier. (It is likely older.)[46] The rising use of scientific loanwords may also have been popularized by the 1918 outbreak of influenza in U.S. cities such as Boston and Philadelphia. Spreading quickly and claiming many lives, the epidemic placed public health—and the dangers of population crowding—into the forefront of American political and civic discourse.[47] The popularity of such scientific metaphors within the emergent planning profession was likely underscored by longstanding cultural norms—suspicion of cities has been deeply embedded in the American psyche since Thomas Jefferson's day, and an agrarian perspective on the city would lend itself naturally to the borrowing of agricultural metaphors.[48]

Among these scientific metaphors, as Forty has labelled them, for the first time the word blight began to be used by planners as a term of urban description. The first use of "blight" as an urban term is uncertain, but a few examples are worth consideration. The area around the Brooklyn Naval Yard is described, in a 1911 edition of the *New York Times*, as "a blighted neighborhood."[49] A confer-

ence of urban planners in Boston in 1912 discussed "blighted districts."[50] Such uses might indicate that blight already had an urban definition, meaning some form of substandard building conditions, but further perusal of period headlines suggests less stability around the idea. For example, an Italian-American doctor in Chicago complains, in 1914, of the health costs of Italian immigrants living in the "Blight of Crowded Tenements," the blight in this case being the tenement situation itself, regardless of building conditions. [51] The use here is poetic, descriptive rather than technical.[52] Or consider this 1916 headline from the *New York Times Magazine:* "Heart of the City Saved from Factory Blight." A news story about the nation's first zoning code, the word blight here describes the relatively new garment factories of Manhattan.[53] The word "blight," within the context of a headline written by an editor or a journalist (rather than designer working within a professional system), could just as easily have been phrased "Saved from Factory Scourge" or "Saved from Factory Affliction," or bane, burden, woe, nuisance, eyesore, or any number of other words. While an admittedly small sampling, what these headlines show is that blight was not yet what linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson would describe as "an entity."[54] Rather, it was a non-technical word, one of many, that appears to have had a slow and organic emergence within the discourse of urban design and urban politics. Yet, its use to describe the city also suggests a *need* for such a term, some form of urban condition that merited a metaphor recalling a chronic and terminal disease of the orchard. What were such conditions, and why did those attempting to describe them reach for the word blight?

One set of definitions for those conditions can be found in the words of Edward M. Bassett, counsel to the City of New York's Zoning Committee, as quoted in a 1922 story in the *New York Times*. Although a lawyer rather than a planner, Bassett was an important figure in the history of New York planning, having written the city's pioneering 1916 zoning code, and he was then regarded as a leading expert on zoning in the United States.[55] (The same paper, on the occasion of Bassett's 80th birthday in 1943, called him "the father of zoning.")[56] In the article, Bassett sets out to construct a very specific idea of a blighted district: A "chaotic" form of urbanism that resulted from rampant and unchecked speculative construction:

> *Before the days of zoning they started almost overnight. A residence or block or bright group of small stores would be invaded by a large stable or garage, or by a junk yard, milk bottling works or fume-producing factory. The well-to-do owners would sell out and go elsewhere. The old houses and stores would be recouped by people who would let them run down. The stores would be taken for small industries and would go from bad to worse. It was almost impossible to stay the decline of a blighted district when it once got started.*[57]

In bringing order and stability to the development of the city, Bassett saw one of the primary goals of the 1916 zoning code the prevention of such blight.[58]

Bassett's definition of blight—as a mixture of land uses that lead to urban decay of all sorts—stands as an important grounding for the idea.[59] Several key characteristics emerge from Bassett's definition, characteristics that will go on to "stick" to blight's urban definition. First, blight and slum are not the same condition. The word slum was well established, and it can be safely surmised that if Bassett meant to talk about slums, he would have simply stated so. Further, and second, the specific description he gives of the process of blight setting in on a neigh-

borhood not only is not a mirror of slum conditions, rather it is a general sense of disorder and instability regarding land uses, as well as a tight mixture of land uses that are depicted as incompatible. Third, and building on this, blight is a process of decline, or perhaps more accurately a stage in such a process.[60] In a profession that remained underdeveloped, Bassett's definition was the first of many sometimes complementary, sometimes competing efforts to define an urban meaning for blight. It was also a definition that was tentative, a description more than an empirically measurable state, for the terms by which Bassett defined blight—disorder, incompatible mixing of land uses—were frequently if not explicitly subjective.

As the profession of planning developed further, so too did the definitions of blight offered by its members. In 1925, the organizers of the National Planning Conference established *City Planning*, meant to be the premier journal dedicated to the study of North American cities.[61] In a letter published in the first issue, Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce in the Coolidge administration, greeted the publication with enthusiasm. "I am a firm believer in city planning," Hoover wrote, adding that planning "is one of the first obligations which we owe to the future."[62] What, though, was the profession about which Hoover showed such enthusiasm? New York's Edward Bassett asked this explicitly about sixty pages later—following a glowing report on zoning he had penned—when he asked the question "what is city planning," followed by a series of additional questions:

> *Is there a definite field of city planning? If so, what are its boundaries?*
>
> *Does every city have a plan or only certain favored cities?*
>
> *Is city planning a branch of architecture?*
>
> *Is city planning exclusively in the domain of engineering?*
>
> *Is platting a branch of landscape architecture?*

...and so on, and so forth, to a total of twenty-four rhetorical questions, to none of which Bassett felt he could supply an answer. Bassett confessed that he had "sufficiently mixed up himself and perhaps other city planners of ordinary insight," proposing to attempt to answer such questions in future columns within the pages of the journal.[63] In short, Bassett and other planners involved with the annual American City Planning Conference hoped to use the new publication as a crucible for defining a profession, the output of which was now centered on rationalization, efficiency, and organization, but the practice of which was interdisciplinary and ill-defined.

Three pages later came this note:

> *Mr. Frank B. Williams, a member of the Board of Governors of the American City Planning Institute, is offering... a prize of $250 for the best essay on 'Blighted Districts: Their Cause and Cure'.*[64]

The contest was open only to students or recent graduates of colleges "giving instruction in city planning" from the disciplines of law, landscape architecture, engineering, "social ethics," and programs in what is now known as public administration.[65]

The winners were C. Earl Morrow and Charles Herrick, students at Harvard's Graduate School of Landscape Architecture, and their essay was published in the third issue of *City Planning*.[66] In Morrow and Herrick's essay, there are three issues at stake: What blight *is*, how it was caused, and how planners ought to address it. Their answer to the first one is starkly economic and, in a broader sense,

capitalist, in that it frames economic growth as an inherent good, and "blight" as a hindrance to that growth:

> *By a blighted district we mean one in which a normal development has been frustrated. Ordinarily property values are an index of the situation: wherever property values fail to keep pace with the increase in other similar districts in the same city, or have actually decreased, the district may be termed a blighted district.*[67]

Note that the condition of buildings is not relevant, nor the living conditions of those who live within such buildings. In their concept, "blight" is, and only is, a retardation of the property values in one portion of the city when compared to peer regions of the city, the result of which is a hindrance to "normal development." Put more simply, to Morrow and Herrick, blight is the lagging of property value. Any material decay or social decline seen in a such a district are not in themselves blight, but merely symptoms of blight. Material aspects, such as "unorganized, haphazard.... inadequate street system[s]," or "lots that are too deep or too shallow,"[68] contribute to this valuation decline.

Like Bassett, Morrow and Herrick see blight as being a stage in a process of decline, or perhaps more acutely, an impediment to its opposite, growth. "In the case of a residential area where extreme conditions of this nature obtain," they note, "there is produced the social disease which we call a "slum."[69] The implication is that blight, in turn, is a constituent part of the slum, as well as that it is possible for blight to exist in any land use, where slums can only exist in residential areas. Contradicting themselves, however, Morrow and Herrick note that in some cases, slums might actually have *higher* property values, because "a change in use of land is anticipated," thus raising the speculative value of the properties.[70] There is no social causation to Morrow and Herrick's model of blight, no consideration of the larger systems that influence the owners and occupants of such districts, such as access to education or jobs, much less tension and discrimination along ethnic and racial lines. Even the structural conditions of the buildings were irrelevant. Within a positivist ideology of growth, the market ultimately determined all.

While Morrow and Herrick's definition of blight has several weaknesses, it stands as a landmark, for it is the first significant attempt to give a precise, empirical, urban definition to the word. Before Morrow and Herrick, blight was a slap-dash concept, a loanword from horticulture that seemed an apt description of some of the problems visible in the built environment of U.S. cities; after Morrow and Herrick, blight was terminology.

Methodological antecedents: Depression-era measurements of urban conditions

The economic hardship of the Great Depression, which began with the stock market crash of 1929, added a new sense of urgency to the debate about the condition of U.S. cities. For planners, civic leaders, and others with a stake in urban real estate, the economic crisis had highlighted two problems. The first: What to do about the vast number of people who had once worked in the real estate industry, and were now unemployed? This body included not just construction workers and contractors, but also bank personnel, real estate agents, property assessors, and the like. Second: What to do about the living conditions of the urban populace, especially those in the lower third of the socioeconomic scale? Many planners and housing advocates decried the effect of "doubling up," wherein residents, seeking to reduce their rent costs, moved into

shared accommodations with others, resulting in overcrowding. Meanwhile, with less income, both home owners and landlords were ill able to afford basic repairs and maintenance, leading to a decline in overall housing quality.

Within this context, in 1932 the Architect's Club of Chicago—a social organization growing out of the Chicago chapter of the American Institute of Architects—set out to study the idea of blight as well as potential solutions to such conditions.[71] Faced with deteriorating inner-city neighborhoods, the club assembled a "Committee on Blighted Area Housing," which in turn authored a report that called for the creation of real estate trusts that would allow existing owners and tenants in such neighborhoods to pool resources and construct newer, better housing. One impetus for the report was the onset of the Great Depression. The report in several places suggests that the construction of new, modern housing would be beneficial to the nation's economy, employing demolition workers, construction workers, real estate agents, and financiers of all sorts. The establishment of land trusts, whose purpose is to clear and then rebuild neighborhoods for existing residents, was sold in the report's pages as a kind of private sector make-work program.[72] Further, because of the economy, the Chicago club suggested that the prices paid for materials and labor would be lower than at any previous period, thus representing an opportunity to be seized in the name of urban reform.[73]

Titled "Rehabilitating Blighted Areas," the Chicago club's report did not map out or inventory the city's conditions, but it did offer a working definition of blight and how it differed from slum conditions:

> *A blighted area is defined as one that has become an economic liability to the community, that is, one on which the taxes do not pay for public service. A slum is a residential area which has become a social liability to the community, that is, where economic returns from property can be had only from an improper use, dangerous or detrimental to the community.*[74]

The club's economistic definition of blight is similar to that proposed seven years before by Morrow and Herrick, but went on to differ in that equity, rather than tax burden, is the matter of concern. Put another way, if Morrow and Herrick had been concerned by taxpayer burden, the Chicago club was concerned by the return on investment. The difference is slight but important, for it places the Chicago club's starting point as squarely within the real estate industry, rather than a broader interest in either public welfare or public finance. The gravest sin of a blighted area is not that it deteriorates the living conditions of those who call it home, nor that it is a burden on taxpayers, but that it denies the ability of owners to reap "the highest and best use," a turn of phrase straight out of the real estate industry's lexicon, nor "impair profitable income."[75] The actual conditions of the building are secondary.

What may be more interesting in the club's definitions is that while Morrow and Herrick suggest that blight is a midpoint on the way to slum conditions—remember that blight, in their formulation, can lead towards the condition of slums—the Chicago club sees things differently, arguing that slums are about dangers to morals and health, and therefore may exist *independently* of blight, and that conversely an area may be blighted yet be perfectly safe and healthy. To the Chicago club, blight and slum are part of independent systems, rather than a joined spectrum.

The Chicago report walks a fine line regarding the proper response to blight, noting that in many if not all cases, rehabilitation requires the bundling of several properties into one larger one,

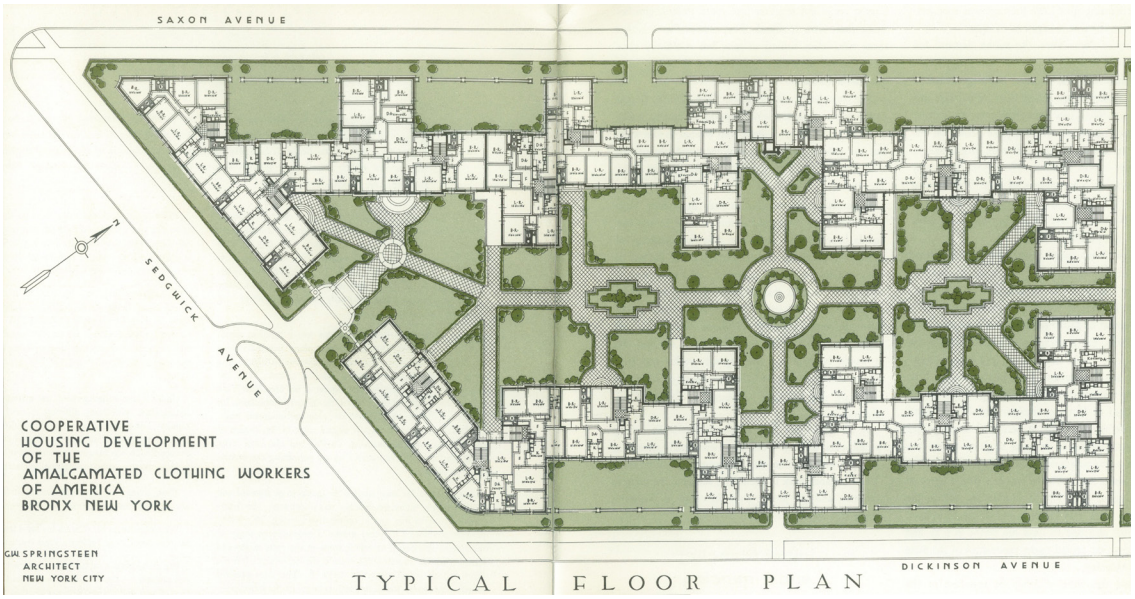


FIGURE 1-3: Plan view of the Amalgamated Garment Workers of New York housing development, built in the Bronx 1927-1930. This was one of the few social housing projects in United States prior to the Great Depression, and one of the most influential. The "houser" movement of the 1930s was born from the labor movement, and the AGWU was crucial to the formation of that coalition. Amalgamated Housing Corporation, *30 Years of Amalgamated Cooperative Housing, 1927-1957*. New York: Amalgamated Housing Corporation, 1957, 4-5.

through land assembly, yet also carefully siding with property owners and the existing tenants of a neighborhood. [76] The report argues in favor of new housing developments that will not become "a speculative profit making enterprise, nor on the other hand being a charitable venture without hopes of fair returns." Indeed, home ownership is promoted throughout, with the notion that residents who rented in a blighted district would, once it was rebuilt, have a stake in a cooperatively owned development. The model for the report's recommendations came out of the cooperatively built and owned Amalgamated Garment Workers of New York development, built first in the Bronx 1927-1930, then in the Lower East Side on Manhattan in 1930.[77] (See Figures 1-3 and 1-4.) For the Chicago Club, blight was a matter of financial formulas demonstrating obsolescence, the proper response being to reconstruct the urban fabric "for the use of the people now living in the

FIGURE 1-4: Photograph of the first Amalgamated Garment Workers of New York housing development, built in the Bronx 1927-1930. Amalgamated Housing Corporation, *30 Years of Amalgamated Cooperative Housing, 1927-1957*. New York: Amalgamated Housing Corporation, 1957, 10.

neighborhood."[78]

One aspect of blight that was underscored in the Chicago club's report was the matter of scale. Like Morrow and Herrick's 1925 analysis, as well as Edward M. Basset's comments in 1922, the Chicago report framed blight as a problem seen and best addressed at a district scale. At stake is not the individual building or tax lot, but the collection of buildings that make up an entire segment of the city. If we fold back upon the biological metaphor of blight itself, these parties were not concerned with the individual tree, but with the survival of the orchard.[79] This was part of a larger trend within planning during the 1930s, a focus on the so-called "neighborhood unit" (Figure 1-5). The concept was popularized by Clarence Perry in a 1929 essay "City Planning for Neighborhood Life," in which Perry compared neighborhoods to a biological cell, in that they contained all the necessary components of the good, urban life.[80] Like blight, this "cellular" view of the city originates in the biosciences.

While private sector organizations such as the Architects Club of Chicago were struggling to identify "blight" and craft a proper response, the federal government began to enter the debate, seeking its own data and potential solutions. As noted prior, during the 1930s, at least three urban condition surveys were conducted, each under the auspices of a different federal agency. These programs were, in roughly chronological order, the Department of Commerce's Real Property Index (RPI), the Works Progress Administration's Real Property Survey (RPS), and the risk assessment efforts of the Home Owner's Loan Corporation (HOLC). The motives and methods behind each of these efforts were different, as were the ways that the data were deployed. RPI and RPS data was generally made available to the

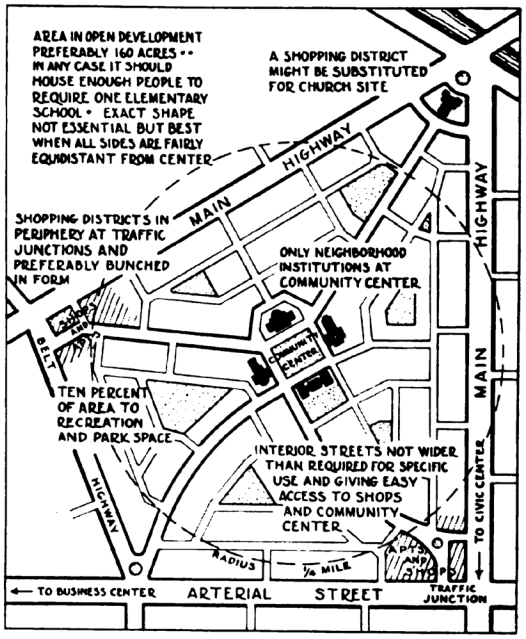


Fig. 33
Neighborhood-Unit Principles

FIGURE 1-5: The "Neighborhood Unit" as diagrammed by Clarence Perry in a report to New York planners in 1929. This diagram has been reproduced over and over again in planning literature and scholarly work. Notably, the planning group that received Perry's report included as members Edward M. Bassett, the so-called "father" of zoning in the United States, Frederic A. Delano, uncle of future president Franklin Delano Roosevelt (and future head of the New Deal era National Resources Planning Board), and C. Earl Morrow, co-author of "Blighted Districts: Their Cause and Cure." Committee on Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs, *Regional Survey of New York and its Environs: Neighborhood and Community Planning* 7, 1929, 88.

cities in which these surveys were conducted. HOLC data, on the other hand, were meant for the eyes of mortgage bankers, not the general public. In fact, HOLC surveys were largely kept secret, as the results of these surveys determined whether or not a specific property owner qualified for HOLC-backed mortgage bailouts. All three surveys, however, provide insight into the first attempts to create comprehensive methods for measuring urban conditions in the United States.

In most of these methods, the word "blight" rarely appears. It is, however, necessary to consider each of these efforts in greater detail for several reasons. First, attempts to create a systematic and empirical measurement of "blight" developed substantially in the 1930s, during the same time as these other methods for measuring urban conditions. Thus, "blight" measurement methods of the 1930s—culminating in the efforts of the American Public Health Association, discussed towards the end of this chapter—are of a piece, related impulses with related sensibilities. It is necessary to consider them as part of one larger project to measure the actual conditions of the American city. Second, these survey methods were alternative ways of documenting the same conditions as those who struggled to define and locate "blight." In some ways, these other methods can be seen as alternatives or competitors for measuring the decline of urban buildings. To know these alternative ways of viewing the city is to better know how "blight" was positioned both alongside and in opposition to them.

The first of these surveys was the RPI, conducted under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Commerce in 1933-1934. The purpose of the RPI was, as stated in an instructional pamphlet for enumerators, to "put men back to work," both directly in the form of employing personnel to compile the inventory, and

indirectly through civic improvements that might come as responses to the problems identified through the inventory process.[81] Staff for the project was hired by the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce (a subset of the Department of Commerce) and the Bureau of the Census, with approximately 10,000 enumerators employed. Most work took place in the early months of 1934, with funding from the Civil Works Administration, a predecessor agency of the Works Progress Administration. The RPI originated with the federal government, its purpose being to gather statistical data on the state of U.S. cities. As a result, the program was limited in scope, with only 64 cities included, all selected at the federal level. While the inventory included "at least one city from each state in the Union," in practice this choice left a lot out. For example, in California, the RPI was conducted in San Diego and Sacramento, but not in San Francisco or Los Angeles, while in Illinois only Decatur and Peoria were included, and in New York, only Syracuse.[82]

In an instructional pamphlet for inventory personnel, the Department of Commerce framed their project of measuring the urban problem not as an investigation of the "slums" nor of "blighted areas," but of obsolescence. The purpose of the project was to:

> *...show the extent of old and obsolete buildings, the degree to which families have doubled-up in recent years to save rent, etc. The number of vacant buildings will also be known and the extent to which residences and apartments are vacant. Information will be secured on the capacity of homes and apartments, and upon the condition of the properties, the sanitary and heating facilities, as well as many other facts.*

While these conditions are not described as "slums," among the appropriate responses was "slum clearance."[83]

The RPI was an inventory of *all* built structures, not just residential units, although far more data was included on residences than on non-residences. Additionally, some residential structures were excluded from its housing enumeration, including "hotels, clubs, rooming houses, and summer cottages... together with the persons living in such establishments," though it is unclear what logic this decision flowed from.[84] Data were collected on an enumeration sheet with 28 categorical columns, with each physical address given its own line on the sheet. Non-residential structures were only entered on the sheet as a single line with the street name, the building number, and the type, e.g. "textile factory" or "St. Mary's Hospital," to cite two examples given in the instructions. If a building contained both residential and non-residential uses, the two uses would be placed on separate lines of the sheet, with the latter following the former in order. By contrast to non-residential structures, residential buildings (or the lines on the sheet for residential portions of a building containing both stores and apartments) were recorded in greater detail, using all 32 columns. Where building of professional offices would only be recorded as a banal "office building," residential structures were divided into 11 types, from the "one family dwelling" through several multi-family housing types, row houses, and "flats over stores." It is notable that residential hotels were enumerated, alongside YMCA and YWCA hotels and other less permanent forms of housing. "Other" dwellings was a catchall category that explicitly included the new building type, the "bungalow court," which enumerators are encouraged to "treat as *one* structure, with multiple family units."[85] The remaining columns were applicable only for residential buildings. Columns 5-11 contained additional data relating to the age, condition, and amenities of the structure.[86] Columns 12-

32 contained data relating to each residential unit, including cooking and sanitation facilities, as well as the commuting habits of the unit resident.[87]

An example of the RPI's data-centric approach can be had from the survey conducted in Portland, Oregon in 1934, which declared more than 15 percent of the city's housing structures to be in "bad condition." Among the findings were that 7.3% of the city's dwelling units were crowded with "over three persons per room." More shocking were the sanitation issues:

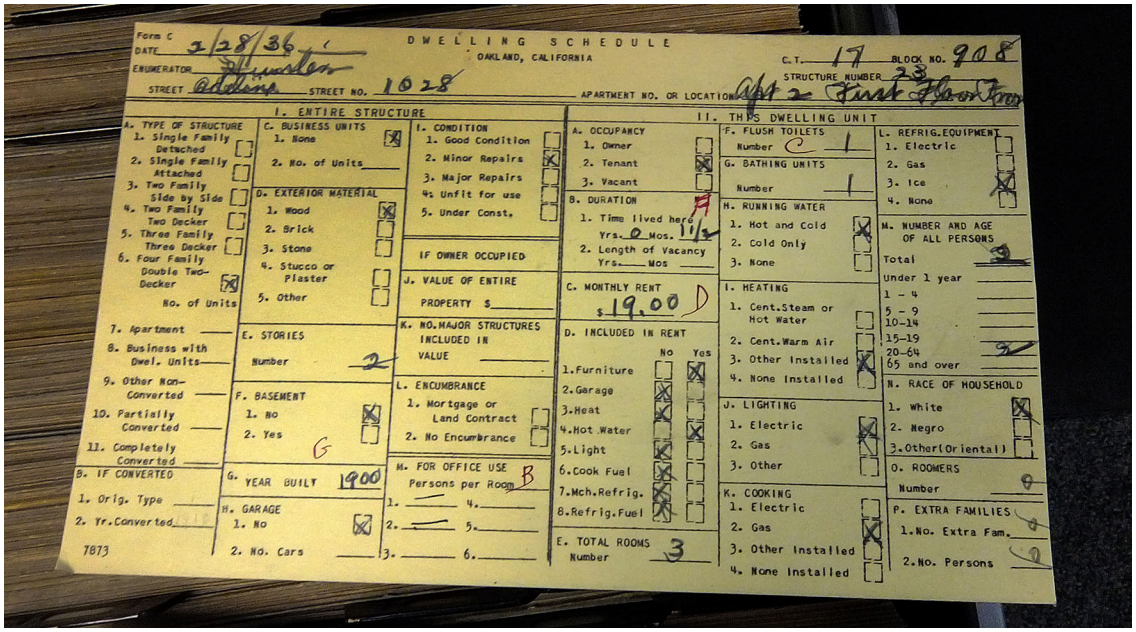
> *There were 1,081 dwelling units with no running water; 1,290 had neither gas nor electric light; 6,119 had no private indoor water closet; and 8,098 had neither bath tub nor shower.* [88]

While the RPI project thus gathered much data on housing conditions in a given city, it did not include a classification system for sorting good from bad, valid from invalid, up-to-date from obsolete. This preliminary attempt to create a comprehensive view of urban conditions is centered on data gathering, rather than analysis or the expression of an urban policy, such as declaring structures or groups of structures as slums or blighted areas.

Another federal project of the 1930s that influenced thinking about the urban problem was the Real Property Survey (RPS), a project overseen by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The purpose of the RPS was to establish a data set for major cities that mapped out the current conditions of urban housing. In addition, there is some evidence that data were sometimes collected that mapped out transportation choices made by residents, as well as changes in employment types brought on by the Great Depression.[89] RPS was, as its name implies, a kind of survey. Employed to undertake the survey were people formerly working in real estate trades such as former estate agents, brokers, developers, and the like, a class of citizens who were profoundly and negatively impacted by the 1929 crash. Their task was to walk the streets, knock on doors, and gather information about every residential unit in a city. This makes the RPS very similar to the RPI, and confusingly both were staffed with personnel via the WPA.[90] The two efforts, though overlapping in time and in some personnel, were distinctly different. The RPI had been organized around structures, with entries for all types both residential and non-residential, albeit with less detailed entries for the latter. The RPS by contrast gathered and organized data by residential unit, and did not include any information on non-residential structures. Although there is thus overlap between the efforts, the methods were discrete. Additionally, where RPI data were collected in columns on a large sheet of paper, each residential unit in the RPS was given its own file card of approximately five-by-seven inches, making data collation far more efficient. The information gathered under RPS was thus copious as well as more usable.

The City of Oakland conducted a WPA Real Property Survey in 1936, and as its cards still exist, it provides an interesting window into the project. Every residential unit—every rented room, every apartment, every single-family home—was included in the survey, although it is not clear if transient hotels were included. Survey takers collated a rich variety of data.[91] On the backs of the Oakland RPS cards, there were often further data relating to the employment of the residents of that unit. This data included where the occupant worked at that time; their "normal" or pre-Depression employment; the location of their present employer by nearest street intersection, and the mode of transportation used to commute there. In addition, type of sewage dispos-

FIGURE 1-6: Real Property Survey card from the 1936 survey of Oakland, California. A yellow card such as this exists for every residential structure in the city, with information on the primary (or sole) dwelling unit in that structure. White cards in the same format exists for every additional unit in a residential structure. Photo: Alexander Benjamin Craghead.

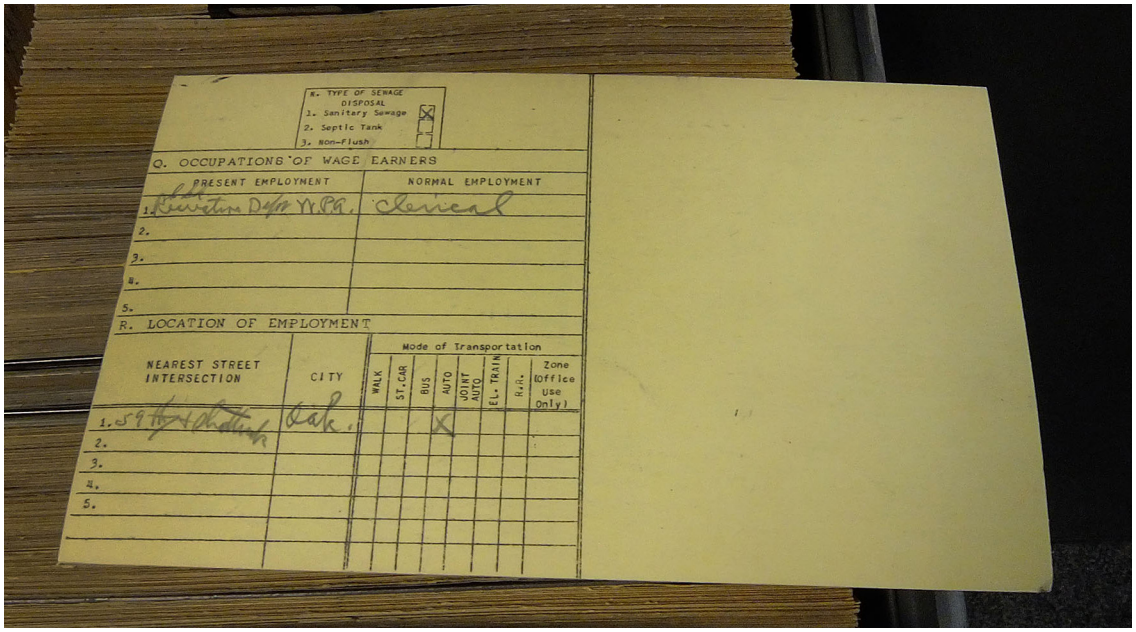


al ("sanitary sewage," "septic tank," and "non-flush") was denoted on the card backs. The cards were further color-coded to provide additional ease of access to the data, with the primary unit of a property printed on a soft yellow cardstock, and additional units (if extant) on white cardstock. As a further example of the meticulousness of these survey cards, each contains not only the physical location of the unit, but also the date the data were collected, and the name of the survey administrator. (See Figures 1-6 and 1-7.)

It's not clear how many cities engaged the WPA to undertake the RPS process. Both Oakland and San Francisco undertook the RPS, but there seems to be no evidence that the City of Portland conducted the RPS. [92] In many cases, records simply don't survive.[93] However, the RPS established a social-scientific approach to collecting data on urban conditions, creating an early model for the development of methods for the measurement of urban conditions. In its time, it was influential, even if its prominence faded in the following decades.[94] Like the RPI, the RPS does not directly engage in the rhetoric of blight, but it does provide a window into how planners, policy makers, and others interested in the conditions of American cities gave thought into how to measure urban conditions. Moreover, it is also an important precursor to formalized methods of blight identification that were developed during this decade, as we will see in later discussion of the methods created by the American Public Health Association.

The efforts of the Home Owner's Loan Corporation also deserve examination as a precursor to later blight definition and identification methods. The purpose of HOLC was to stabilize home ownership by purchasing loans in default from private banks, and the refinancing

FIGURE 1-7: Real Property Survey card from the 1936 survey of Oakland, California. The back of each RPS card—this is a yellow card, representing a primary dwelling unit—contains information about the workplace and commuting habits of a unit resident. Photo: Alexander Benjamin Craghead.



of those loans at long-term, lower interest rates.[95] HOLC also produced maps of most incorporated cities, known as "residential security maps." These maps showed a given city divided into one of four classes of economic risk, from first through fourth grades, with first being the most secure, to fourth being the least secure. The grades were graphically represented on the maps via colors, with the fourth grade (the least secure areas for investment) colored in red.[96] In short these were maps of financial risk, that showed how likely it was that a bank would be repaid if it issued a mortgage on a property in a given urban location. In practice, those owning property categorized as fourth grade on the map were thus unable to secure a HOLC loan bailout.

There is a strong correlation between urban areas coded red for fourth grade, and areas dominated by ethnic and racial minorities, especially black communities. The HOLC maps were thus tantamount to economic discrimination, primarily against people of color, and this practice became known as "red lining" due to the colors used on the map to denote fourth grade risk conditions. In Oakland, for example, historian Robert Self notes that there is a rough correlation between the fourth-grade areas identified by the HOLC in the 1930s, and "the line between the black west side and white east side" of the city.[97] (See Figure 1-8.)

As a method, the HOLC project approached the city from a block and neighborhood scale—much like the U.S. Census—and reinforced the notion that negative conditions on a few properties could invalidate the worth of entire swaths of urban fabric. Yet in some ways, the urban mapping efforts of the HOLC may have had less influence on defining the *concept* of blight than it did in actually inducing the *state* of blight. By declaring

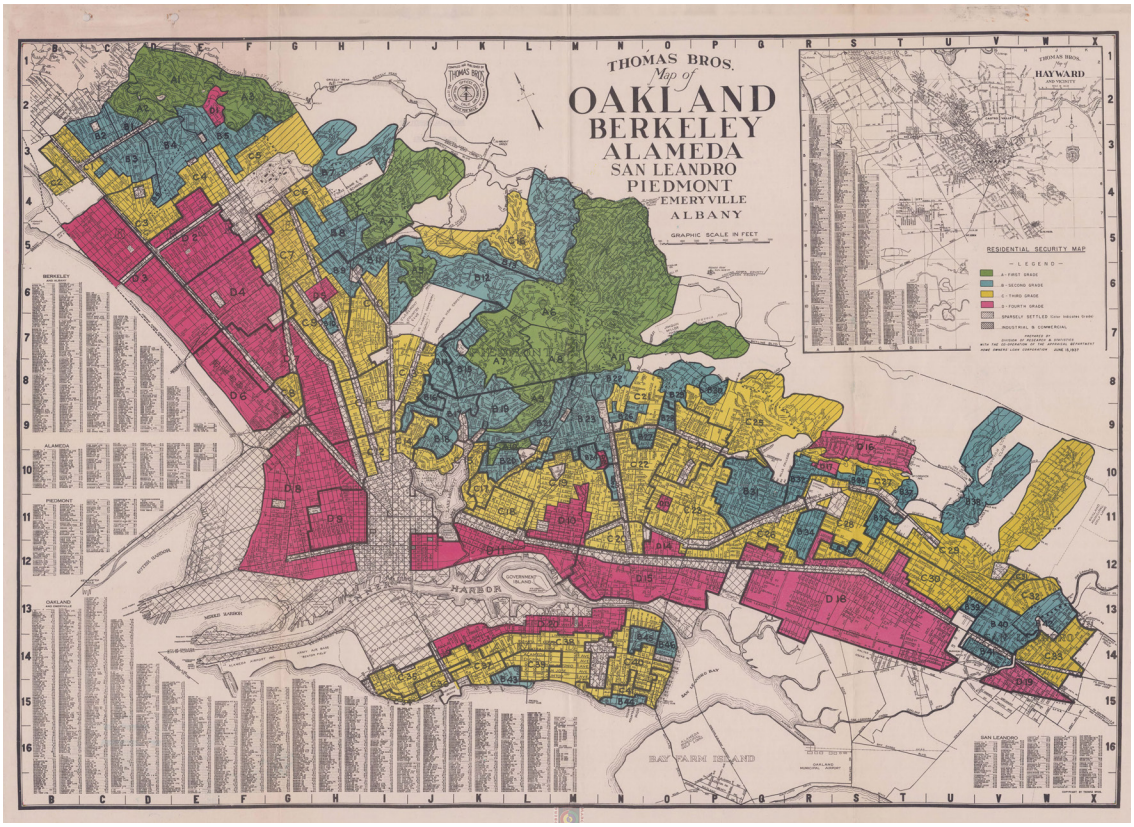


FIGURE 1-8: Residential Security Map of Oakland, California (otherwise known as a "redline" map), created by the Home Owner's Loan Corporation, June 15, 1937. Source: Testbed for the Redlining Archives of California's Exclusionary Spaces, University of Maryland.

large areas of the city substandard, HOLC also disqualified these areas from easy access to financial resources. As other scholars have related, HOLC's mapping of risk, further, was often used by other federal agencies, as well as by private lenders, as a guideline for where to issue or deny mortgages, extending the impact of HOLC's assessments decades beyond the Great Depression. This in turn limited the ability of property owners in these areas from making investments in building repairs and maintenance.[98]

The RPI, RPS, and HOLC surveys all emerged out of the social and political realm formed by the Great Depression, and were directly tied to the New Deal reforms of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. None of these efforts specifically deployed the logic of blight, but each of them forms a crucible of ideas about the nature of the urban problem. In some sense, each method was an attempt to

measure something akin to "blight," but without explicitly using the term, in that whatever blight might or might not be, the one safely established norm within the field of policy and planning was that blight was something that existed between an idealized positive urban condition, and the nadir of the slum. Of greater importance, however, is how each is an antecedent of urban condition surveys that *did* use the discourse of blight, such as that developed by the American Public Health Association from 1938-1945. These are the ancestors of blight surveys, and as such it is interesting to see how they each grapple with the real conditions of the city, attempting to measure it along empirical lines. These ideas would ultimately coalesce in an empirical model of slums and blight developed by the public health association, a model that defined blight in rational, repeatable terms.

The discourse of blight

Even while the above survey methods were developed and deployed, there were simultaneous struggles over what blight meant, and how planners and policy-makers might apply it to urban conditions. These, too, would go on to shape both the methods developed by the APHA, as well as in postwar federal legislation that would have a profound effect on the urban landscape. Housing advocate and activist Catherine Bauer, writing in her 1934 book *Modern Housing,* described blight as a space between the historical urban core, and wealthier residential areas that shift ever towards the periphery, "pushed farther and farther out: each year it moved, like an army, to new encampments. And in between the fringe and the nucleus all was chaos."[99] This "chaos" of transitioning land uses is blight:

> *...a dejected area which has lost a large part of its population and is therefore not on a paying basis (either to the owners or to the city which provides the utilities and services in return for inadequate taxes) and which offers no near hope of being turned to more intensive use.*[100]

Bauer's definition, though more spatialized than earlier claims (such as those of Morrow and Herrick) and more emotive in its phrasing, remains primarily an economic one, rooted in notions of property value, cost/benefit for municipal services, and the potential for growth. In this way, it echoes some earlier considerations of blight, such as the 1932 analysis of the Architects Club of Chicago.[101] Out of context, Bauer's views might be taken as the words of a dilettante—she had only a bachelor's degree from Vassar, and was not a trained professional in either architecture or planning, and when *Modern Housing* came out, she was just 29. However, Bauer had good connections in the world of design and city planning, many through her sometimes lover, Lewis Mumford. She became a prominent figure in planning circles after winning a 1931 contest by *Fortune* magazine for an article about German public housing developments. After the publication of *Modern Housing,* policy-makers, planners, and social reformers alike came to see Bauer as a leading figure in thinking about housing and the American city.[102] As we will see in Chapter 2, she went on to play a vitally important role in crafting federal legislation and policy relating to urban housing and, intertwined with that, the concept of "blight" itself.

Another who echoed Bauer's perspective, four years later, was Lewis Mumford, who wrote in *The Culture of Cities* (1938) that blight was the property that surrounded city centers, areas that were once upper and middle-class residential neighborhoods, but were now in decay.[103] His language is hardly charitable to those living in such spaces: "The original residential areas," he writes, "are

eaten from within, as if by termites" and the original inhabitants are "replaced by lower economic strata."[104] His definition is, however, imprecise: How does he define residents as "lower economic strata," and why is their occupation of the space adjacent to downtown a cause for concern? There's a smack of classism at play here, one that, intentionally or not, echoes that which motivated the establishment of New York's first zoning code twenty-two years before.

Of greater note is the work of Mabel Walker, a specialist in the study of taxes and tax policies working under the auspices of what was then the Harvard School of City Planning. The goal of Walker's work was to "analyze and answer... what can be done by public and private effort to reclaim these decadent districts and to prevent their future inception and contagion?" The problem of blight is thus hitched to redevelopment, with the solution—to "reclaim" and "prevent"—coming long before the problem.[105] In 1938, the same year as Mumford's *Culture of Cities* came out, Walker related the results of years of study in *Urban Blight and Slums: Economic and Legal Factors in their Origin, Reclamation, and Prevention.*

In order to address the issue of blight, Walker set out to give the word more definitive boundaries. Slums she dismisses as fairly easy to define, relying on a definition provided in the Wagner-Steagall Act of 1937:

> *The term "slum" means any area where dwellings predominate which, by reason of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement or design, lack of ventilation, light or sanitation facilities, or any combination of these factors, are detrimental to safety, health, or morals.*[106]

Walker freely admitted that the concept of blight was less easily understood. In some ways, it was a condition that seemed obvious, something already seen in the "American city," yet difficult to grasp.[107] Examining several pre-existing attempts to define blight, Walker found that deterioration—a process, not an outcome—is one of the few places of common ground. Intriguingly she dismissed arguments based on tax receipts versus costs of city services, ideas that had been in part advocated in Bauer's definitions of blight, as well as those of Herrick and Morrow in the 1920s. If the tax revenues versus cost argument were the way blight was defined, "many counties of every state and many states of the Union could be characterized as blighted."[108] Ultimately, Walker came up with her own definition:

> *Blighted areas are those sections of a community where, as a result of social, economic, or other conditions, there is a marked discrepancy between the value placed upon the property by the owner and its value for any uses to which it can be put, appropriate to the public welfare under existing circumstances. This discrepancy prevents or handicaps the improvement of the area. Old buildings are neglected and new ones are not erected and the whole section becomes stale and unprofitable. In other words, blight is a condition where it is not profitable to make or maintain improvements.*[109]

Note that Walker's idea of blight did several things at once. First, it framed it as a problem that may have social aspects, but is fundamentally about economics. Second, she included the idea of land speculation—her concept of the cause of the conditions—in her definition of their outcome, thus linking the problem with a cause.

Walker thus did not see blight as primarily a physical condition of the built environment; Like Morrow and Herrick and the Chicago club, blight is

economistic. Buildings in a blighted area might be in poor shape, but the problem wasn't their conditions per se. Rather, the problem was their damaged monetary value. Walker described the problem as municipal in scale, using the framework of the city government as the boundary as well as appropriate respondent. Walker thus proposed as a solution several actions, ranging from planning and zoning efforts, tax reforms, condemnation and assembly of land for "replanning purposes," and "government demonstration projects." Although Walker did identify land speculation as a cause of blight, she was not a radical, and took an almost conservative stance against federal subsidy, noting that it will be insufficient for more than demonstration projects and thus a solution must come from a private sector development initiative that is appropriately regulated through the auspices of municipal governance. "This writer is not one of those who feel it is necessary to overthrow the capitalistic system in order to have decent housing."[110]

At the heart of Walker's arguments are several conceptions of how and where blight is identified. Walker claimed that there were several common indicators of blight: long-term falling property values, "detrimental shifts of business or population," poor maintenance, and "substandard housing."[111] Walker further argues—citing the work of Henry Wright—that blight tends to be located "in rings surrounding the central business district," an observation not dissimilar from the conclusions of prominent planning consultant Harland Bartholomew, or for that matter the spatial aspects of the arguments put forth by both Bauer and Mumford.[112] Here, adjacent to the historical urban core with its department stores, bank headquarters, and law offices, blight was a problem that was ever-present on the doorstep of the civic elite.

Although several parties had thus struggled to define blight over nearly two decades, by the end of the 1930s, blight remained an uncertain concept. The term might mean anything from lagging property values, to an overestimation of that property's value by its owners, to changing residential demographics (as in Mumford's uncharitable commentary). Despite this lack of consensus—or perhaps even because of it—blight remained a lesser word in the discourse about American cities. "Slum" remained, by far, the most popular description of urban decay, with blight still more parts metaphor than method. Federal studies of the urban condition undertaken during this same time period, meanwhile, avoided the use of the word blight altogether. Following the publication of Walker's book, however, the rhetorical framing of blight and struggle to document and categorize the urban condition would merge under the auspices of public health, creating for the first time a definition for blight that was empirically based, a method that was stable and repeatable—or, in other words, scientific.

The American Public Health Association and scientific thinking

Arguably the first comprehensive and empirical model of "blight" was that created by the American Public Health Association. In 1937, the APHA created a special body, called the "Committee on the Hygiene of Housing," and charged it with creating "guidelines for healthy housing."[113] While initially focusing on setting standards for "healthful housing" at the level of the individual home, by the beginning of the 1940s the committee had broadened the scope and complexity of its project, with far more explicit consideration of building conditions, as well as the neighborhood and even metropolitan scale.[114] As committee secretary Allan A. Twitchell explained in a 1940 letter

to Catherine Bauer, the goal of setting standards for housing and then grading the extant fabric of the city was "providing health departments with a technique for intensive study of their worst housing areas."[115] Known officially as the "Appraisal Method for Measuring Quality of Housing"—and referred to hereafter as the "APHA method"—this method was to be written in a language that was neither "propaganda" nor technical and esoteric, so as to "have some value to non-technical housers, such as health officials members of local authorities, university students, and the like...."[116]

The APHA methods project was a direct result of three factors. First, there was a demand from public health officials in many cities for the APHA to "translate the substance of its 'Basic Principles of Healthful Housing' into a yardstick for the measurement of housing conditions," in order to guide health code enforcement. Second, the city health department in Memphis, Tennessee had successfully pioneered a new, standards-based approach to code enforcement, wherein a set of uniform minimums, combined with random inspection, supplanted an approach grounded in complaints-based inspections. If the APHA created a set of standards suitable for national application, the Memphis model would be far more easily spread.[117] The third impetus was the committee's deeply felt dissatisfaction with pre-existing methods for measuring conditions in the city, especially and specifically citing those employed by the U.S. Census, and the New Deal Real Property Inventory of 1934. The RPI methods had served as the starting point for APHA research teams, and had been "most unsatisfactory." Researchers became so dissatisfied by their trials of the RPI's "subjective determination of structural condition," that they scrapped even their own tentative homegrown proposals, and started over again from scratch.[118]

Indeed, the struggle for objectivity was central to the entire APHA methods project. Developed in conjunction first with Yale planning students,[119] then M.I.T.,[120] the goal of the method was to create

> *objective description of these conditions in terms of facilities and characteristics which can be reliably observed by different enumerators with a minimum of difference due to subjective judgement... [and] a reasonable scoring method for presentation of summary findings and for over-all comparison from structure to structure, district or perhaps from city to city.*[121]

Accurate evaluation of the extant city was contingent on reliable data. The APHA methods were based on extensive empirical fieldwork in four cities: New Haven, Waterbury, and Stamford, all in Connecticut, and the District of Columbia, although only the first three were considered significant enough to shape the development of the method.[122] To ensure greater objectivity, special care was taken to ensure that analysis only took place in the office, with dedicated analysts, "for it is believed that the enumerator should report conditions only, and should not complicate either his work or his attitudes by the assignment of ratings."[123] As a 1942 report on the development of the APHA method notes,

> *Special objective measures have been developed by the Subcommittee for two important factors which have been unsatisfactorily dealt with, or omitted, in most other housing surveys: structural deterioration and crowding together of buildings, which seriously impairs the quality of daylight....*[124]

Similarly, data collected for improved tabulation, such as rent rates and resident incomes, were intentionally excluded

from the evaluation of conditions, so as to ensure that the method would reflect the real material conditions of the built environment, rather than the subjective prejudices of those conducting the survey. All of the pilot surveys were conducted exclusively with public health inspectors, while analysis was primarily conducted by Twitchell and Anatole Solow, an M.I.T. planning student.[125]

Despite these struggles for objectivity, even with the relatively free access that public health inspectors enjoyed, APHA documents cite two problems. First, public health inspectors (or anyone else conducting the survey's field work) may lack the necessary understanding to evaluate certain characteristics. Could a health inspector identify the difference between dry rot and merely old wood? Or between old but adequate chimney brickwork, and a true firetrap? APHA researchers proposed a solution: Use easily tabulated material conditions as "index facts," or "factors which may be taken to represent the whole complex of housing conditions." As but one example,

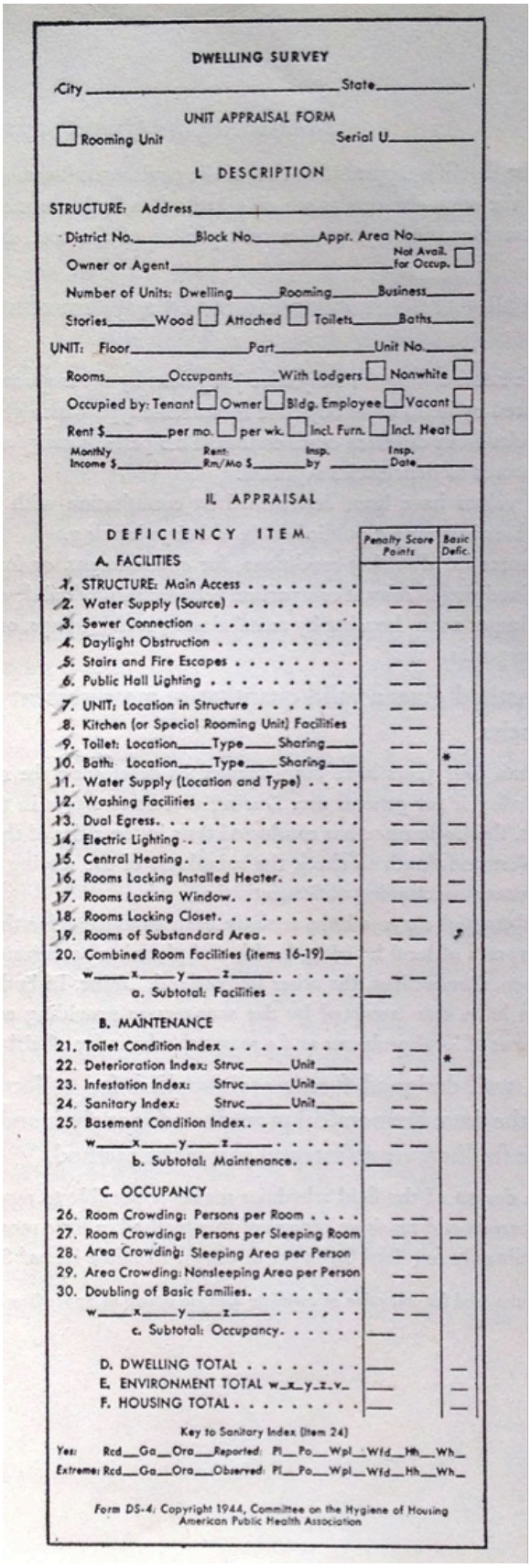
> *...the presence of an inside flush toilet not shared by other households is determined and scored not only because of an interest in whether such a facility is present, but because of its assumed intrinsic meaning is one element in an index of hygiene housing*

The heart of field tabulation was a system that Twitchell called a "penalty score," wherein specific items and conditions would, upon observation, receive a numerical value. Added together, they combined to form a representation of the entire dwelling unit or building, or if several buildings are added together and averaged, of an area of a city. To conduct the survey, an enumerator would need to physically visit a given residential unit, evaluate its characteristics, and then assign a numerical "penalty score" of 1-30 to that characteristic. As a 1945 instructional booklet puts the matter:

> *Factors of the dwelling or its environment which meet the standard receive a zero score. Penalties for individual deficiencies range from 1 point to a maximum of 30 points. For example, scores of 20 to 30 points are assigned to conditions which offer extreme and ever-present threats to health or safety.*

Scores might be gradated—for example, the lack of closets in some bedrooms might only be worth a few, single-digit penalty points.[126] Because the method had some degree of flexibility and judgment built in, the APHA noted that "appraisal of dwelling conditions is particularly suited for execution by the inspection and clerical staffs of local health or building departments." The association further recommended having planners, sanitation engineers, or housing authority staff conduct the portions of the survey relating to environmental conditions.[127] Initially there were to be three forms, known as "field schedules," on which to enumerate this data. One was to be used for evaluating residential units, another for buildings, while a third was to be developed for the block.[128] Ultimately, it appears that the first two schedules were combined together into one form, (see Figure 1-9).

Throughout the fieldwork and the subsequent analysis of that work, the APHA method concentrated on real material conditions. Very little of the APHA standards related to construction methods or architecture, and in fact forms produced for the survey do not even have a field to record the build date of a structure. Economistic conceptions of urban conditions are likewise eschewed. There is no consideration of property value, tax value, or return on investment. Only the actual living conditions of the residents are of concern.[129]



DWELLING SURVEY

City _____ State _____

UNIT APPRAISAL FORM

☐ Rooming Unit Serial U _____

I. DESCRIPTION

STRUCTURE: Address _____

District No. _____ Block No. _____ Appr. Area No. _____

Owner or Agent _____ Not Avail. for Occup. ☐

Number of Units: Dwelling _____ Rooming _____ Business _____

Stories _____ Wood ☐ Attached ☐ Toilets _____ Baths _____

UNIT: Floor _____ Part _____ Unit No. _____

Rooms _____ Occupants _____ With Lodgers ☐ Nonwhite ☐

Occupied by: Tenant ☐ Owner ☐ Bldg. Employee ☐ Vacant ☐

Rent $ _____ per mo. ☐ per wk. ☐ Incl. Furn. ☐ Incl. Heat ☐

Monthly Income $ _____ Rent: Rm/Mo $ _____ Insp. by _____ Insp. Date _____

II. APPRAISAL

DEFICIENCY ITEM	Penalty Score Points	Basic Defic.
A. FACILITIES		
1. STRUCTURE: Main Access	__ __	
2. Water Supply (Source)	__ __	__
3. Sewer Connection	__ __	__
4. Daylight Obstruction	__ __	
5. Stairs and Fire Escapes	__ __	
6. Public Hall Lighting	__ __	
7. UNIT: Location in Structure	__ __	
8. Kitchen (or Special Rooming Unit) Facilities	__ __	
9. Toilet: Location ___ Type ___ Sharing ___	__ __	__
10. Bath: Location ___ Type ___ Sharing ___	__ __	* __
11. Water Supply (Location and Type)	__ __	__
12. Washing Facilities	__ __	
13. Dual Egress	__ __	__
14. Electric Lighting	__ __	__
15. Central Heating	__ __	
16. Rooms Lacking Installed Heater	__ __	__
17. Rooms Lacking Window	__ __	__
18. Rooms Lacking Closet	__ __	
19. Rooms of Substandard Area	__ __	*
20. Combined Room Facilities (items 16-19) ___		
w ___ x ___ y ___ z ___	__ __	
a. Subtotal: Facilities	___	
B. MAINTENANCE		
21. Toilet Condition Index	__ __	
22. Deterioration Index: Struc ___ Unit ___	__ __	* __
23. Infestation Index: Struc ___ Unit ___	__ __	
24. Sanitary Index: Struc ___ Unit ___	__ __	
25. Basement Condition Index	__ __	
w ___ x ___ y ___ z ___	__ __	
b. Subtotal: Maintenance	___	
C. OCCUPANCY		
26. Room Crowding: Persons per Room	__ __	__
27. Room Crowding: Persons per Sleeping Room	__ __	__
28. Area Crowding: Sleeping Area per Person	__ __	__
29. Area Crowding: Nonsleeping Area per Person	__ __	
30. Doubling of Basic Families	__ __	
w ___ x ___ y ___ z ___	__ __	
c. Subtotal: Occupancy	___	
D. DWELLING TOTAL	___	__
E. ENVIRONMENT TOTAL w_x_y_z_v_	___	__
F. HOUSING TOTAL	___	__

Key to Sanitary Index (Item 24)

Yes: Rcd__ Ga__ Ora__ Reported: Pl__ Po__ Wpl__ Wfd__ Hh__ Wh__

Extreme: Rcd__ Ga__ Ora__ Observed: Pl__ Po__ Wpl__ Wfd__ Hh__ Wh__

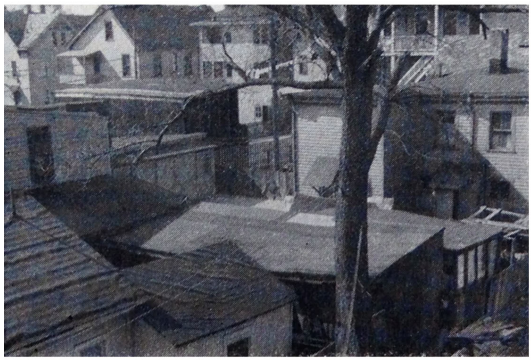
FIGURE 1-9: A sample form for evaluating residential units, from the American Public Health Association's *Appraisal Method for Measuring Quality of Housing*. Source: American Public Health Association Committee on the Hygiene of Housing, *An Appraisal Method for Measuring Quality of Housing: A Yardstick for Health Officers, Housing Officials and Planners: Part I. Nature and Use of Method.* New York: American Public Health Association, 1945, 9.

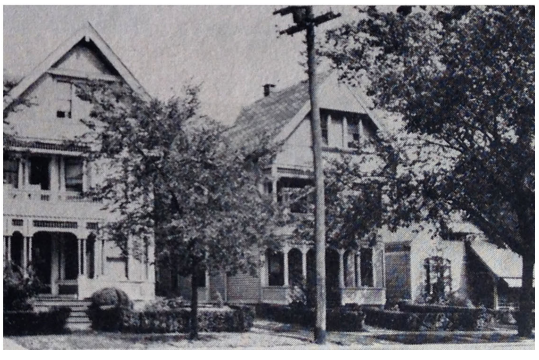
It was in the evaluation and analysis of field data that the discourse of slums and blight became prominent in the APHA method. After tabulating field data, scores were weighted, to ensure that there were not equal penalties for unequal conditions.[130] Buildings were then assigned one of five letter groups, "A" through "E."[131] In the APHA's perspective, the mid-point grade of "C" was considered to represent "mediocre housing districts in which extensive blight and obsolescence can be expected," while "grade E marks the thoroughgoing slums."[132] In turn, conditional groupings implied certain responses. To the APHA researchers, slums—which the method characterized as the absolute worst penalty scores, class "E"-- clearly called clearance, in that the conditions amounting to slums were believed to be irreparable. It was less clear, however, what the correct response was to condition "C", which the APHA characterized as synonymous with blight. As the 1942 report notes, "whether conditions that warrant compulsory demolition or compulsory vacation will be found in districts with milder deficiencies is perhaps the next question." Grade C was "undoubtedly more or less typical of the results which will be found in blighted areas or partial slums," however, their "treatment... may involve action considerably short of complete slum clearance."

Further complicating matters, the final volumes of the APHA method, published in 1945 with financing from the Milbank Foundation, included visual guides to urban conditions that in many ways ran counter to the otherwise thoroughly objective orientation of the project.[133] In this instruction book, the APHA included eight sample images representing four levels of urban condition, grades B through E (see Figure 1-10). Each were sourced from 1944 fieldwork in New Haven. As visual evidence, they prove problematic. As historian Themis Chronopoulos notes, looking at mid-century visual arguments about slums, blight, and the urban problem with a "contemporary viewpoint is unfair and ahistorical," yet "it opens questions about the inclusion of these photographs."[134] The images presented appear to reflect not stages of deterioration but of class distinction. Grade B is represented by images of stately Gilded Age homes that appear to have been built for the upper middle class, while grade E, (at the opposite end of the spectrum), is represented by images of tenements and storefronts. Decay is barely present in any of the images. One building in one of the grade E images appears to have boarded up windows. One image for grade D shows a chain link fence and a utilitarian front yard, and one image for grade C shows untidy but hardly shocking backyard clutter. These images would not evoke Dickensian horror in any era. Yet *conditions alone* are not the issue at hand. The text refers to the worst of these images as being "slum sections, with their intermixing of business and industry and their large proportion of arterial traffic streets."[135] The images were thus meant to help instruct APHA survey enumerators in recognizing an urban built form that defied contemporaneous ideas about proper urban land use. They complicate the otherwise resident-centered concerns of the APHA method, and leave it open to

FIGURE 1-10 (Next Page): Images such as these were used by the American Public Health Association to illustrate the kind of urbanism that they associated with unhealthy living. The top row was labeled as "Grade E," the worst urban condition in the APHA method. The second row is "Grade D," slightly better conditions. "Grade C" is seen in row three, and this is the grade of condition that the APHA described as blighted. "Grade B"—considered solid, with little deficiencies—is seen in the bottom row. No illustration was provided for "Grade A." These images came from a pilot project for the method undertaken in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1944. Source: American Public Health Association Committee on the Hygiene of Housing, *An Appraisal Method for Measuring Quality of Housing: A Yardstick for Health Officers, Housing Officials and Planners: Part I. Nature and Use of Method.* New York: American Public Health Association, 1945, 37-38.


LAFAYETTE





use as a tool for imposing ideologies about proper urbanity that stretch beyond public health and safety. As Chronopoulos notes, such photographs "portrayed areas that were considered discardable, and this portrayal called for their elimination."[136]

Despite this confusing counter-example, overall, the APHA method was more rigorous than anything that came before. With a focus on highly empirical procedure, it represented the first time that blight rose above scientific metaphor toward scientific quantification. While earlier methods of defining blight had sometimes linked it to specific, measurable conditions, never before had there been an exhaustive survey of urban conditions that resulted in an exclusive definition for blight. The APHA had created a grading model applicable to every condition found in the American city, and made fixed definitions that allowed for almost no rhetorical slippage. "The slum of today is no longer a hot-bed of cholera and typhus fever as it was seventy-five years ago," the APHA wrote in the foreword of its first volume, published in 1945. "It remains, however, one of the major obstacles to that physical and emotional and social vigor and efficiency and satisfaction that we conceive as the health objective of the future." One of the stated goals of the method was "answering the superstition—where it still persists—that 'there are no slums in our town.'" Since the "slum" and the merely "blighted" area could visually resemble each other, it was difficult to know if "slums" had increased or decreased by mid-century. The APHA clearly felt that the former was true, but worked to establish clarity by investing massive human capital in the creation of what it considered an "objective" method for measuring housing quality.[137] In 1943, Twitchell supplied an advance working copy of the method to Catherine Bauer, in hopes of receiving critique and input.[138] Bauer replied with compliments. "It's really a beautiful job, fascinating in formal techniques and potentially extremely useful," she wrote. "Your Committee is the only outfit that has done any really scientific thinking in the whole housing field."[139]

Urban assessments: To what end?

Throughout the development of the APHA methods, which mostly took place from 1940 to 1945 and thus overlapped the Second World War, the purpose and applicability of the standards changed in the minds of those creating them. Early letters from Twitchell, as well as early internal documents, indicate a concentration on their usefulness to public health departments and, in some cases, public housing authorities.[140] Yet, even in 1940, Twitchell had an inkling of their greater potential reach.[141] By 1942, with the outbreak of the war, the APHA's awareness of the potential applications of the method had grown. Potential benefits included the institution of comprehensive record keeping of urban conditions, "strengthening of housing regulations" as well as their enforcement, a better grasp of the low-rent housing market, and influencing "remedial schemes for districts of doubtful quality." Among these sat two additional uses, both relating to the war. The first was a concern with the "conservation of existing housing facilities in war centers," so as to maintain and improve housing for defense workers. The second, *only fifty-seven days after Pearl Harbor*—anticipated the war's end, a concern for "recommendations for public works programming" aimed at the postwar period. There was "a need to prepare in advance a scheme of public works projects for participation in post-war works programs calls for early consideration of post-war urban rehabilitation by city administrations." The APHA methods could then help planners with the "guidance of large-scale rehabilitation and housing improvement schemes."[142] The

next year, Twitchell described the APHA method as a product of "our belief that broad post-war planning objectives cannot be realized unless precise techniques are developed and put to use in the near future as tools for shaping local policy," while intended end users had broadened past public health officials to include "policy-making officials," for "applicability to the housing and planning problems which confront them."[143] As Twitchell described the project to Catherine Bauer,

> *We think this is pretty important stuff which should have been undertaken by someone in the planning field long ago... if housing is to be ready to do after the war, not still in the speech-making stage, a lot more than a handful of cities had better get started damned soon looking at their problems in some such quantitative fashion as our method makes possible.*[144]

The APHA method was remarkable, and in the postwar period it sometimes influenced how cities quantified their urban problems. However, the standards the association developed were frequently the subject of heavy simplification, and despite the APHA's high hopes for its postwar applicability, these standards were often outright ignored. Further, by the time that the method was published in 1945, to many planners, civic leaders, and urban elites, New Deal politics and concerns over housing quality seemed far less pressing. The end of the war brought new motives and new goals that often worked against the methods developed by the APHA. [145] As I will explore in the next chapter, much of the postwar era's development was driven by a new set of concerns and rhetoric within planning, that of urban redevelopment. This new concern was rooted in struggles over housing and urban policy that originated during the New Deal, but which underwent significant political and ideological struggle between the passage of the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act in 1937, and the American Housing Act of 1949. Blight—a concept finally given measurable and empirical qualities by the APHA—would go on to become a powerful concept linked intimately with redevelopment, but not in ways with which the APHA's research team would recognize—except, perhaps, with chagrin.

NOTES to CHAPTER 1

1. Attributed to an editor named "Klippart," for an 1876 publication of an address before the Potomoac Fruit-Grower's Association. In Jehu Brainerd, "Essay on Pear-Blight." (Columbus, Maryland: Nevins & Meyers, 1876), 3.

2. L.F. Henderson, "Fire Blight: A Bacterial Disease of the Pear and the Apple." *Wisconsin State Horticultural Society Bulletin No. 5.*, May 1905, 5.

3. "blight, n." Oxford English Dictionary Online. March 2014. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/20205?rskey=X-KEY85&result=1 (accessed April 05, 2014).

4. L.F. Henderson and M. B. Waite, "The Cause and Prevention of Pear Blight," *Year Book of the Department of Agriculture,* n.d., 295. http://naldc.nal.usda.gov/download/IND23334214/PDF (accessed April 04, 2014).

5. "blight, n." OED

6. "slum, n.1". *OED Online*. July 2018. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.libproxy.berkeley.edu/view/Entry/182267?rskey=Lp0i2m&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed September 13, 2018).

7. Charles A. Madison, "Preface," in Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, Dover Edition. (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), v-viii.

8. Peter Bacon Hales, "The Hidden Hand," in *Silver Cities: Photographing American Urbanization, 1839-1939.* Revised and Expanded. (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), *passim*.

9. The term "slum" appears thirty-eight times in the book's 300-odd pages. "Blight, however, appears only on page 216 (speaking of alcohol, "There is no escape from it; no hope for the boy, once its blighting grip is upon him.") and on page 261 (quoting Dr. Louis L. Seaman's description of poor asylums located on islands in Long Island sound, that "On these islands there are no flexible twigs, only gnarled, blasted, blighted trunks, insensible to moral or social influences."). Riis, Jacob A. *How the other half lives; Studies among the tenements of New York*. American Century Series AC-12. New York: Hill and Wang, 1957.

10. Riis, 216

11. *Ibid*., 261

12. Andy Shanken has suggested that there is a moralistic dimension to the use of blight/blighted in the 19th century, that Riis' words may carry a moral judgement as much as make a poetic image of the future of these children. If "blight" had acquired a meaning as a moral metaphor in 19th century U.S. culture, then perhaps this would explain why early planners went on to borrow this specific word for describing certain urban conditions. I concede this as a possibility, but to explore it further would require a significant investigation of moralistic literature of the 19th century, a research area beyond the pragmatic scope of this dissertation. This is an area worth further exploration at a later date, however, and may prove an important addition to this project.

13. The first use of the word "slum," according to the OED, dates to the 1820s, "slum, n. 1", *OED Online*. Webster's, whose dictionary was the standard American volume for generations, did not include the word slum until the 1907 addition, which it defines as "a foul back street of a city, especially one filled with a poor, dirty, degraded, and often vicious population; any low neighborhood or dark retreat." A quote from the English writer Dickens is supplied as an example. Interestingly, Webster's suggests a relationship between "slum" and "slump," the latter of which is given an etymology of Scots origin, coming from an onomatopoeia for "the dull noise of something falling into a hole, a marsh, a swamp." See "slum" and "slump," both from *Webster's International Dictionary of the English Language*. (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1907).

14. Figures taken from the Bureau International des Expositions, the international regulating body for expositions and fairs that, based in

Paris, was set up in 1928 but traces its roots to a memorandum signed by representatives of several countries—including the USA—in order to set up proper guidelines for the mounting of so-called "world's fairs." "Expo 1893 Chicago," *Bureau International des Expositions* (web site), accessed September 20, 2018, from https://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/1893-chicago

15. "The White and Black Cities," (originally published in the London *Spectator*), quoted in *The Outlook*, October 7, 1893, 650.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Hélène Valance, "Dark City, White City: Chicago World Columbian Exposition, 1893," *Caliban: The French Journal of English Studies,* 25, 2009, 433-438. See also Clinton Keeler, "The White City and the Black City: The Dream of a Civalization," *American Quarterly* 2, 2, Summer 1950, 116. Keeler pointedly suggests that the fair's "Grecian columns and Venetian lagoons" were forces "concealing the inimical dynamos within."

18. *Ibid*., 432, 435.

19. Valance notes an outpouring of "eulogistic creations" that followed the destruction of the fair's main buildings during the 1894 fire. *Ibid*., 439.

20. Such is the general thesis of Robert Wiebe's *Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1966). By contrast, Richard Hofstadter ascribes slightly different motives to the overlap of progressive politics and the rising urban professional classes, suggesting that alienation, frustration, and a fear of unassimilated immigrants were the motivation behind many progressive efforts. See Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Knopf, 1955). Regardless of the perspective, the 1890s through the advent of the First World War was a period when progressive politics, urban reform, and professionalization were on the rise. Planning is yet another example of the convergence of these trends.

21. George Kriehn, "The City Beautiful," *Municipal Affairs 3,* 1, 594-601. Kriehn's defined City Beautiful by several aesthetic concerns: Artistic street signs (and the elimination of commercial signs); municipal bridges; color in architecture (which included an advocacy of incorporating more heraldry into structures and for use as commercial trade marks); public squares and public buildings such as parks, libraries, and city halls; and finally two arguments about "how civic art pays," one in which he advances the profit potential of such art (and describes American civic leaders as a potential new Medici), and one in which the educational value—by which, Kiehn really means the hegemonic enculturation value—of the arts. *Passim.*

22. Henry De Forest Baldwin, "Municipal Problems: A Discussion of the Model Charter of the National Municipal League," *Municipal Affairs 3,* 1, 1.

23. Charles Mulford Robinson, *The Improvement of Towns and Cities: Or the Practical Basis of Civic Aesthetics.* (New York: Putnam, 1901), viii.

24. Joan Draper notes that both Burnham and Robinson were "the two best representatives of the City Beautiful point of view," noting that both had extensive careers writing about the proper role of planning, and also working as planning consultants. Joan E. Draper, "Planning the City Beautiful: An Investigation of the Idea of the Planned City Within the City Beautiful Movement with Special Reference to Daniel H. Burnham and Charles Mulford Robinson," (unpublished paper), 1969, 16.

25. Patrick Abercrombie, "International Contributions to the Study of Town Planning and Civic Organization," *The Town Planning Review 4,* 2, July 1913, 114.

26. Jane Addams, "Charity and Social Justice," originally given as an address to the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, St. Louis, Missouri, May 19, 1910. Published in *The North American Review* 192, 656, July 1910, 68-81. Quote from 77, general descriptions of urban problems *passim,* but especially pages 72-73, 76-77, and 80.

27. Tolstoy concludes that in giving away his money to the poor, he is not only not making enough of a difference, he is also reinforcing the system of serfdom that keeps the poor where they are. Count Lyof N. Tolstoi, *What to do? Thoughts evoked by the*

census of Moscow, Translated by Isabel F. Hapgood. (New York: Thomas Y Crowell & Co, 1887), 132-133.

28. "Chronicle of Passing Events," *The Town Planning Review 1,* 2, July 1910, 173.

29. The meeting was aptly named the Second National Conference on City Planning and Congestion. Among the proceedings was a successful proposal to make the conference a sustaining annual event, and rename it the American City Planning Conference. "Chronicle," 173. This meeting has become an institution of the planning profession in the United States, and it is still held today, under the name National Planning Conference, hosted by the American Planning Association.

30. Frederick Law Olmsted [Jr.], "City Planning," *Art and Progress 1,* 10, August 1910, 284-285.

31. Olmsted, 286-287. A similar complaint can be had, a year later, in *The Town Planning Review* coverage of the third conference, held in Philadelphia in 1911. Reviewing a "comparative exhibition" of city plans from the U.S. and Europe, the journal notes that "the exhibition clearly showed, most of this has been 'City Beautification'—rather an anomalous putting of the cart before the horse for practical America, but yet, anyhow, a healthful sign." George Burdett Ford, "Third American City Planning Conference," *The Town Planning Review 2*, 3, October 1911, 212.

32. Olmsted, 286-287.

33. Joan E. Draper, "Introduction," in Daniel H. Burnham, *The Final Official Report of the Director of Works of the World's Columbian Exposition.* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989), xiii. Scholars often termed the post-1910, Olmsted-led phase of planning "City Practical" due to the greater emphasis on pragmatics. For example, Robert A. Walker's *The Planning Function in Urban Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), which purports to be the first administrative history of urban planning in the United States, describes a "gradual change in planning from the outlook epitomized as the 'city beautiful' to an attitude best described as the 'city practical' ...in the decade following the publication of the *Plan of Chicago,*" the last being Burnham's 1909 plan, *Ibid,* 34. The origins of the term "city practical" are unclear and it appears that it never achieved the kind of place in the language of planning (much less the public lexicon) that City Beautiful had, although John Pipkin has found period uses of the term as early as 1910. See John S. Pipkin, "'Chasing Rainbows' in Albany: City Beautiful, City Practical 1900-1925," *Journal of Planning History* 7, No. 4, November 2008 327-353. Robert Freestone argues that the divisions between the aesthetic goals of City Beautiful and City Practical planning approaches have been exaggerated in the historiography; While a subtler shading between the two philosophies is agreeable, it must nevertheless be reiterated that the later development *was* a movement away from an aesthetics-forward approach to planning, one in which planners began to incorporate more heavily the use of empirical data and methods borrowed from the social sciences. For Freestone's critique see Robert Freestone, "Reconciling Beauty and Utility in Early City Planning: The Contribution of John Nolen," *Journal of Urban History* 37, 2, 2011, 256-277. As far as the young profession, Olmsted was furthermore a young member, being only 39 at the time of his address to the 1910 planning conference.

34. For the Brunner quote, see R.B.W., "Notes: City Planning Conference," *Art and Progress 3,* 9, July 1912, 662. For the "City Scientific," see Abercrombie, "International Contributions," *The Town Planning Review 4,* 2, July 1913, 114. Undoubtedly, another stake in this claim was the desire, by those who described themselves as planners, to portray the work of city planning as a profession, not an art, and therefore with more solid claims to authority. In the arts, beauty may be subjective, but the sciences are associated with rigor, method, fact, and absolutes—in short, with claims to objectivity.

35. Historian of public health Jason Corburn has associated the late 19th century rise of sanitation concerns with the development of what he calls the "science of the city... that included mutually constitutive relationships between science and technology, on the one hand, and political and administrative organization of the city, on the other. As Corburn notes, several principles of early planning, from the City Beautiful movement to the earliest adoptions of zoning, were rooted in public health concerns. Jason Corburn, *Towards the Healthy City: People, Places, and the Politics of Urban*

Planning (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009), 38, 44-52.

36. John Duffy, "Social Impact of Disease in the Late 19th Century," in Judith Walzer Leavitt and Ronald L. Numbers, editors, *Sickness and Health in America: Readings in the History of Medicine and Public Health.* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 418. Duffy calls this discovery of germ theory "the bacteriological revolution," and points to the rise in civic sanitation efforts throughout late 19th and early 20th century American cities, typically funded if not staffed by members of the upper classes. Such charitable societies in the era was a product of fear of contagion, and "since public health could not be separated from social conditions, the net result was an attack on the poor." The obsession with public health infected—if you will pardon the pun—every layer of reform, for Duffy adds that "nearly all social reformers, whether their concern was with infant welfare, tenement conditions, or even political reform, the elimination of sickness and disease became a major aim.
Ibid., 424-425

37. Louis Sullivan, "The tall office building artistically considered," *Lippincott's Magazine, 57,* March 1896, 403-409. The association of urban planning and sanitation efforts with Taylorism has been made by Jason Corburn, Corburn, *Towards the Healthy City,* 43-44.

38. Sonia A. Hirt, *Zoned in the USA: The Origins and Implications of American Land-Use Regulation.* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2014), 134-141.

39. Note, prior to the 1916 New York zoning ordinance, there had been earlier attempts to control the use of large areas of urban land in other cities. Typically, these took the form of covenants, which are agreements between buyers and sellers of property that restricts the use of those properties. These are not zoning, though they were attempts to go beyond the limits of traditional property ownership privatism. There were also, however, municipal ordinances that attempted similar aims, such as spatial laws preventing racial mixing in Baltimore (1910) and Louisville (1914). The latter resulted in a court challenge, *Buchanan v. Warley*, whose 1917 decision "struck down the idea of overt racial segregation via municipal law." Again, however, this was not zoning, which regulates land use, but rather ordinances relating to residency and occupancy. New York's 1916 law is generally held to be the first true application of German-style land use regulations by zone. Hirt, *Zoned in the USA,* 164.

40. As Andrew Dolkart has convincingly argued, New York's zoning laws were instituted because private interests—in this case the department store owners and operators on Fifth Avenue—desired a limit to the existing laissez-faire approach to urbanism. The previous philosophy of privatism had, in the dense confines of Manhattan Island, pushed competing uses too closely together, in this case by the construction of garment factories practically on the doorsteps of the big department stores, creating a class mixture that did not serve the marketing interests of the stores. Zoning would ensure adequate separation of the two land uses, and thus ensure the mutual benefit of the two economic interests, manufacturing on one hand, and retail sales on the other. Andrew S. Dolkart "The Fabric of New York City's Garment District: Architecture and Development in an Urban Cultural Landscape," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 18, 1 (Spring 2011), 14-42

41. For the Nolan quote, see Ford, "Third American City Planning Conference," *The Town Planning Review,* 214. The New York congestion issues are discussed in "Chronicle of Passing Events," *The Town Planning Review*, 173.

42. Forty, 33.

43. See especially definitions 1. (a) and 6., "zone, n.". OED Online. July 2018. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.libproxy.berkeley.edu/view/Entry/232990 (accessed September 21, 2018).

44. Forty, 87-101 passim.

45. The word congestion was sometimes also used, during the 1910s and 1920s, as a byword for overcrowding, as in the titular "Second National Conference on City Planning and Congestion." See "Chronicle of Passing Events," *The Town Planning Review*, 173.

46. Clarence A. Perry, "City Planning for Neighborhood Life," *Social Forces* 8, 1, 98-99, and Le

Corbusier. *The City of Tomorrow and its Planning.* Translated from the 8th French edition by Frederick Etchells. (1929. London: The Architectural Press, 1947), 246-247, caption. See also Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to be Used as the Basis of Our Machine-Age Civilization.* (1933. New York: The Orion Press, 1964), 143.

47. See John Dill Robertson, "Spanish Influenza – the Flu," *The Public Health Journal* 9, 10 (October 1918), 482-485, as well as Christina M. Stetler, "The 1918 Spanish Influenza: Three Months of Horror in Philadelphia." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 84, no. 4 (2017): 462-487, especially 462-463 and 467-469. Stetller describes how the disease reached Philadelphia via a military parade, where returning soldiers spread it to a crowd of more than 200,000. Within a week, hundreds were showing symptoms, ultimately claiming almost 13,000 fatalities.

48. See Charles N. Glaab, "The Historian and the American Urban Tradition." *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 47:1 (Autumn 1963) 12-25; Morton White and Lucia White, "The American Intellectual Versus the American City," *Daedalus* 90:1 (Winter 1961) 166-179; and Gene Wunderlich "Hues of American Agrarianism," *Agriculture and Human Values* 17:2 (June 2000) 191-197.

49. "Shall our Navy Yard Go?" *New York Times* (1857-1922); Dec 9, 1911, 12. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993) (accessed February 25, 2014).

50. Richard A. Watrous, "Discuss Ways to Pay for Beautifying Cities," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922); May 29, 1912, 6. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1990), (accessed February 25, 2014).

51. Luigi Alfieri, "Italians Feel Blight of Crowded Tenements." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922); May 3, 1914, F5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1990), (accessed February 25, 2014).

52. Another example: The journal *Art and Progress*, which had included early city planning efforts in its purview, opened its May 1910 issue with coverage of the planning conference in Rochester. Blight did not appear in this article, but the immediately trailing article was titled "Commercial Blight." Its subject was not the built environment, but the degradation of the arts through the commercialization efforts of artists. "City Planning" and "Commercial Blight," *Art and Progress 1*, 7, May 1910, 200-201.

53. "Heart of the City Saved from Factory Blight." *The New York Times Magazine*; October 22, 1916, 15. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), (accessed February 25, 2014).

54. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, 26.

55. Hirt, *Zoned in the USA*, 150-151.

56. "FATHER OF ZONING." *New York Times,* Feb 06, 1943, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), (accessed September 22, 2018).

57. "Blighted Areas Zoned Out: Many Prevented and Some Redeemed Through Zoning." *The New York Times*; December 16, 1922, RE2. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), (accessed February 25, 2014).

58. Still, if disorder and instability were the ills that city planning was supposed to resolve, there were severe limitations to the tool of zoning. First and foremost, zoning applies to construction, and is thus prospective, controlling how the city develops in the present and the future; when dealing with the cumulative development of the past, it is comparatively weaker.

59. Bassett was a public figure and a prolific speaker whose words were often reproduced in the *Times*, he consulted for many other cities. A cursory search for Bassett's name and the keyword "zoning" in the ProQuest database for the *New York Times* returns more than one-hundred entries with mentions or quotes, the vast majority of them dealing with city planning and published in the period of 1920 and 1939, formative years for both the planning profession in general, and for concepts such as zoning and blight in specific.

60. Intriguingly, in his landmark 1940 history of

the first twenty years of zoning, Bassett does not mention blight even once. Edward M. Bassett, *Zoning: The Laws, Administration, and Court Decisions During the First Twenty Years*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1940).

61. *City Planning* was billed as the official organ of the American City Planning Institute, founded 1917, itself in turn an outgrown of the American City Planning Conference series. The instate was later incorporated into the still extant American Planning Association. "A Brief History of the American Planning Association," *American Planning Association* (web site), accessed September 18, 2018 from https://www.planning.org/history/

62. Herbert Hoover to Mrs. Henry Vincent Hubbard, January 20, 1925, as printed in *City Planning 1,* 1, April 1925, 2.

63. Edward M. Bassett, "What is City Planning?", *City Planning 1,* 1, April 1925, 61.

64. "City Planning Prize Essay," *City Planning 1,* 1, April 1925, 64. The announcement includes the intriguing comment that this was the second time that Williams had sponsored such a prize—given that *City Planning* did not exist in 1924, what had become of the previous year's winning entry? The answer is unknown, but such an essay should prove equally fascinating study.

65. "City Planning Prize Essay," *City Planning*, 64.

66. The Registrar's Office at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard confirms that Cornelius Earl Morrow was a student with the Masters of Landscape Architecture program in the City Planning department during the 1920s. They were unable, however, to confirm it Charles Herrick was affiliated in any way with the university. Maria Murphy, e-mail message to the author, March 17, 2014.

67. Morrow, C. E., and C. Herrick. "Blighted Districts: Their Cause and Cure." *City Planning* 1 (1925), 160. Five years later, University of Pennsylvania economist C. Lewis Knight made a similar property-value argument for "blight": "an area is blighted when its economic development has been considerably retarded, as compared with the development of the larger area, of which the area under consideration is a part, i.e., with the development of the city as a whole." C. Louis Knight. "Blighted Areas and Their Effects upon Urban Land Utilization." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 148:1, 134.

68. Morrow and Herrick, "Blighted Districts," 161.

69. *Ibid.* 160.

70. *Ibid.* 161.

71. The Architects Club of Chicago was formed in 1925 as an offshoot of the AIA and of the Illinois Society of Architects, and later was supported by the still extant Chicago Architecture Club. Finding Aid to the Architects Club of Chicago Records, 1925-1937, Ryerson Burnham Libraries, accessed August 18, 2018 from http://digital-libraries.saic.edu/cdm/ref/collection/findingaids/id/14409

72. *Ibid.*, 20-23.

73. *Ibid.*

74. The Architects Club of Chicago, "Rehabilitating Blighted Areas: Report of the Committee on Blighted Area Housing," Chicago: Architects Club of Chicago, 1932, 9.

75. *Ibid.*, 15-17.

76. Note that the Chicago club's report uses the word "rehabilitation" generally, meaning any overall attempt to intervene and improve a blighted area. "Rehabilitation" has its own long history in relationship with cities, as well as in a more general usage, beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it is interesting to ponder its similarities with "blight," as both have biological meanings, e.g. to "rehabilitate" a drug addict, and so on. In later design discourse—especially that originating in the real estate industry in the 1940s and 1950s—rehabilitation will carry a different and very specific meaning, one not implied within the Chicago report.

77. *Ibid.*, 12-13, 21.

78. *Ibid.*, 23. Throughout the report, the tone is remarkably progressive if not liberal, despite its frequent lip service to private enterprise, noting in many cases that common ownership could transcend any number of social barriers, including

race, implying the notion that such housing cooperatives might be mixed race developments. In at least one passage, there is even indications of mixed classes being proposed, a concept that remained controversial well into the early 21st century. *Ibid.*, passim.

79. This scale of analysis fit nicely in an emerging concept within the still young profession of urban planning, the neighborhood unit. Generally attributed to planner Clarence Perry in 1929, the neighborhood unit, which historian Greg Hise later described as "a residential cell capable of building up a community life." Hise provides a very thorough and able history of the "neighborhood unit" concept, and its relation to the planning of Los Angeles, in Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 30-35; the quote given here is from a planner named Tracy Augur who presented these comments within remarks given to the 1936 Joint National Housing Conference, *Ibid.*, 31.

80. Clarence A. Perry, "City Planning for Neighborhood Life," *Social Forces* 8, 1, 98-99.

81. Most of the description given here of the Real Property Inventory was sourced from this instructional pamphlet, located in the collection of the Portland Archives and Records Center. Unfortunately, I was unable to locate any of the enumeration sheets described in the pamphlet, and the pamphlet did not contain an example of the sheet. U.S. Department of Commerce. *Real Property Inventory 1934: Instructions to Enumerators,* Form 21. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1933), ii.

82. Alanson D. Morehouse, "Real Property Inventory of 1934," in United States Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Survey of Current Business,* November 1934, 16-17.

83. U.S. Department of Commerce. *Real Property Inventory*, ii.

84 Morehouse, "Real Property Inventory,", 16-17.

85. The full list is as follows:

1. One-Family Dwelling.
2. Two-Family Dwelling (Side by Side).
3. Two-Family Dwelling (Up and Down).
4. Three-Family Dwelling (Three Decker).
5. Four-Family Apartment.
6. Row House.
7. Flats Over Stores.
8. Larger Apartment House Exclusively Residential.
9. Larger Apartment Houses Containing Nonresidential Units.
10. Hotels, Clubs, or Rooming Houses.
11. Other Dwelling Under this Category.

U.S. Department of Commerce. *Real Property Inventory 1934: Instructions,* Form 21, 5-6.

86. 1934 Real Property Inventory, conditions relating to structures are as follows. Each entry shows the column number from the inventory form, followed by its named criterion, followed by the possible entry categories:

5. Materials of Construction: Wood / Brick / Stone / Concrete or Concrete Block / Tile / Stucco / Metal / Other
6. Stories (Number): Number
7. Basement: Yes / No
8. Year Built.: In numerical year. Note: instructions call for asking the owner or occupant for this datum, and if neither is available or knows, to approximate the answer.
9. Elevators: Total number, including both freight and passenger.
10. Condition of Structure: 1-4 with 1 representing the best condition, and 4 representing the worst.
11. Garage and Car Capacity: Number of cars that can be accommodated / No

Source: *Ibid.*, 7-8.

87. 1934 Real Property Inventory, conditions relating to residential units and their residents. Each entry shows the column number from the inventory form, followed by its named criterion, followed by the possible entry categories:

12. Number of Family Unit in Order of Visitation: A numerical identification assigned to each family in a block, sequentially, e.g. 1 for the first family visited, 2 for the second, and so forth.
13. Designation of Unit: For multifamily housing, with "U" for top floor, "D" for ground floor, and "M" for middle floor if applicable. For larger structures, enumerators are encouraged to use the official unit or apartment numbers.

14. Type of Heating Apparatus: Hot air furnace / Steam or vapor / Hot water / Heating stove / Other
15. Principal Fuel: Coal / Wood / Gas / Oil / Kerosene / Other
16. Running Water: Cold / Hot & cold / None
17. Mechanical Refrigeration: Yes / No
18. Occupied by Owner, Tenant, Janitor, Manager, or Vacant: Owner / Manager / Tenant / Janitor / Vacant
19. If Occupied When Did Present Occupant Move In?: Month and Year. (If vacant, date is of last occupancy.)
20. Rooms in Addition to Bathrooms: Number. (Dinettes and Kitchenettes are counted as half a room.)
21. Persons Living Here: Number.
22. Extra Families: Number, including both unrelated occupants residing due to "doubling up" as well as related family members who would otherwise live separately, such as a married child.
23. Private Indoor Water Closets: Number.
24. Bathtubs and Separate Showers: Number.
25. Gas: Cooking / Lighting / Both cooking and lighting / None.
26. Electricity: Cooking / Lighting / Both cooking and lighting / None.
27. Present Monthly Rental: If owned, current value, and if mortgaged or if free from debt. If rented, rent rate in dollars. If vacant rental, approximate rent likely to be charged.
28. Concessions and Items Provided by Landlord: Furnishings / Janitorial services / Electricity / Gas / Water / Heat / Mechanical refrigeration / Other / Service / Garage.
29. Passenger Automobiles: Number.
30. Time Required to Get to Work: In minutes. If unemployed, marked with "NW" for "not working." If employed at home, enter a zero. If employed in odd jobs, estimate an average number of minutes.
31. Usual Mode of Transportation to Work: Walking / Automobile / Bus / Streetcar / Railway / Subway / Elevated / Other. If unemployed, marked with "NW" for "not working."
32. Vegetable Garden Last Year: Yes / No.

Source: *Ibid*., 8-10.

88. Warren Jay Vinton (United States Housing Authority), to Harry D. Freeman, (Technical Direct, City Planning Commission, City of Portland), January 27, 1938. Freeman had, sometime in late 1937, come up with the outline of a housing survey that would have enumerated dwelling types, occupancy characteristics, construction, sanitation, and economic/employment data. Freeman then sent this proposed survey outline to the United States Housing Authority for comment. Vinton responded with a cautionary letter, outlining some basic data from the RPI, and then warning against engaging in a "duplication of work."

89. The Oakland RPS cards typically show this data on their backs.

90. The RPI is associated with the WPA by Folger Johnson, who chaired the city of Portland's Joint Committee on Housing, in a memo to his committee. The memo lists all possible sources of data about the urban problem in Portland. It is not dated, but it notes that the committee would meet on January 4, 1938 to discuss these data, suggesting that the memo was drafted in late 1937. From "Housing Survey of Portland," box 8/12, Portland Archives and Records Center A2012-003.

91. Real Property Survey, structural data collected. Sourced from surviving cards of the 1936 Real Property Survey of Oakland, presently in the possession of the City of Oakland Planning Department. Each entry shows the column number from the inventory form, followed by its named criterion, followed by the possible entry categories:

ENTIRE STRUCTURE

Type of Structure: Single Family Detached / Single Family Attached / Two Family Side by Side / Two Family Two Decker / Three Family Three Decker /
Four Family Double Two-Decker, Apartment / Business with Dwelling Units / Other Non Converted / Partially Converted / Completely Converted.
If Converted: Original type, Year converted.
Business Units: None / Number of Units.
Exterior Materials : Wood / Brick / Stone / Stucco or Plaster / Other.
Stories: Number.
Basement: No / Yes.
Year Built: Year.
Garage: No / No. Cars.
Condition: Good Condition / Minor Repairs

/ Major Repairs / Unfit for use / Under Const.
If owner occupied, value of entire property: In Dollars.
If owner occupied, number of major structures included in value: Number.
If owner occupied, encumbrance: Mortgage or Land Contract / No Encumbrance.
For Office Use, Persons per room: 1-6.

THIS DWELLING UNIT
Occupancy: Owner / Tenant / Vacant
Duration: Time lived here, years and months / Length of vacancy, years and months.
Monthly rent : In Dollars.
Included in Rent:
- Furniture: No / Yes.
- Garage: No / Yes.
- Heat: No / Yes.
- Hot Water: No / Yes.
- Light: No / Yes.
- Cook Fuel: No / Yes.
- Mch. Refrig.: No / Yes.
- Refrig. Fuel: No / Yes.

Flush Toilets: Number.
Bathing units : Number.
Running water: Hot and Cold / Cold Only / None.
Heating: Cent. Steam or Hot Water / Cent. Warm Air / Other Installed / Home Installed.
Lighting: Electric / Gas / Other.
Cooking: Electric / Gas / Other Installed / None Installed.
Refrig. Equipment: Electric / Gas / Ice / Home.
Number and Age of All Persons :
- Total
- Under 1 year
- 1-4
- 5-9
- 10-14
- 15-19
- 20-64
- 65 and over

Race of Household: White / Negro / Other (Oriental).
Roomers: Number.
Extra Families: No. Extra Fam. / No. Persons

92. There is a mention in the papers of the city's Joint Committee on Housing of a "W. P. A. Survey of 1936" but there is no context or other indication of what this means. In 1937, however, the committee reports indicate that no comprehensive housing survey exists for the city. "Housing Survey of Portland." Files of the Housing Authority of Portland, City of Portland Archives & Records Center A 2012-003, box and folder 8/12. A year later, in 1938, the Portland chapter of the League of Women Voters passed a resolution calling on the city to "sponsor a Real Property Survey of this city." Portland League of Women Voters. "Proposed resolution urging a technically competent investigation of housing, or real property survey, in the city of Portland." November 20, 1938.

93. San Francisco's RPS cards are no longer held by the city and county of San Francisco, but instead are at the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley. Oakland, meanwhile, lost much of its institutional memory in the wake of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, which decimated Oakland's city offices and kicked off a round of emergency cleanup. The RPS cards themselves were tossed into a dumpster, only to be retrieved by sharp-eyed city employees who realized the value the cards held for the city's history. However, contextual documentation such as correspondence, reports, and the like seem not to exist.

94. RPS data was used in Oakland's postwar citywide assessment of blight, *Redevelopment in Oakland,* but only for its more in-depth investigation of two specific areas Clinton Park, and West Oakland. See City Planning Commission, City of Oakland. *Redevelopment in Oakland.* (Oakland, California: City of Oakland, June 1949), pages 34 and 38 respectively.

95. Gail Radford. *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 179.

96. Residential Security Map of Oakland, California (otherwise known as a "redline" map), created by the Home Owner's Loan Corporation, June 15, 1937. Source: Testbed for the Redlining Archives of California's Exclusionary Spaces, University of Maryland.

97. Robert O. Self. *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland.* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), 161.

98. In the late 1970s, the Department of Housing

and Urban Development and the University of Illinois at Chicago held a multi-day conference to investigate discriminatory housing practices. One individual testifying before the group noted that red lining led to disinvestment and deterioration, and ultimately "the area properly qualifies as blighted and urban renewal is undertaken." Department of Housing and Urban Development. *Redlining and Disinvestment as a Discriminatory Practice in Residential Mortgage Loans.* (Washington, U.S. Goernment Printing Offie, 1977), 13.

99. Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing.* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), 33-34.

100. *Ibid.*, 244.

101. Bauer went on to help draft the Wagner Steagall Housing Act of 1937, as well as work as a planning consultant for several jurisdictions after the Second World War, both of which will be discussed at length later in the dissertation. She ended her career as an academic, teaching urban planning courses at U.C. Berkeley. Bauer's archives, at the Bancroft Library, were an invaluable source for this dissertation.

102. H. Peter Oberlander, *Houser: The life and work of Catherine Bauer.* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), 9-11, 48-74, 109-124.

103. This is perhaps unsurprising given Mumford's connection with Bauer, to whom he had often played professional mentor as well as lover. Mumford, however, was a relatively established figure of a public intellectual, and his words carried additional weight, and are worth considering on their own.

104. Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938), 245.

105. Harland S. Buttenheim and Lawson Purdy, "Foreword by the Sponsors," in Mabel L. Walker, *Urban blight and slums: Economic and legal factors in their origin, reclamation, and prevention.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1938), xv-xvi.

106. Quoted in Walker, *Urban blight and slums*, 4.

107. *Ibid*, 3. The situation is similar to the later, famous pronouncement by Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart that obscenity was something he could not precisely define, yet he knew it when he saw it. Peter Lattman, "The origins of Justice Stewart's 'I know it when I see it'," "Law Blog," *The Wall Street Journal* (web site), September 27, 2007. Retrieved April 7, 2015 from http://blogs.wsj.com/law/2007/09/27/the-origins-of-justice-stewarts-i-know-it-when-i-see-it/

108. Walker, *Urban blight and slums*, 4.

109. *Ibid.*, 6.

110. *Ibid.*, 421-425.

111. *Ibid.*, 15.

112. *Ibid.*, 13. For the Bartholomew observation, see Themis Chronopoulos, "Robert Moses and the Visual Dimension of Physical Disorder," *Journal of Planning History* 13, 3, 210.

113. Russ P. Lopez, "Public Health, the APHA, and Urban Renewal," *American Journal of Public Health* 99, 9, September 2009, 1603-1605. Members of the committee, from a 1942 roster, were: Frederick J. Adams, a professor of planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; statistical sociologist and professor F. Stuart Chapin at the University of Minnesota; professional planner Earle Sumner Draper; Catholic scholar and activist Andree Emery; physician George C. Ruhland; the chairman was Rollo H. Britten. Other key figures on the committee were Allan A. Twitchell, who as secretary was the primary staff leadership for the project, and Anatole "Tony" Solow, a research assistant who entered the program under the supervision of Adams at M.I.T. From the American Public Health Association, *An Appraisal Technique for Urban Problem Areas as a Basis for Housing Policy of Local Governments: Illustrative Results from Three Test Surveys: Staff Report for the Subcommittee on Appraisal of Residential Areas.* February 2, 1942, iii. Twitchell describes Solow to Bauer as one of Adam's students and assistants in a 1940 letter, see Allan A. Twichell, Technical Secretary, APHA Committee on the Hygiene of Housing, to Catherine Bauer, April 25, 1940, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

114. By the late 1940s, the APHA was at work

on a set of standards for "occupancy standards," such as overcrowding, and the best design for individual housing units. In a letter to Bauer from the chairman of the Subcommittee on Occupancy Standards, Abner D. Silverman, Silverman notes that this is a direct follow-on of the hygiene standards, and that the latter are now the first in a series, the "Standards for Healthful Housing," which the APHA was assembling. It was as if the APHA had become enamoured of its own social scientific work, that it now considered systemizing and standardizing everything. Abner D. Silverman to Bauer, October 28, 1947, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

115. Twitchell to Bauer, April 25, 1940, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

116. *Ibid.* As the *Appraisal Technique* draft of 1942 notes, ""a method of data analysis whereby final results could readily be summarized and interpreted by local health departments and various other agencies as a guide for their policy and work." APHA, *Appraisal Technique*, 2.
117. APHA, *Appraisal Technique*, 1.

118. *Ibid.*, 14. As the report elsewhere notes, the RPI and other surveys had also proved lacking because of their staffing—both the RPI's statisticians and the U.S. Census's enumerators had only limited access to buildings, while public health inspectors enjoyed almost unlimited access. *Ibid.,* 1.

119. Twitchell to Bauer, April 25, 1940, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

120. APHA, *Appraisal Technique,* 3.

121. *Ibid.*

122. *Ibid.*, 8. There is little clarity about why the D.C. field surveys were not considered significant enough for the evaluation of the method, but race may have played a part, for this 1942 report on the development of the project notes, further on, that black families tended to have far worse housing conditions than whites, on a ratio of almost 2-to-1. While they blame this not on residents, but on those who provide such lodgings, it is a hint that the APHA found the issue of race to be a complication to the development of an objective method.

Ibid., 19.
123. *Ibid.* 7.

124. *Ibid.,* 5.

125. *Ibid.*

126. American Public Health Association Committee on the Hygiene of Housing, *An Appraisal Method for Measuring Quality of Housing: A Yardstick for Health Officers, Housing Officials and Planners: Part I. Nature and Use of Method.* New York: American Public Health Association, 1945, 13.

127. *Ibid.* 11.

128. The block schedule was, in 1940, still under development, under the auspices of Anatole Solow at M.I.T. APHA, *Appraisal Technique,* 3.

129. APHA, *An Appraisal Method*, 9. This stated, Solow expressed in a letter an interest in "the subject of reducing acquisition costs of substandard properties." Anatole Solow to Harold S. Buttenheim, May 6, 1942. This statement, however, is not typical of the APHA method, and throughout the method documents, practices and recommendations tended to lean away from the condemnation and clearance of residences, favoring instead remedial work.

130. APHA, *Appraisal Technique,* 6.

131. Early versions used only a three-level grouping system of "A" through "C," but the final version issued in 1945 contained five letter groups. *Ibid.,* 20.

132. APHA, *An Appraisal Method*, 16.

133. Alan A. Twitchell to Alexander L. Crosby, May 13, 1943, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

134. Chronopoulos, "Robert Moses," 208.

135. APHA, *An Appraisal Method,* 36-38.

136. Chronopoulos, "Robert Moses," 208.

137. APHA, *An Appraisal Method*, 1-2.

138. Allan A Twitchell to Catherine Bauer Wurster, June 7, 1943.

139. Catherine Bauer Wurster to Alan A. Twitchell, September 28, 1943.

140. APHA, *Appraisal Technique,* 2.

141. "My own prejudiced view is that we have in this technique the beginnings of something which can be extremely valuable in developing the housing interest of health department at least, and may have wider application." Twitchell to Bauer, April 25, 1940, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

142. APHA, *Appraisal Technique,* 23-25. This document was developed for and presented at the Committee on the Hygiene of Housing's thirteenth meeting, held at the Hotel Shoreham in Washington, D.C. on February 2, 1942, meaning that these forward-looking views were written even earlier, at the end of January 1942. In this regard, the APHA was radically optimistic and forward thinking about postwar planning.

143. Twitchell to Crosby, May 13, 1943, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

144. Alan A. Twitchell to Catherine Bauer Wurster, June 7, 1943, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

145. One additional potential reason for why the APHA standards were not widely adopted is their length and complexity. The methods document published in 1945 runs to 246 pages, not counting a 71-page brief introduction.

CHAPTER 2
Blighted ambitions: Public housing, redevelopment, and federal urban policy, 1937-1949

In Catherine Bauer's papers is an intriguing little typescript document, titled "Victory Dinner, Passage of the Housing Act of 1937." Nine pages long, it contains six different lyrics set to the tune of popular songs, all in praise of the passage of the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act of 1937 (hereafter the "1937 Act"), the first legislation that authorized the federal government to engage in the construction of public housing. The songs are not dated, not signed, and no further information is attached to them, but presumably they were written for a celebratory dinner in the wake of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's signing of the bill on September 1. Were they sung jubilantly, or with surprise? With confidence, or with hope? Whatever mode in which they were ultimately sung, the lyrics pithily reveal many struggles, anxieties, and losses between their otherwise self-congratulatory lines. One song's lyrics praise Senator Robert F. Wagner, representing New York, for his "three weary years" of advocacy for a housing bill, a bill that had passed "without warning." [1] (See Figure 2-1.) Wagner's previous efforts to pass a housing bill had been stymied over and over, with bills failing to gain votes or failing to get out of committee. Sometimes, the failure had originated with a lack of political commitment from the White House. At other times, opposition came from Congressmen representing the South, who saw little or no benefit from an urban spending program for a region that was largely rural. At yet other times, opposition came from lobbyists representing the conservative-leaning real estate industry, for whom the prospect of federally funded

FIGURE 2-1: Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York was a key power broker in the New Deal Congress, often sponsoring legislation desired by the Roosevelt administration. Here, Wagner was photographed on April 12, 1937, celebrating the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court to uphold one of those works of legislation, the National Labor Relations Act. The Housing Act of 1937, passed later that year, would go on to be another New Deal legislative victory guided by Wagner's office. Harris & Ewing photographic studios, Library of Congress LC-DIG-hec-22542.

home-building was unwelcome competition at the least, and a fundamental ideological threat to the power of the private sector at the worst. What had made the 1937 bill different was not so much its content as its timing. By summer of that year, the FDR administration had suffered several policy defeats, most notably the failure of its attempt to greatly enlarge the Supreme Court, and as a result they were desperate to pass something, anything, that served their reform agenda.[2] The final text of Wagner's successful housing bill, however, underwent many amendments between the senator's office and its final Congressional vote. Its scope was reduced, in part due to the budgetary concerns of the administration, and partly due to a watering-down process that was spearheaded by rural senators and representatives.[3] As the victory song titled "Dear Mr. President" went on to note, the bill had been "tidy, neat, exact / Till some Senators from the South / Started shooting off their mouth." [4]

Wagner was far from the only person singled out in the lyrics of these victory dinner songs. Numerous lawyers, planners, advocates, and activists were lauded, people collectively known as the "housers," and the pre-eminent houser of them all was Bauer herself. It was Bauer who, in 1933, took on the role of secretary for the Labor Housing Commission (LHC), an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor that was tasked with drafting national housing reform legislation. As secretary, Bauer was the de-facto leader of the LHC, organizing its activities, managing correspondence and lobbying, and travelling the country to act as the voice and face of the movement. Although many individuals drafted the legislation itself, historians tend to credit Bauer as the primary author of the 1937 Act.[5] Following the passage of the Act, Bauer went on to a career that mixed consulting work on urban planning with academic work teaching about the same subject at Harvard and the University of California at Berkeley.[6]

In the twelve years following the passage of the 1937 Act, Bauer was thus in a unique position to see the consequences of this piece of legislation. She would go on to witness its ultimate failure and betrayal. From the passage of the 1937 Act through to its replacement by new legislation in 1949, the real estate industry and its allies systematically worked to weaken federal intervention into the housing market. In addition to the standard tactic of outright opposition, the industry added a new vector of attack, cooption from the inside. The goal of the cooption method was to redirect federal intervention away from low and middle-income housing, and towards redevelopment projects that helped to bolster establishment urban real estate interests, especially those who had invested heavily in urban core properties such as office towers, department stores, and hotels. Through cooption, the industry ultimately prevailed with the passage of the American Housing Act of 1949 (hereafter the 1949 Act), legislation that used the language of housing reform to underwrite redevelopment activities that had little or nothing to do with improving housing.

Throughout all of this, the concept of blight played a central role. The 1949 Act added the condition of "blighted" as a trigger for the distribution of federal monies, but did so, crucially, without a fixed definition. Pre-existing definitions of blight, and established practices of empirically measuring it, such as those created by the American Public Health Association from 1938-1945, were not adopted within the language of the 1949 Act. Instead, quite literally, this legislation did not include either "slums" or "blight" in its section on definitions. The effect, as later chapters will show, was profound, amounting to a "blank check" to municipal levels

of governances, bolstering the interests of the real estate industry against the waning vestiges of New Deal reform emanating from the nation's capital. Without "blight," or some term much like it, such a shift in urban power would not have been possible.

To understand how "blight" became such a powerful part of federal law and policy, it is important to step back a bit and return to the mid 1930s, and the struggle to pass the nation's first public housing bill, what ultimately became the 1937 Act (from which blight was excluded). As I will show, the battle lines drawn around the 1937 Act directly produced the later, 1949 version of that legislation and lead to the adoption of "blight" as a part of federal policy.

In this chapter, I will thus lay out several stories, each of which brings us to the moment of blight's thrust into the center of federal urban policy. First, I will explain how the 1937 Act came to be, with an eye towards the struggle between housers and the real estate industry and the important but controversial inclusion of slum clearance funding within the act—and the exclusion of considerations for blighted areas. Next, I will show how these same parties struggled over the creation of new legislation to expand upon the 1937 Act. The emergent threat of a global war, followed by the entry of the United States into that war, helped to shape a new discourse of anxiety around the postwar future of American cities. From this debate, the concept of urban blight emerged as a central topic, as well as potential responses through federally-funded redevelopment. This leads to an examination of the ideological terrain of the debates that led to the passage of the 1949 Act, and then a consideration of the act itself, laying out a case for why its use of the term blight is central to understanding the birth of urban renewal in the United States. Ever present throughout it all, whether bubbling below the surface or floating to the top, was the concept of urban blight.

Before blight: Legislation, housing, and slum clearance in the New Deal

To understand the power of the word blight during the postwar era, we must first understand several struggles over federal urban policy as played out during the Great Depression. The stock market crash of October 29, 1929 was devastating, and included among the economic carnage was the real estate industry. As historian Kenneth Jackson notes, "between 1928 and 1933, the construction of residential property fell by 95 percent." During this time, the industry responded with what Jackson described as "aggressive sales campaigns" as well as advertising meant to reinforce the ideal of home ownership, along with a new tactic: Intervention by the federal government.[7]

The first legislation towards that end was the Federal Home Loan Bank Act, signed into law by President Herbert Hoover on July 22, 1932, the purpose of which was to authorize the formation of savings and loans associations which, in turn, would lower the consumer costs of financing a home.[8] This was followed by the 1933 creation, under the auspices of the Roosevelt administration, of the Home Owners Loan Corporation, a new federal entity that improved on Hoover's savings and loan scheme through the introduction of mortgages, issued directly by HOLC, that self-amortized, eliminating the dreaded end-of-loan "balloon payment."[9] HOLC also introduced the practice refinancing, wherein a new loan at a lower rate, with a longer term of repayment, or both could replace an older and less favorable loan. While this reduced the amount of potential interest income for banking institutions, it also worked to

stabilize the home market, reducing loan defaults.[10] HOLC's impact was not universal, but significant, ultimately financing approximately 40% of the nation's eligible recipients of reduced interest mortgages.[11]

Next came the National Housing Act of 1934, introduced to Congress by Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York. The main achievement of this act was the creation of the Federal Housing Administration, whose purpose was to take the stabilization efforts of HOLC and expand them throughout the home financing market. Unlike HOLC, which directly engaged in making loans, the FHA acted behind the scenes through loan insurance issued to private lending institutions. A private bank could thus lend knowing that the loan would be repaid by the federal government if not the borrower. In exchange, the FHA also set new rules that reshaped the mortgage instrument, introducing the 30-year, self-amortizing loan.[12] Such reforms, however, tended to support the real estate status quo, reinforcing the private house-building market but doing little to change the fundamentals behind the inability of many Americans to live in decent housing. The new reforms also did little to address the poor conditions of many of the nation's urban homes, which, as rental properties, did not benefit from HOLC or FHA activities.

By late 1934, political momentum began to change. Lobbying efforts made by the National Public Housing Conference (NPHC), the Labor Housing Conference (LHC), and other houser groups succeeded in convincing the Roosevelt administration to seriously consider a public housing program. Encouraged, the NPHC quickly drafted the text of a housing bill, and convinced democratic Senator Robert F. Wagner, representing New York, to introduce the bill. The process of legislation, however, is a slow one, and during the 74th Congress, Senator Wagner was busy with promoting the Social Security Act, among other legislation.[13] The NPHC's bill, once in the hands of Wagner's office, went through a series of revisions, but always retained two essential elements: Direct construction of housing by the federal government (much like what already existed under Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes' PWA Housing Division), and slum clearance (see Figure 2-2). The LHC, meanwhile, pursued its own legislative agenda by drafting a bill under the auspices of Representative Henry Ellenbogen, (Democrat, Pennsylvania), focusing on a decentralized program of local housing authorities constructing federally funded housing projects on mostly new land.

Opposing this sort of legislation were various members of the real estate industry. As the *Architectural Forum* later noted, one of the three largest roadblocks to the bill was "..a wailing clan of private interests headed by the Chamber of Commerce which clung visibly to the thesis that private initiative could solve the problem by itself." [14] Alongside the Chamber of Commerce, who represented the establishment business elite in the debate, were trade organizations representing the lumber industry, who voiced opposition out of the nakedly self-serving fear that houser architects, with their modernist aesthetic tastes, would favor materials such as steel and concrete rather than wood.[15] However, the most prominent opponent to the public housing program was the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB). With roots dating to 1908, NAREB was a national professional association for real estate agents, one purpose of which was to lobby on behalf of the real estate industry. NAREB had been a vocal opponent of earlier state public housing schemes in New York during the 1920s, and it continued that opposition in the face of the federal program of both Wagner and Ellenbogen.[16]

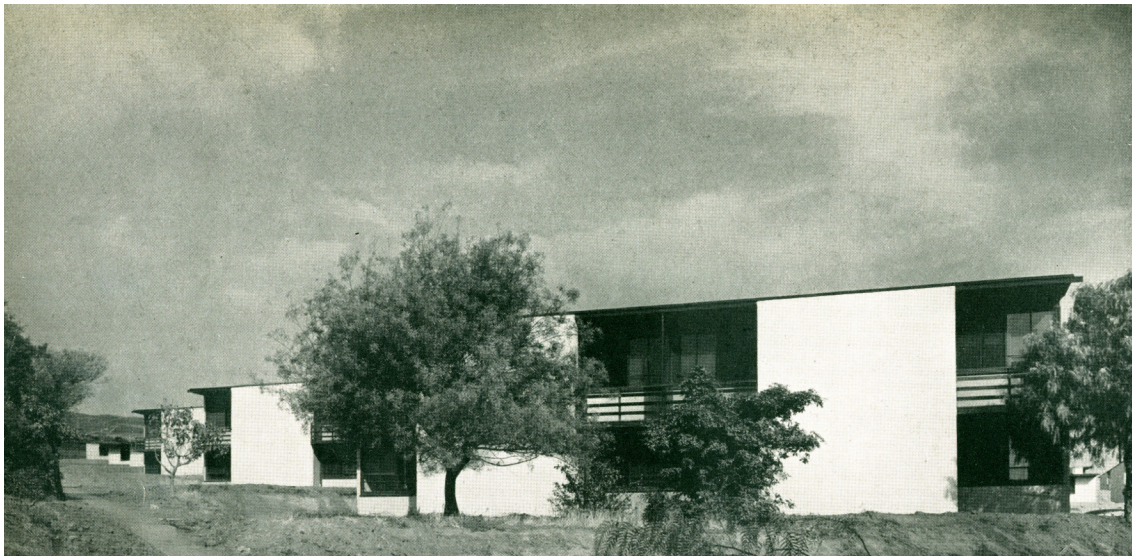


FIGURE 2-2: As part of the Roosevelt administration's response to the Great Depression, the federal government built low-cost housing under the auspices of the Public Works Administration, run by secretary Harold Ickes. PWA projects, though intended as serving budget renters, tended to be high cost projects, employing top architects and using high quality materials. One example, seen here, is Channel Heights in the San Pedro area of Los Angeles. Constructed primarily to serve port workers, Channel Heights was designed by Richard Neutra, and constructed from 1941-1942. Photo by Julius Schulmann, from W. Boesinger, *Richard Neutra: Buildings and Projects*. Zurich: Editions Girsberger, 1951.

While the real estate industry thus acted to oppose any federal public housing program through lobbying, political pressure, and publicity campaigns, the rival bills also became a field for internecine warfare among the housers. When the Wagner bill went to hearings before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor in June 1935, Catherine Bauer, leader of the Labor Housing Committee, testified before Congress not as an ally, but as a critic. Prior to her oral testimony on June 6, Bauer submitted a written statement, the contents of which were scathing towards Wagner's NPHC-derived bill. "I am in hearty agreement with the general purpose of Senator Wagner and his colleagues in framing this bill," Bauer noted, but added that "this bill is by no means broad enough." Her opening broadside was the bill's links to slum clearance:

> *In the first place, it could be interpreted as limiting the new construction to slum clearance; that is, merely replacing bad dwellings on their present sites. But this is only part of our need, and the experience of the [PWA] Housing Division has already clearly demonstrated that it is by far the hardest and slowest job to tackle.*

Slum clearance, in other words, would act as a braking force on an urban housing program. As Bauer went on to note, "a Federal housing agency must have clear authority to build on new land."[17]

Bauer had long been skeptical over the tendency of housers to link public housing schemes with slum clearance. As Bauer had noted as far back as her 1934 book, *Modern Housing*, building new housing in cleared slums would be a failed effort. [18] In her 1935 written testimony, Bauer took the opportunity to hammer home her points to Congress. In her oral testimony, Bauer doubled down on those statements, arguing that slums, while terrible, were "the sins of our fathers," while her primary concern was "our present and future sins," the "utter failure of one of our basic industries." Because the real estate industry engaged almost entirely in the construction of housing for the upper one-third of the market, this meant that middle income and low-income Americans "is permanently forced to live in handed-down dwellings, very many of them in 'run-down' or blighted neighborhoods if not in outright slums." While Bauer agreed that slums were a problem, their removal would not address their underlying cause: the inability of the real estate industry to generate enough housing construction to keep every American in a decent home, and to replace homes as they became functionally obsolete.[19]

Listing several other critiques of the Wagner bill, mostly relating to programmatic issues such as the types of entities qualifying to engage in housing construction, Bauer went on to lobby for the bill that the LHC had crafted with Rep. Ellenbogen, noting that it "frankly attacks the real problem, which is not nearly so much the existing slums as it is the incapacity of private enterprise to meet the great need for new housing in the near future."[20] Bauer's case for federal housing, as exemplified throughout her testimony, relied on the failures of the real estate industry to provide adequate housing even before the onset of the Depression, noting that the industry had mostly constructed houses for the upper 1/3rd of the market during the 1920s boom years, leaving two thirds of Americans underserved. Worse yet, Bauer argued at least ten percent of all U.S. housing, regardless of location, was so decayed as to be beyond repair, and that due to natural wear and tear at least twenty percent of all housing units would need replacement within ten years. Wagner's NPHC bill focused on urban slum clearance and thus was too limited in both scope and scale; Bauer and the LHC, with their own bill under the wing of Rep. Ellenbogen, argued that the problem was nationwide, and could only be addressed through a massive and multi-prong construction program that specifically avoided slum clearance. As Bauer noted before the Senate committee, their Ellenbogen proposal, unlike Wagner's bill, "recognizes the fact that much housing will have to be done on new land *before* large-scale economical and efficient rehabilitation will be possible" (emphasis added).[21]

Ultimately, both Wagner's NPHC-derived housing bill and Ellenbogen's LHC-derived bill died at the end of the 74th Congress, neither making it out of committee hearings to receive a full Congressional vote. Both efforts, however, were resuscitated during the 75th Congress, and the LHC's position, as articulated by Bauer during the 1935 hearings, began to gain traction with Senator Wagner's staff over the course of 1936. Leon Keyserling, one of Senator Wagner's aides, became firmly in charge of the renewed effort, typically representing the senator at meetings, and he increasingly relied on the LHC and its allies. On March 24, Keyserling arranged a meeting of several key stakeholders to review a confidential draft of the new housing bill. Invited were

representatives from Ickes' PWA, the Resettlement Administration, the National Association of Housing Officials (NAHO), the NPHC, and the LHC, as well as from the housing authorities of New York, Cleveland, and Cincinnati, and the New York State Housing Board.[22] Bauer attended to represent the LHC, while the meeting was chaired by the NAHO representative, Ernest J. Bohn, whose personal friendship Bauer had cultivated.[23] Despite the attendance of representatives of the PWA and NPHC, the ad-hoc committee's recommendations leaned heavily against a focus on direct federal slum clearance, and in favor of the positions of Bauer's LHC:

> *It was the opinion of the majority that very little leeway should be permitted for pure 'slum clearance project' (i.e. Demolition not involving rebuilding at the same time). It was felt, nevertheless, that local government might be permitted to borrow for such clearance at the going rate of interest, particularly if a construction project were going ahead at the same time on new land.*[24]

It was not a complete elimination of slum clearance from the bill, but it was a strong limitation, a step in the right direction as far as Bauer and the LHC were concerned. Public housing, not slum clearance, would be the focus, and slum clearance funding limited to loans and only available when public housing was being constructed on new land, just as Bauer had called for in her book two years before.

The 1936 draft of Wagner's bill eventually made it to a vote of the full Senate, on June 3. Its House equivalent, introduced by Ellenbogen, did not fare so well, dying in committee when Congress recessed to handle the business of the impending Fall elections.[25]

A third attempt at a housing bill began when Senator Wagner re-introduced the 1936 bill in February of 1937, despite circumstances seeming as grim as ever for its passage. Congress was in a particularly contentious mood at the start of 1937. The Roosevelt administration had rolled out a proposal to radically expand the Supreme Court, allowing the president greater control over the court. The decision angered several critics of the administration's New Deal policies, and especially Southern Democrat legislators who saw the potentially packed court as an attack on the traditions of white supremacy.[26] Meanwhile, Wagner had personally earned spite from Southern Democrats by sponsoring an anti-lynching bill.[27] Atop this, the Southern Congressional voting block was largely rural, and saw little in the way of tangible benefits to their constituents. The Wagner bill had no "pork" for these politicians to bring home.[28] As 1937 opened, then, the administration and its allies such as Wagner were in a weak position, especially with the democratic members of Congress from the South, who, as historian Ira Katznelson has argued, formed a loose voting block that was often crucial to the passage of New Deal reforms.[29]

Both the supreme court expansion and the antilynching bill went down to defeat later in the year, but in an ironic twist these defeats helped the housing bill by leaving the administration without a significant policy win. Starved of successful reforms, the Roosevelt administration finally came around to supporting Wagner's bill in full force, bringing tremendous influence to bear upon the deliberations in Congress.[30] The influence of the administration ultimately helped to push the bill through to adoption by Congress, with the president signing on September 1st. Commenting on the fate of the bill, the *Architectural Forum* noted success had come because "the President was appeased" (through amendments that had limited the costs of the bill), that "the ru-

ral Congressmen were partially appeased," but noted dryly that "the Chamber of Commerce was never pleased." [31]

What the magazine did not note was how much room there was for displeasure among the housers, as well. The bill had undergone significant amendments and compromises, all of which came at the expense of the housers and their high-minded ideals. In Senator Wagner's 1936 bill, "no assistance" was "provided for pure clearance projects," nor for greenfield (new site) construction of housing. Despite this, the bill that passed in 1937 specifically *advocated* clearance, as if the removal of old housing was the first task, and its construction second.[32] The mechanism for this was the "equivalent elimination" clause. This portion of the 1937 Act specifically forbade local authorities from constructing housing

> *unless the project includes the elimination by demolition, condemnation, and effective closing, or the compulsory repair or improvement of unsafe or unsanitary dwellings... substantially equal in number to the number of newly constructed dwellings provided by the project...*[33]

The only exception was, as advocated by the LHC in 1936, a provision allowing local authorities to postpone slum clearance activities when conditions of overcrowding existed, and because the immediate elimination of any housing units (no matter how substandard) would exacerbate such problems.[34]

The equivalent elimination clause thus directly linked the construction of public housing with the elimination of extant substandard housing, which is to say slum clearance. As a result, the 1937 Act also included within its language a definition for the slum:

> *The term "slum" means any area where dwellings predominate which, by reason of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement or design, lack of ventilation, light or sanitation facilities, or any combination of these factors, are detrimental to safety, health, or morals.*

It is not quite clear *whose* safety, health, or morals are of concern here, but it is notable that the 1937 Act's definition of slums includes no explicitly economic component. There is no mention of tax values, or concerns for the provision of city services outweighing tax income. Appreciation or depreciation are absent. In short, the definition of slum offered here is distinctively about residential character and the qualities of the built environment. Consideration of "blight" or any of its related problems, by any definition then in currency, is absent.

Equivalent elimination was also a double bind for the housers and their opponents in the real estate industry. The 1937 Act directly linked the construction of public housing with slum clearance, much to the dismay of the housers (see Figure 2-3). This made it possible for the real estate industry (via political influence with local government) to excise slums because they were in the way of redevelopment. Yet, the equivalent elimination clause also had significant drawbacks for the real estate industry. First, any land cleared had to be primarily residential in nature, thus reducing the supply of land available for redevelopment. (Areas dominated by commercial uses were not available for clearance.) As residents might vote, while buildings do not, the political consequences of clearance were thus uncertain.[35] Beyond this, cities were required to build an equivalent number of new, subsidized, low-income housing units, if not directly on the cleared lands then elsewhere in a city, thus forcing the real estate industry to accept subsidized, socialized housing in order to engage in

FIGURE 2-3: The Housing Act of 1937 had linked the construction of new public housing to the demolition of slums, a double-bind that restricted the utility of federally-funded housing programs for both "houser" activists as well as those in the private real estate industry that typically opposed them. Lester Beall, artist, "Cross out slums," poster for the United States Housing Authority. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941. Library of Congress LC-USZC4-2680.

federally-funded clearance.

The end-result was a federal housing program that adequately served neither the interests of the housers nor those of the real estate industry. The *Architectural Forum* called the 1937 Act "portentous but not yet important," a program that housed an insufficient number of people and that compromised its economics with its slum clearance requirements, but also "the day when public housing was recognized as a permanent national duty."[36] Including slum clearance had robbed the 1937 Act of its clarity of purpose. However, for those in the real estate industry who had so long feared and abhorred public housing, the slum clearance provision was not merely the containment of a dangerous rival, but also the seed of an opportunity. For the first time, the federal government was in the position of financier to large-scale urban intervention. Under the 1937 Act, this intervention was limited to slum clearance and the construction of public housing. As the nation turned towards a defense mindset, however, we will see how the real estate industry began to construct narratives about the American city that would supplant federal support of public housing with support for a broader idea of urban redevelopment, and supplant the specificity of the slum with a more loosely defined and more easily applicable idea of blight.

From housing to redevelopment: The war, blight, and the real estate industry

While the 1937 Act had explicitly linked public housing with slum clearance, Congress had not included any provision of the new law to address blighted areas. As noted in the previous chapter, in the late 1930s blight was still an amorphous concept, something sensed by several observers of the American city, but not strongly

defined. The slum, being the ultimate nadir of physical urban conditions (as well as, to some commenters, moral ones), was relatively easy to define. "Blight," on the other hand, was nebulous, something that existed in the eye of the beholder.

Simultaneous with the process of passing the 1937 Act through Congress, the American Public Health Association continued its development of housing survey standards, efforts that would eventually create a potentially stable idea of what "blight" was, and in turn legitimize the concept as terminology rather than loose aspersion. To put it another way, before the APHA's efforts (which began with the first public draft of survey standards in 1940) to call someplace "blighted" was equivalent to calling someplace a "dump;" descriptive, easily understood, even visceral to be sure, but grounded in subjective opinions rather than facts. After the APHA, "blight" was a term describing a condition with measurable qualities, a term that belonged to planners, architects, and social scientists.

At the same time, members of the real estate industry began to see blight as a problem far broader in scale and therefore far worse than the slum. As the 1940s unfolded, members of that industry began more and more to regard the problem of blight as central to the future of the commercial American city. A key element of this shift came from the onset of a new and more existential threat: The possibility of a new world war. The 1930s had been a litany of dangerous armed conflicts, and despite attempts by many U.S. politicians to keep the country out of another war, by the early 1940s such involvement began to seem unavoidable. With this realization came a vast effort, led by the FDR administration, to build up the nation's military might and, in the process, begin an industrial boom. As noted by historian Ira Katznelson, "a remarkable national consensus developed among political leaders and the mass populace to build American strength."[37] This was a defense mindset, and as it set in, opposition to government intervention in traditionally private sector industries (such as housing) began to wane.

The reason was pragmatic: Rapid industrial buildup of defense materials (both for Lend-Lease and for national defense) meant not only burgeoning factories, but also burgeoning numbers of factory workers with insufficient housing. In October 1940, Congress passed a joint resolution (sometimes referred to as the Lanham Act, after sponsor, House Representative Fritz G. Lanham, a Democrat representing Texas) that provided $150 million for the immediate construction of housing specifically for defense industry workers (see Figure 2-4). (A bill the previous month had already allocated money for military personnel.) The money wasn't enough, and by Spring 1941 the FDR administration asked for additional funds from Congress, upping the total to $225 million.[38] Congress complied in May. By August, with financing from both the 1940 and 1941 Congressional appropriations, the U.S. Housing Authority was backing more than 101 projects, or approximately 31,000 units in cities across the nation.[39] Communities that did not create war housing fast enough risked losing defense industries to places with better housing and greater cooperation with the USHA.[40]

Preparation for defense had changed much of the domestic landscape. It brought increased employment and with it improved economic conditions, as well bolstering support among the real estate industry for the public construction of housing (as seen with the Lanham Act). For planners, housers, and the real estate industry, however, the impending war brought anxiety alongside opportunity.

FIGURE 2-4: Defense housing constructed under the Lanham Act and its many reauthorizations tended to be simple and spartan, more akin to a motel than an apartment, with central shared facilities such as laundries and childcare. They were also meant to be temporary, and thus did not pose a serious threat to the peacetime private-sector real estate industry, whenever that returned. Guilds Lake Courts housing units, 1942, Portland Archives A2001-025.265.

Assuming that the Allied forces prevailed, what would come after? Would the postwar world be a return to the limp status quo of the Depression years? How would economic boom-times be continued if the demand for war material simply dried up? And what would become of the U.S. city, after the tremendous strain of rapid war production and overcrowding with war workers eased? In 1941, even before open participation in the war underway for the United States, those with an interest in the future of housing and cities were openly discussing a postwar world. As Catherine Bauer noted in a September 1941 letter to a fellow houser,

> *What could be done in the 'next six years' does not seem to me to be the point any longer–but rather, what we could definitely plan to do in the period following the end of the war…to combat unemployment and maintain prosperity.*[41]

Where planners had not devised a solution to the newly solidifying problem of blight, the real estate industry had: redevelopment. The Urban Land Institute (ULI), founded in 1940, emerged from NAREB, with the latter's executive secretary, Herbert Nelson, playing a leading role in the ULI's creation.[42] On the eve of World War Two, ULI's officers and

trustees read as a mixture of American industrialists and the real estate industry's high-finance wing. Members included representatives from Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass, and Proctor and Gamble, Chicago Title and Trust, New York's Title Guarantee and Trust, and Philadelphia's First Mortgage Corporation, and the trustee of the Marshall Field estate. Also serving were Walter R. MacCormack, dean of the M.I.T. School of Architecture, as well as representatives from the University of Chicago, the American Transit Association, and the FDR administration's National Resources Planning Board. An early prospectus for the ULI, probably produced in 1940, describes the institute as "organized to study trends affecting real property and to advance research and education in replanning and rebuilding cities." This the ULI directly linked with the problem of decentralization and blight:

> *Those who can are leaving the cities to such an extent that the growth of the suburbs in the past decade has been phenomenal. This attempt to escape the problems of the city has only intensified them. Today blight is a creeping sickness that every type of city must combat.*[43]

To attempt to address the problem, the ULI undertook a large-scale research project in twelve U.S. cities, the largest of which was New York, and the smallest Des Moines, Iowa. (Des Moines was also the furthest west city in the institute's project.) For each city, the ULI conducted studies "not primarily to describe existing conditions, but to serve as a basis for practical and attainable proposals for remedial action." In the words of Charles T. Stewart, the ULI's administrative secretary, the ULI hoped that its reports would "assist local and private groups in assuming some degree of leadership now in replanning for the accelerated public and private building that may be expected as an aftermath of the defense program."[44]

Similar language, along with similar advocacy for a redevelopment scheme, came from NAREB, representing real estate brokers. In the early 1940s, NAREB convened a "Committee on Housing and Blighted Areas," which concluded in late 1941 that the only way to solve blight was to re-plan cities "on a realistic basis, discounting optimism as to future city growth" and accommodating new forms of commerce, traffic, and living. To effect such changes, NAREB advocated for a new class of local institution, "a land planning commission having the power to purchase land and exercise the power of eminent domain… for replanning and rebuilding." Such an organization would then turn over its lands to private builders—in other words, to the real estate industry—for actual construction, albeit with FHA-backed low-interest loans to finance the whole operation. "Until this is done," NAREB warned, "the flight from cities by those who can escape will continue."[45]

The Roosevelt administration increasingly tended to agree with the ULI, NAREB, and other leaders of the real estate industry. Even as early as 1937, the National Resource Planning Board, an effort headed up by the president's cousin, the architect Frederick A. Delano, began issuing studies on the conditions of the nation's cities, with recommendations for rebuilding them on a grand scale. To undertake such work, it would be necessary for the federal government to intervene, for no other entity was in a position to acquire urban property on the scale needed. By 1941, NRPB's studies of the topic yielded a report titled "Public Land Acquisition as a National Land-Use Program," calling for the federal government to finance the clearance of urban lands as a means to combat what it called "blight."[46] Later that same year, the Federal Housing Administration joined in this chorus, issuing *A Handbook on Urban Redevelopment for Cities in the United States*.

This handbook served to outline several aspects of the problems of decentralization and blight, and propose several potential solutions, some of which might translate into state and federal policy. In this sense, the handbook signaled the administration's willingness to entertain new policies and new legislative proposals centering on urban redevelopment.[47]

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor and the official entry of the U.S. into the war, the housers began to chew over this problem in earnest. In January 1942, just a little over a month after the attack, the United States Housing Authority held a meeting at the Clift Hotel in San Francisco, the point of which was to begin postwar planning. In addition to federal officials from the USHA, representatives of local housing authorities attended. As ever, Catherine Bauer was there, representing yet another planning advocacy group in which she was active, in this case the California Housing and Planning Association, of which she was then secretary. Her statement captures the mood of the moment aptly. Titled "Post-war housing can save the West," Bauer argued that the country needed housing "more than almost any other major commodity," adding that the construction of housing on a large scale was also "one of the best methods of creating wide-spread, and spreading, employment."[48]

The problem was an acute one, generated by the war, and likely to entirely reshape the postwar world. Bauer noted that four regions—Southern California, the Bay Area, Portland, and Seattle—were "changing the whole economic base of the West Coast, almost overnight," leading to an urban population boom without precedent.[49] What came after was of great concern. Where would defense workers go, once the war ended? If they stayed, where would they live over the long term, once the hardship of war was no longer present and the tolerance for substandard temporary living conditions dried up? And what jobs would they work at, what would war production plants make in the peacetime economy?[50] Bauer encouraged the USHA to pursue every possible angle for handling these new west coast residents, from resettlement in new communities in California's Central Valley, to the establishment and enforcement of strict building codes, to the construction of new urban housing. On the policy level, Bauer argued for several changes to the 1937 Act, all of which were liberalizing in character:

To admit one-person families.

To admit non-citizens, particularly Mexicans.

To develop special means for redevelopment of expensive slum sites.

To meet the problem of farm and shack-town home-owners.

To meet the needs of those who require little or no subsidy, but nevertheless cannot be rehoused by ordinary private enterprise.

Relaxation of 'equivalent elimination' provisions in rapidly growing towns and areas of new settlement[51]

The last item on Bauer's list is particularly interesting. The equivalent elimination clause that Congress had attached to the 1937 Act had, in effect, limited the scope of potential action for public housing authorities. To construct new units, extant substandard units had to be removed, and although the law allowed for delays in such action, the debt ultimately had to be repaid. This meant, first, that housing authorities could change the nature of the housing units in a city, but not the total number, with aggregate growth coming only from private sector construction.

Second, it meant that housing authorities in younger cities, whose structures might be in relatively good shape, had fewer eligible units for elimination and thus fewer units to construct. If public housing was meant only to assist in enforcing housing standards, this was a fine solution, but for Bauer and many other housers, the concept underlying public housing went further. These authorities were meant, in their view, to correct for the many deficiencies of the real estate industry, and the construction of new units was a critical power that housing authorities would need in order to accommodate wartime and postwar population growth in the West.

While Bauer pushed for an increased postwar role for public housing, the real estate industry was busy with its own initiative: To shape a postwar program of urban redevelopment centered on the concept of "blight." Suburbanization was taking its toll. "The problem of decentralization," as the Urban Land Institute described it, was happening "at an overrapid rate." Downtown businesses were losing revenue, and the ULI concluded that "the causes... may lie in the decay of residential areas whose former residents have moved further out." The result was "urban instability."[52] For anyone who owned urban core properties, the decentralization trend was a painful one, destroying land values. Certainly, most white-collar office jobs remained in the city center, but with a ring of decay around the downtown how long before those jobs also decamped for the edge? And if so, what would that do to their investments in the formerly expensive and valuable downtown properties? Such properties were often occupied by banks, large insurance companies, law firms, and department stores, the leaders of which tended to be among the most elite of the real estate industry and, in parallel, leaders in urban political life.

The term "blight" gave these members of the real estate industry a word by which to call the process threatening their investments, and better still it was a term that had been given birth by the planning profession, thus giving social cover to their self-interested concerns. Legitimation of the term was bolstered further when the American Society of Planning Officials held its "Conference on Planning Problems" on February 13-14, 1941, at Chicago's Shoreland Hotel. A "discussion conference," the event could be seen as a kind of open conversation or debate in which officials from planning agencies across the nation could chew over the problems of the day. The official program called for just two subjects: defense planning, and urban rehabilitation, which it termed as the "rehabilitation of blighted urban areas."[53] Several planning officials in attendance did their best to define "the symptoms of blight," as a correspondent of the St. Louis Post Dispatch later called it. Against the background of the APHA's efforts, there was significant consistency around the definition of blight, but less so on what to do about it. While these planners were "earnestly seeking a solution," the Post-Dispatch writer notes, "no magic formula yet has been found."[54]

Increasingly, the issue of "blight" came before Congress. While debating extension of the Lanham Act's defense housing program during 1942, NAREB executive Herbert Nelson advocated for federal intervention in the American city. The exchange between Nelson and Elbert D. Thomas (Democrat, Utah), chairman of the Senate Committee on Education and Labor, is illustrative of how the real estate industry was shifting its position from opposition to federal intervention towards a cooption of such intervention for purposes that supported entrenched property interests. It is worth quoting at length:

Mr. NELSON. The new technologies, modes of personal transportation, and habits of living, require that probably, as the first great post-war emergency program, we undertake to replan and rebuild a large part of most of our cities.

The CHAIRMAN. Has your organization seen the possibility of going right into a bit of social dynamic study and doing something for the world?

Mr. NELSON. We have such a program; we have set it up under what we call the Urban Land Institute, and we hope to bring to the Congress soon legislation which would, in the first place, enable the Federal Government to assist, with grants, local communities to make a master plan for replanning the city now.

The CHAIRMAN. Grants, money from the Public Treasury?

Mr. NELSON. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Won't that be a sort of public sponsored institution?

Mr. NELSON. It must be, because planning of that type is necessarily a public function.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, then, you are not opposed to public function as such?

Mr. NELSON. No, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Even in housing?

Mr. NELSON. No, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. As long as it is done in conformity with the idea of the real estate organization?

Mr. NELSON. No; I think that it is possible to have a fruitful partnership between Government and private enterprise in this field. [55]

This was nothing short of a sea-change in the attitudes of NAREB and the real estate industry in general. Throughout the mid- 1930s, NAREB had been at the forefront of opposition to the public housing bill advanced by the Labor Housing Conference under the auspices of Senator Wagner. Less than eight years later, NAREB was advocating for a scheme of federal intervention even larger in scale and scope. This was classic interest politics—a redevelopment program would benefit the real estate industry in ways that a pure public housing program would not have—but it also showed that NAREB's positions were dictated as much by pragmatics as by ideology. The key justification of such an intervention came in the threat of blight. As Senator Thomas noted himself, "I think that our cities have grown up in such a way that we are sorry they have grown up.... if we hang on tenaciously to that which is bad just because we did it, what chance is there for future generations?"[56] Congress was, in Senator Thomas's view, ready for proposals of cooperation between the real estate industry and the federal government in replanning America's cities and, in the process, eliminating blight.

NAREB continued to advocate for redevelopment action by the federal government, proposing a program of government-authorized and funded land acquisition—including, even, acts of forceful condemnation—"designed to buy up large blighted areas... for private building."[57] These principles found reflection in Senate bill 953, introduced by Senator Thomas during the 78th Congress on April 2, 1943. In his speech introducing the bill, Senator Thomas directly linked urban redevelopment with "the reconversion from a wartime to a peacetime economy," an effort that would employ those who had previous built munitions and other

war material:

> *The replanning and gradual redevelopment of blighted portions of American municipalities meet these requirements. The covenant of both population and industry from the older parts of the cities has left these parts in a condition which constitutes a serious social and financial liability; and for the cure of this constitutes a serious social and financial lability; and for the cure of this condition and the reinvigoration of these obsolescent and declining areas, public action, both Federal and local, is a necessity.*[58]

It was through the ULI, however, that the real estate industry's concerns with blight found their fullest expression, especially before Congress and the FDR administration. The ULI's series of urban studies, started at the beginning of the forties, had made the case that the problems exhibited by poor quality residential neighborhoods could also be found in commercial and office zones, emphasizing in turn the inadequacy of slum clearance (as provided for in the 1937 Act) to deal with the future of the American city. In 1944, the National Housing Agency (created in 1942 as an umbrella for coordinating the FHA, as well as the successor organizations to USHA and HOLC) found the ULI's case studies to be "particularly significant evidence that clearance and redevelopment do go beyond housing problems."[59] The ULI proposed a four-part redevelopment program centered on federal action. These four parts were:

> *A Federal Urban Land Commission, whose purpose is to set policy, and to finance local redevelopment projects;*
>
> *A series of "local metropolitan land commissions" with authorization to acquire, bundle and resell urban lands;*
>
> *A policy that calls for these lands to be placed back into the private sector for redevelopment;*
>
> *And, finally, a "national laboratory for housing research."*

The ULI soon found the ear of the same senator who had advanced the Labor Housing Conference's housing bill in 1937: Robert Wagner of New York. Wagner introduced Senate bill 1163 on June 4th, just 63 days after Thomas's bill. Wagner specifically stated, in his introductory comments, that the bill was introduced at the request of the ULI, and was still largely incomplete. "I do not believe that it is a perfect measure," Wagner noted, "but rather one which requires a great deal of additional and intensive study. The bill, I hope, will afford this opportunity for study and discussion throughout the country." What is particularly notable is how Wagner framed S. 1163 and its relationship to the 1937 Act, private enterprise, and anxieties about the postwar world. On one hand, Wagner claimed that the ULI bill dealt with "a vital problem closely related to legislation I have advocated in the past," but on the other, went to great pains to describe the new effort as "a private-enterprise bill," as well as a "encouragement to enterprise bill." Unlike the Thomas bill (S. 953), however, Wagner claimed that his bill was "not a post-war bill," but only because the efforts it called for would need to be started prior to the end of hostilities, lest reconversion efforts be stalled for years. The Wagner/ULI proposal, titled the Neighborhood Redevelopment Bill, was thus significantly different from the 1937 Act, a program that would be aimed at rebuilding cities more than reforming housing conditions.[60] This proposal would charge the National Housing Agency with the tasks the ULI had originally proposed for a new Federal Urban Land Commission, and then provided a fund of $1 billion out of which the NHA would issue loans to "municipalities (or

appropriate instrumentalities thereof)" for the acquisition of land, as well as public improvements such as streets, sewers, and the like on that land. Wagner's bill would have achieved two of the four points in the ULI plan. This was clearly a bill that served the interest of the real estate industry, with little mention of housing and little concern for the needs of residents. The purpose was to rebuild the American city—to address the real estate industry's concerns over urban 'blight"—and the bill did not serve the interests of the housers with their concerns for workforce housing and the living conditions of the poor.[61]

Although recognizing the need for a postwar federal urban program, there was deep skepticism from within the housers about the value of redevelopment. Earlier in 1943, Catherine Bauer spoke to the annual convention of the National Public Housing Conference in Pittsburgh. The NPHC had, alongside the LHC, been a key lobbying group supporting the public housing bill that ultimately passed in 1937, and consisted of a mixture of public housing officials, politicians, charity workers, and other housers across the public and private spectrum. Titled "The Public Houser's Responsibility for a Post-War Program," Bauer called for a renewal of the principles under the 1937 Act, and an expansion into the provision of public housing for the middle classes who, despite their better incomes, still could not afford quality homes. Closing her remarks, Bauer described the housers as a group "pretty unfashionable at the moment" but composed of those with a "social conscience, the practical idealists," and deeply skeptical of the "oomph in reverse" that comes from programs promising urban reform. "'Saving cities?' I wonder for how many citizens that phrase would have any positive meaning. But 'better homes for everybody' is something everybody understands and a great many will fight for." Bauer's speech seemed to hit the right notes, and the NPHC ultimately published a transcript of it in pamphlet form, making it a part of their official political literature.[62] Yet, as 1943 closed, there was no sign that discourse about the future of the American city was any closer to a clear resolution.

Blight and the emergence of a postwar order

The 1944 re-election campaign of Franklin D. Roosevelt did not include passage of either the Thomas or Wagner bills as part of its platform. In some sense, this suggests that both bills were not seen by the administration as serious proposals—much less significant components of the presidential platform—so much as trials for Congressional debate. Similarly, the Congress of Industrial Organizations' pathfinding Political Action Committee, organized to assist with the FDR campaign, did not put a great deal of stress on the housing issue.

This stated, the CIO-PAC did produce, in conjunction with the United Auto Workers, a pro-Roosevelt campaign pamphlet arguing for the continuation of public housing and the elimination of slums. In the literature, Roosevelt's opponent, republican Thomas E. Dewey, was painted as a puppet of the "private real estate lobby," whose stated goal—quoting National Association of Homebuilders president Robert P. Gerholz—was to demolish public housing. As the pamphlet language put it, "Dewey's pal's want to keep their monopoly on housing," while the unions called for the construction of 1.5 million new, publicly-financed homes each year, employing more than five million men for a decade or longer. "We can rebuild our decaying cities, saving property values and human values," the pamphlet argues, closing with an appeal to "vote for Roosevelt."[63] Although the unions did not put a great deal of effort into this plank of

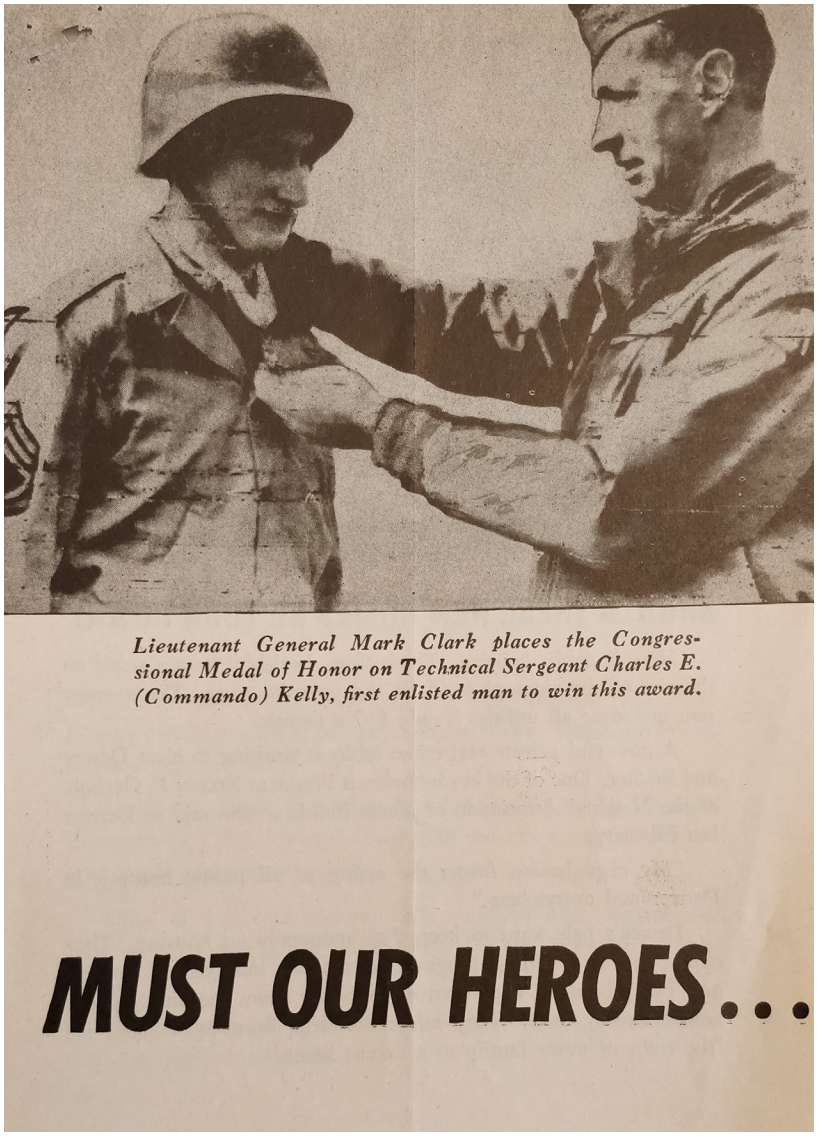


FIGURE 2-5: Public housing did not feature prominently in the 1944 presidential re-election campaign of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. One exception was this, a brochure published by the CIO-PAC, crafted by houser Alexander Crosby. The brochure directly linked the anticipated postwar world, the impending homecoming of American soldiers, and the issue of public housing. Source: Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

the campaign for Roosevelt's re-election, they did print and distribute more than 800,000 copies of the pamphlet.[64]

The visuals of the pamphlet are also notable, the front cover bearing an illustration of Charles E. Kelley receiving the Congressional Medal of Honor, he being the first enlisted man to receive the award (Figure 2-5). Below his picture, in all caps, reads the headline "MUST OUR HEROES..." and on the following pages, the line continues "COME HOME TO THIS?" with an arrow pointing to a ramshackle industrial adjacent slum. Opposite, in smaller caps, is a small label reading "OR THIS" superimposed over a photograph of a public housing project built along somewhat traditional (versus modern) architectural lines (Figure 2-6). The CIO and the UAW thus wrapped up their arguments for public housing directly with an appeal to patriotism and, at the same time, a focus on the bravery of the enlisted man and all the anti-aristocratic everyman connotations of such a figure. [65] It is almost as if the pamphlet, drafted by political consultant Alexander L. Crosby, is a preamble to Norman Rockwell's *Homecoming, G.I.,* which appeared just six months later on the cover of the May 26, 1945 edition of the *Saturday Evening*

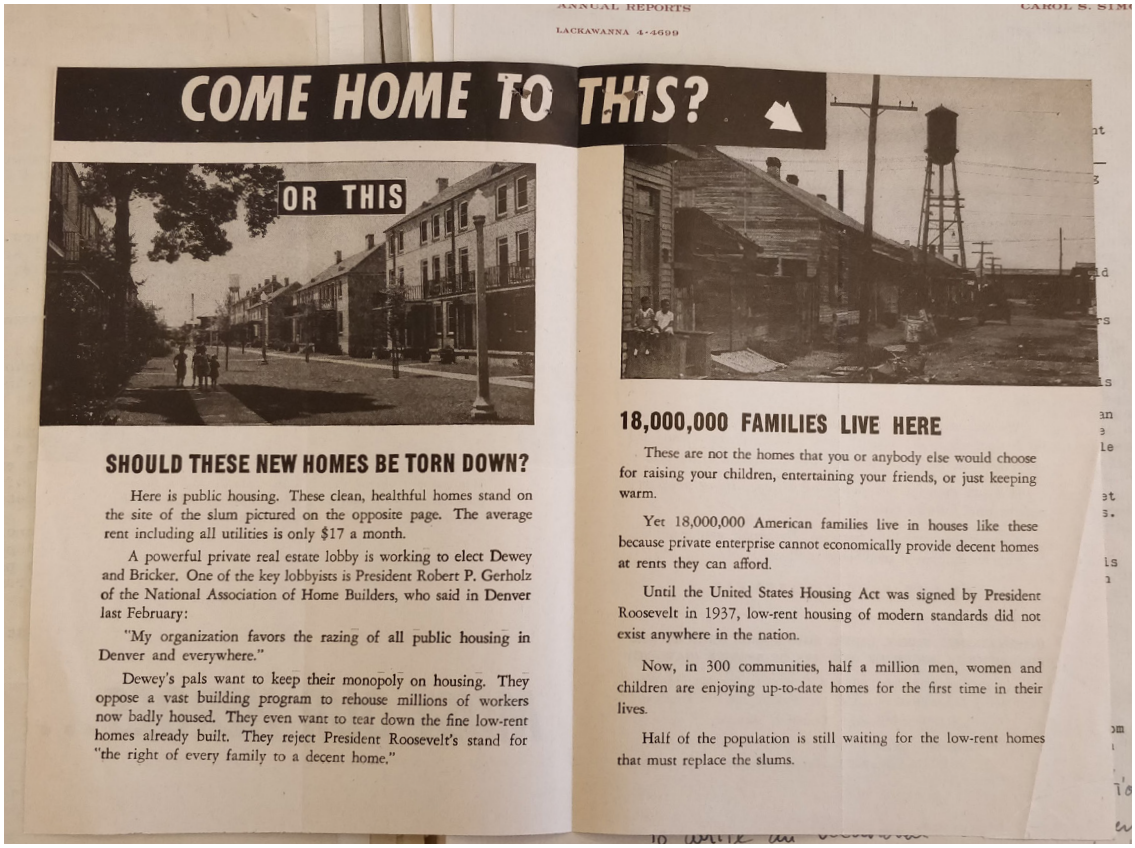


FIGURE 2-6: The interior of the CIO-PAC brochure, crafted by houser Alexander Crosby, continued the argument linking the welfare of returning GIs with domestic housing conditions. Source: Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

Post. (See Figure 2-6.) In Rockwell's painting—which was made after the successful re-election of FDR, but appeared after the death of the president in April, the American soldier has returned to the helter-skelter and slapdash urban neighborhood that Crosby's pamphlet had characterized as a slum, not to the smart public housing the unions had called for.[66]

This contrast between Crosby's 1944 campaign literature and the 1945 Rockwell cover painting is nearly symptomatic of a dissipation occurring in the larger struggle for a federal postwar urban program. In January 1945, Bauer wrote to Leon Keyserling, Senator Wagner's former aid and now deputy administrator for the National Housing Agency (NHA), noting that "all those redevelopment skyrockets shooting off into nowhere have about fizzled anyway."[67] Keyserling, perhaps trying to protect public housing efforts, attempted to keep housing and redevelopment

FIGURE 2-7. Norman Rockwell, *The Homecoming*, oil on canvas, 1945. This painting, anticipating the end of the war and the return of American GIs, appeared on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* on May 26, 1945, seems to extend the fears expounded upon in Alexander Crosby's "Must Our Heroes" election pamphlet. Whether Rockwell had seen the pamphlet before making this painting is less important than its recording of a certain moment in the popular imagination, when the conditions of a return to peace had material as well as emotional dimensions. Source: Private collection, courtesy the Norman Rockwell Museum

efforts separate within the structure of the NHA, but Bauer sensed that the blight-linked redevelopment impetus, so closely tied to reconversion fears and apparently stalling, would only be possible if directly linked to housing concerns. "I even have a feeling," she confided to Keyserling, "that Federal aid for redevelopment in any defensible form is more likely to come in on the back of public housing than any other way." Bauer may have sensed that the housers would be able step into the gap left by lack of action on redevelopment, using the remaining support for redevelopment as way to reinvigorate the public housing project. There was no danger, in Bauer's view, that redevelopment would sap away the resources of the houser cause, believing that the NHA "all fresh and pretty" would act as a harmonizing force.[68]

Despite such optimism, efforts by both the housers and the real estate industry seemed to make little progress as the war drew to an Allied-favorable close. Congress vacillated. In early 1945, ULI representatives continued to press various committees and subcommittees on the urgency of the urban problem, the likely resumption of urban decentralization, declining land values, and declining physical conditions, and emphasized the importance of redevelopment and the relative lack of importance of both public housing and the NHA.[69]

By 1945, the Senate's Special Committee on Postwar Economic Policy and Planning seemed to have swung away from the real estate industry and the ULI position, taking up a more pro-housing approach. A subcommittee report issued on August 1 characterized sweeping redevelopment projects as beyond the scope of the federal government, but strongly advocated for funding urban housing projects, seeing them as part of "the accepted national interest."[70] To accomplish this, the subcommittee recommended "the continuance of the aids to local authorities established by the United States Housing Act of 1937, with an increase in the authorization now available."[71] Other recommendations included making the NHA permanent, increasing the NHA's discretion and remit, and the establishment of a "provisional... new form of assistance to cities in ridding themselves of unhealthful housing conditions and of restoring blighted areas to productive use by private enterprise."[72] The same day, Senator Wagner introduced into Congress S. 1342, the goal of which was to establish a national policy on urban housing, directly linking slum clearance, the elimination of blight, and the preparation of land for the construction of public housing, as explicitly provided for under the 1937 Act.[73]

Five days later, on August 6, the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. Three days later, on the 9th, a second bomb was dropped over Nagasaki. Less than a week later, Emperor Hirohito announced Japan's intention to surrender, and the war was effectively over. In the United States, the long national emergency seemed to have ended, and among the celebrations that followed the formal end of the war on V.J. day (September 2, when the official surrender papers were signed by Japanese representatives) also brought the end of any remaining pretense of national political unity. Following the November 1945 introduction of yet another housing bill by Senator Wagner, the president of the National Association of Home Builders testified before a Senate committee, calling it the "Washington Side Show," and delivering a 230-word diatribe in full carney barker speech:

> *Step up and see the GREATEST of all HOUSING BILLS–it's Democratic–it's Republican–it's Socialistic!–it's good for one–it's good for all–and best of all it's FREE!*[74]

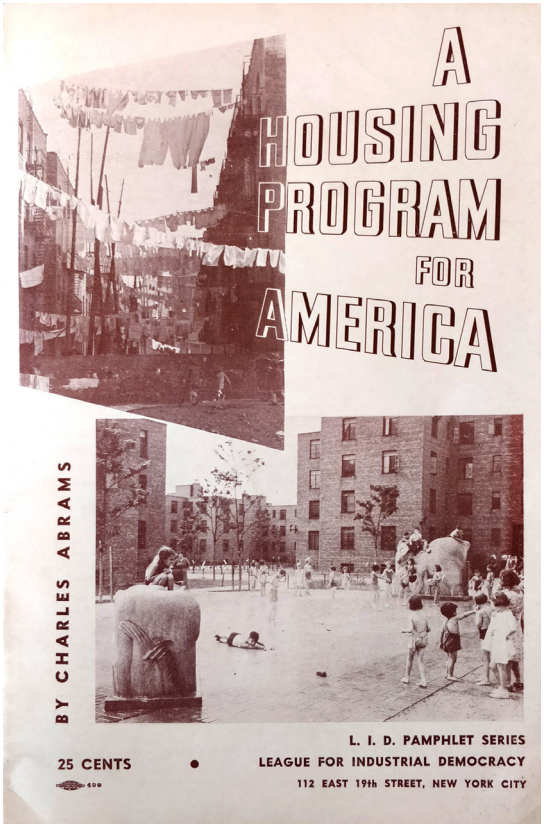


FIGURE 2-8: In the immediate postwar period, houser groups like the League for Industrial Democracy produced policy documents and advocacy literature, such as this, *A Housing Program for America*, by former New York housing official Charles Abrams. The author had strong ties with the Roosevelt administration prior to the war, and postwar houser promotional materials tended to deploy New Deal era rhetoric. Source: Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

This irreverence was a marker of a new phase, a postwar political tone that began to emerge from all parties, exhibiting a greater divisiveness. If the actual war overseas had ended, an ideological war at home had been renewed.

Among housers, the new tone was of renewed advocacy along the lines of the prewar period. A fine example is *A Housing Program for America*, authored by Charles Abrams and published in 1946 by the socialist-leaning League for Industrial Democracy (Figure 2-8).[75] Abrams had a long history as a houser, having worked as a counsel for the New York City Housing Authority, held leadership positions with several advocacy groups (including the National Public Housing Conference), and served as a housing advisor to various branches of the FDR administration. While formerly plugged into the Roosevelt-era federal government, in the Truman era Abrams was in the academy, not the halls of power, holding a lecturer's position at the prestigious, progressive bastion of the New School for Social Research.[76] Abrams' 1946 recommendations read more like 1936, a complete recapitulation of the arguments once used to promote the Wagner-Steagall bill, with attacks on the incapacity of the private homebuilding industry to meet the needs of Americans, a deeply reliance on statistics, and a conclusion consisting of "a ten point program" that recalls New Deal rhetoric. Of these ten points, only two seem to overtly address the postwar world: a call for veteran housing (point eight) and a call for "urban reconstruction" (point four): "Our cities must be rebuilt, our blighted areas replaced by communities befitting our wealth, culture, and productive capacity."[77]

By 1946, the bill (now jointly sponsored by Senator Allan J. Ellender, Democrat, Louisiana, and Senator Robert

A. Taft, Republican, Ohio) had grown to include $25 million in research funding, money for 500,000 units of public housing (plus another 250,000 for rural farm worker housing), and a more extensive home mortgage insurance program. Along with these components, Wagner's proposals now included a continuing program, to the tune of $1.5 billion, for urban redevelopment. "The bill is no more than a step," Abrams wrote, adding that "the more comprehensive approach is needed, the clearance of slums and the rebuilding of all the blighted areas or our cities must be envisioned..." Though Abrams supported the Wagner bill and wanted readers of his polemic to do likewise, it was an example of "the piecemeal approach [that] must be abandoned," a funding that, even at $1.5 billion, was not adequate to the task.[78] Without greater efforts at reform, the status quo would grind on. "The building industry has long supplied the needs of only the well-to-do," Abrams noted, "the rest of American families getting the leftovers or having to crowd in with others." This rhetoric, characterizing the real estate industry as a system that benefits only the wealthy and relegates low income residents to substandard, hand-me-down homes, was straight out of the prewar public housing debate.[79]

NAREB, meanwhile, renewed its political activism in opposition to public housing, its wartime flirtations with federal urban intervention retreating behind a growing rhetoric of economic conservatism. A signal entry into the debate was *Roofs or Ceilings? The Current Housing Problem,* an abridged republishing of a 1946 policy book (of the same name) written by Milton Friedman and George J. Stigler. Friedman, then a newly minted scholar, was a passionate opponent of then Keynesian economics that had underlain much of the New Deal, despite occasionally working for the FDR administration at both the National Resources Planning Board and, later, the Department of the Treasury.[80] In the 16-page excerpt, Friedman and Stigler critique rent control efforts, especially those of the Office of Price Administration, the federal government's wartime regulatory arm dedicated with preventing profiteering, and which still was in place during 1946.[81] While the main thrust of the paper is to argue against rent controls, Friedman and Stigler's goal is to castigate "the use of subsidies" as "especially unwise."[82] A more equitable solution, in their view, was an unregulated, private market:

> *No solution of the housing problem can benefit everyone; some must be hurt. The essence of the problem is that some persons must be compelled or induced to use less housing than they are willing to pay for at present legal rents.... Rationing by high rents would induce many to use less housing and would have the merit of spreading the burden more evenly among the population as a whole. It would therefore hurt more persons immediately, but each less severely than the existing methods.* [83]

No view could be more contrary to that of the housers. While Friedman and Stigler claimed, in the closing paragraph of the paper, that they had "no desire to pay higher rents, to see others forced to pay them, or to see landlords reap windfall profits," yet the policies they argued for would do precisely those things, and their policy paper had been republished and distributed by a professional organization whose vested interests laid in those rent increases.

While NAREB's efforts represents an opening postwar position for the establishment real estate industry, it is interesting to consider the position of the industry's smaller members, such as small landlords and homebuilders. Also in 1946, one of the latter issued "Housing

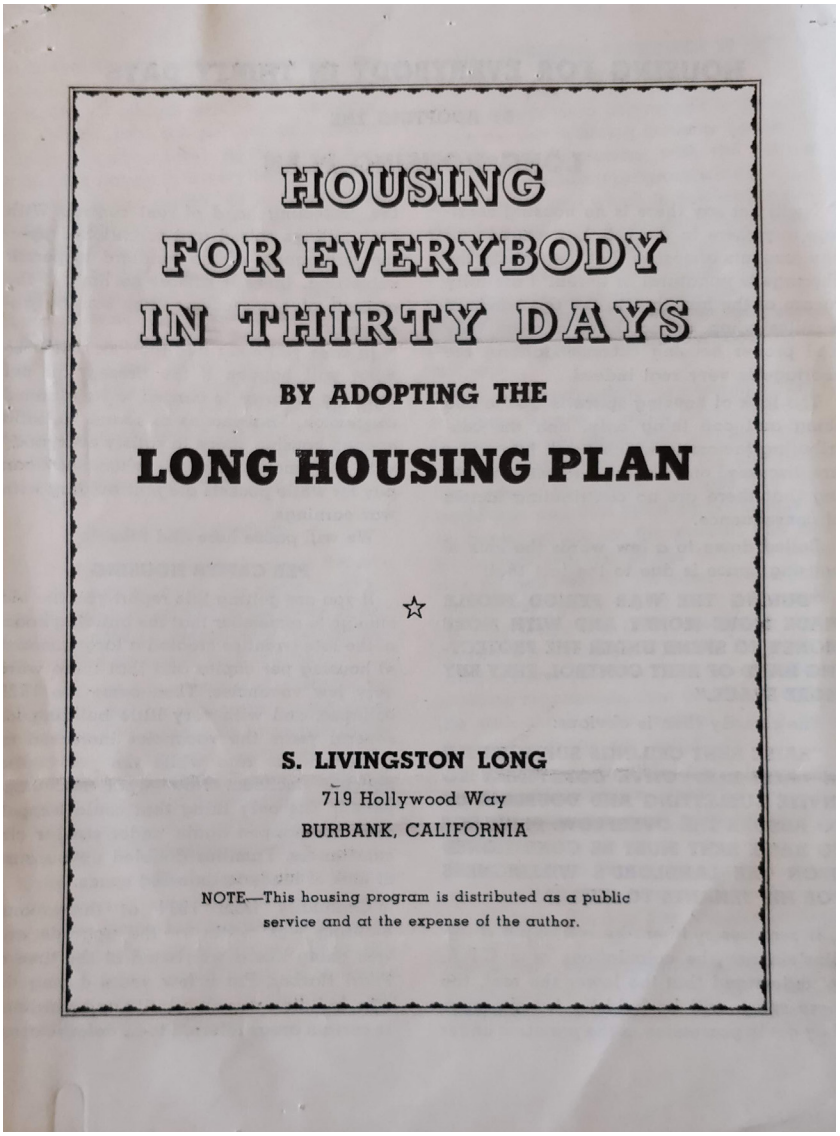
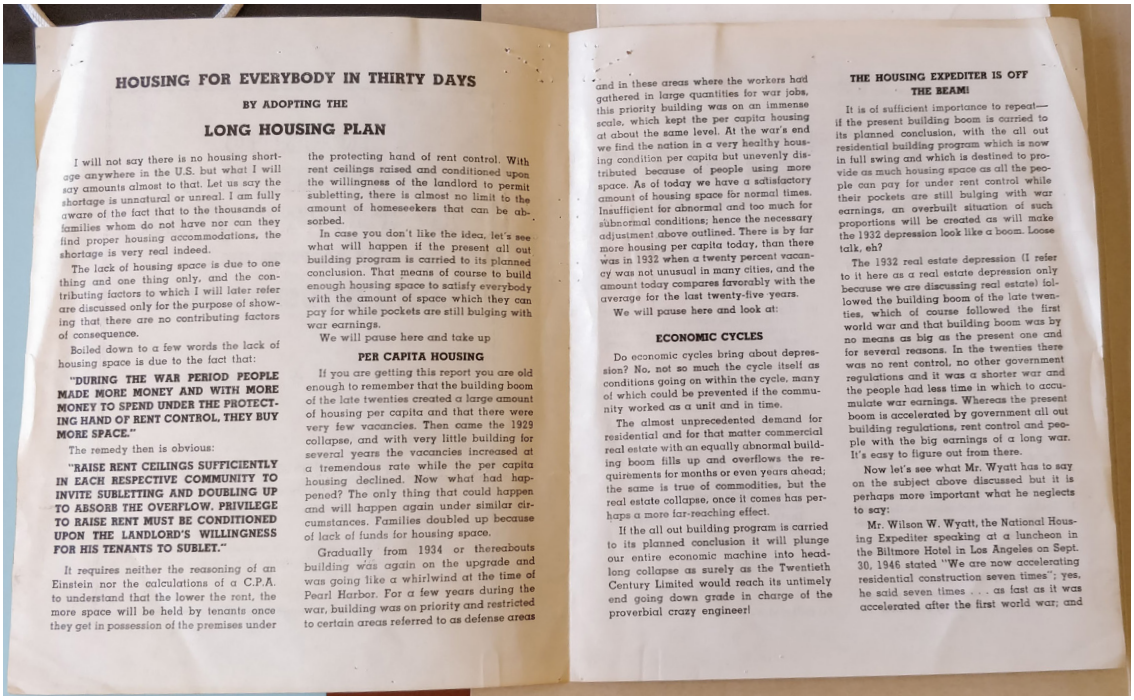


FIGURE 2-9: "Housing for Everybody in Thirty Days," small-time contractor Samuel Long's self-produced entry into the postwar publicity battles over the future of U.S. housing policy. Source: Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

for Everybody in Thirty Days," a political pamphlet that offered solutions very similar to those of the Friedman paper republished by NAREB, but put far more bombastically (Figures 2-9 through 2-11). The author of this work was Samuel L. Long, a 48-year-old independent housing contractor living in Burbank, having moved there from Detroit in the late 1930s.[84] The pamphlet was evidently produced by Long, at his own expense, as a reaction to a September 30th speech by Truman administration housing official Wilson W. Wyatt. In his speech, Wyatt had noted that the nation would meet the housing crisis by accelerating construction by a factor of seven. Long believed somewhat fuzzily that the overproduction of housing during the 1920s had brought about the Great Depression, and was apoplectic. Only ten days later, Long had written his response and printed it in pamphlet form for distribution to newspaper editors, politicians, and small property holders. Like Friedman, Long characterized the problem of a housing shortage as purely a problem of too much demand for more space, and the solution to be to remove rent controls. Long argued that "during the war period people made more money and with more money to spend under the protecting hand of rent control, they buy



HOUSING FOR EVERYBODY IN THIRTY DAYS

BY ADOPTING THE

LONG HOUSING PLAN

I will not say there is no housing shortage anywhere in the U.S. but what I will say amounts almost to that. Let us say the shortage is unnatural or unreal. I am fully aware of the fact that to the thousands of families whom do not have nor can they find proper housing accommodations, the shortage is very real indeed.

The lack of housing space is due to one thing and one thing only, and the contributing factors to which I will later refer are discussed only for the purpose of showing that there are no contributing factors of consequence.

Boiled down to a few words the lack of housing space is due to the fact that:

"DURING THE WAR PERIOD PEOPLE MADE MORE MONEY AND WITH MORE MONEY TO SPEND UNDER THE PROTECTING HAND OF RENT CONTROL, THEY BUY MORE SPACE."

The remedy then is obvious:

"RAISE RENT CEILINGS SUFFICIENTLY IN EACH RESPECTIVE COMMUNITY TO INVITE SUBLETTING AND DOUBLING UP TO ABSORB THE OVERFLOW. PRIVILEGE TO RAISE RENT MUST BE CONDITIONED UPON THE LANDLORD'S WILLINGNESS FOR HIS TENANTS TO SUBLET."

It requires neither the reasoning of an Einstein nor the calculations of a C.P.A. to understand that the lower the rent, the more space will be held by tenants once they get in possession of the premises under the protecting hand of rent control. With rent ceilings raised and conditioned upon the willingness of the landlord to permit subletting, there is almost no limit to the amount of homeseekers that can be absorbed.

In case you don't like the idea, let's see what will happen if the present all out building program is carried to its planned conclusion. That means of course to build enough housing space to satisfy everybody with the amount of space which they can pay for while pockets are still bulging with war earnings.

We will pause here and take up

PER CAPITA HOUSING

If you are getting this report you are old enough to remember that the building boom of the late twenties created a large amount of housing per capita and that there were very few vacancies. Then came the 1929 collapse, and with very little building for several years the vacancies increased at a tremendous rate while the per capita housing declined. Now what had happened? The only thing that could happen and will happen again under similar circumstances. Families doubled up because of lack of funds for housing space.

Gradually from 1934 or thereabouts building was again on the upgrade and was going like a whirlwind at the time of Pearl Harbor. For a few years during the war, building was on priority and restricted to certain areas referred to as defense areas and in these areas where the workers had gathered in large quantities for war jobs, this priority building was on an immense scale, which kept the per capita housing at about the same level. At the war's end we find the nation in a very healthy housing condition per capita but unevenly distributed because of people using more space. As of today we have a satisfactory amount of housing space for normal times. Insufficient for abnormal and too much for subnormal conditions; hence the necessary adjustment above outlined. There is by far more housing per capita today, than there was in 1932 when a twenty percent vacancy was not unusual in many cities, and the amount today compares favorably with the average for the last twenty-five years.

We will pause here and look at:

ECONOMIC CYCLES

Do economic cycles bring about depression? No, not so much the cycle itself as conditions going on within the cycle, many of which could be prevented if the community worked as a unit and in time.

The almost unprecedented demand for residential and for that matter commercial real estate with an equally abnormal building boom fills up and overflows the requirements for months or even years ahead; the same is true of commodities, but the real estate collapse, once it comes has perhaps a more far-reaching effect.

If the all out building program is carried to its planned conclusion it will plunge our entire economic machine into headlong collapse as surely as the Twentieth Century Limited would reach its untimely end going down grade in charge of the proverbial crazy engineer!

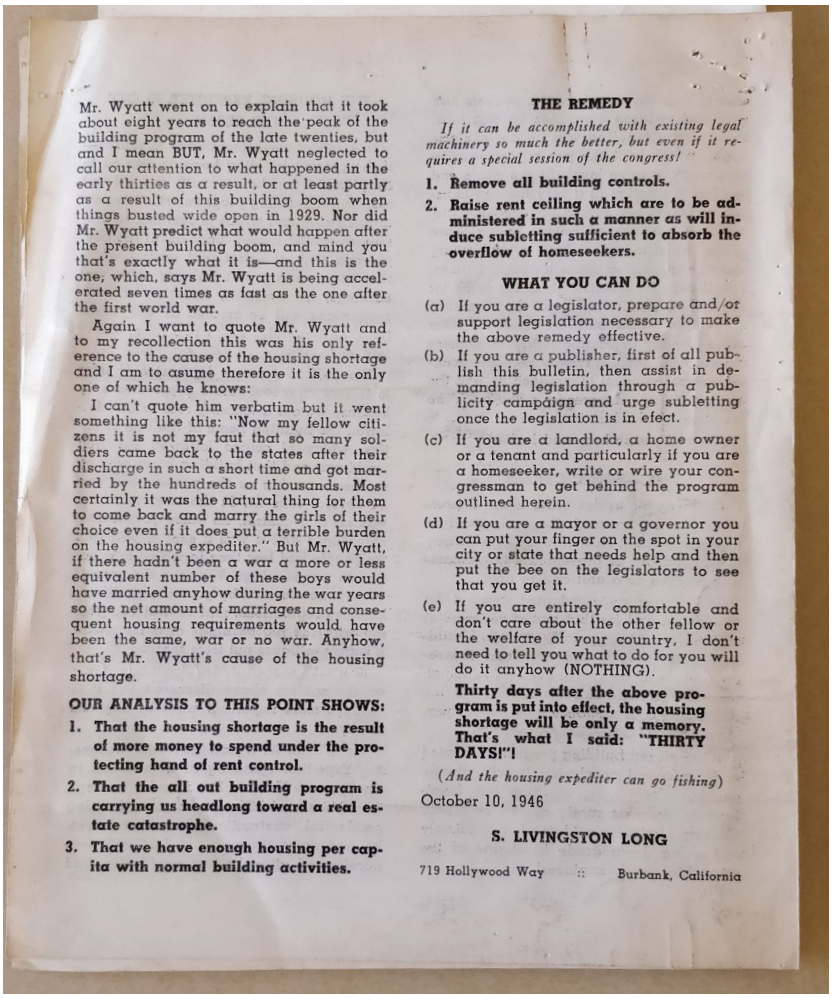
THE HOUSING EXPEDITER IS OFF THE BEAM!

It is of sufficient importance to repeat—if the present building boom is carried to its planned conclusion, with the all out residential building program which is now in full swing and which is destined to provide as much housing space as all the people can pay for under rent control while their pockets are still bulging with war earnings, an overbuilt situation of such proportions will be created as will make the 1932 depression look like a boom. Loose talk, eh?

The 1932 real estate depression (I refer to it here as a real estate depression only because we are discussing real estate) followed the building boom of the late twenties, which of course followed the first world war and that building boom was by no means as big as the present one and for several reasons. In the twenties there was no rent control, no other government regulations and it was a shorter war and the people had less time in which to accumulate war earnings. Whereas the present boom is accelerated by government all out building regulations, rent control and people with the big earnings of a long war. It's easy to figure out from there.

Now let's see what Mr. Wyatt has to say on the subject above discussed but it is perhaps more important what he neglects to say:

Mr. Wilson W. Wyatt, the National Housing Expediter speaking at a luncheon in the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles on Sept. 30, 1946 stated "We are now accelerating residential construction seven times"; yes, he said seven times . . . as fast as it was accelerated after the first world war; and



Mr. Wyatt went on to explain that it took about eight years to reach the peak of the building program of the late twenties, but and I mean BUT, Mr. Wyatt neglected to call our attention to what happened in the early thirties as a result, or at least partly as a result of this building boom when things busted wide open in 1929. Nor did Mr. Wyatt predict what would happen after the present building boom, and mind you that's exactly what it is—and this is the one, which, says Mr. Wyatt is being accelerated seven times as fast as the one after the first world war.

Again I want to quote Mr. Wyatt and to my recollection this was his only reference to the cause of the housing shortage and I am to asume therefore it is the only one of which he knows:

I can't quote him verbatim but it went something like this: "Now my fellow citizens it is not my faut that so many soldiers came back to the states after their discharge in such a short time and got married by the hundreds of thousands. Most certainly it was the natural thing for them to come back and marry the girls of their choice even if it does put a terrible burden on the housing expediter." But Mr. Wyatt, if there hadn't been a war a more or less equivalent number of these boys would have married anyhow during the war years so the net amount of marriages and consequent housing requirements would have been the same, war or no war. Anyhow, that's Mr. Wyatt's cause of the housing shortage.

OUR ANALYSIS TO THIS POINT SHOWS:

1. **That the housing shortage is the result of more money to spend under the protecting hand of rent control.**
2. **That the all out building program is carrying us headlong toward a real estate catastrophe.**
3. **That we have enough housing per capita with normal building activities.**

THE REMEDY

If it can be accomplished with existing legal machinery so much the better, but even if it requires a special session of the congress!

1. **Remove all building controls.**
2. **Raise rent ceiling which are to be administered in such a manner as will induce subletting sufficient to absorb the overflow of homeseekers.**

WHAT YOU CAN DO

(a) If you are a legislator, prepare and/or support legislation necessary to make the above remedy effective.

(b) If you are a publisher, first of all publish this bulletin, then assist in demanding legislation through a publicity campaign and urge subletting once the legislation is in efect.

(c) If you are a landlord, a home owner or a tenant and particularly if you are a homeseeker, write or wire your congressman to get behind the program outlined herein.

(d) If you are a mayor or a governor you can put your finger on the spot in your city or state that needs help and then put the bee on the legislators to see that you get it.

(e) If you are entirely comfortable and don't care about the other fellow or the welfare of your country, I don't need to tell you what to do for you will do it anyhow (NOTHING).

Thirty days after the above program is put into effect, the housing shortage will be only a memory. That's what I said: "THIRTY DAYS!"!

(And the housing expediter can go fishing)

October 10, 1946

S. LIVINGSTON LONG

719 Hollywood Way :: Burbank, California

FIGURE 2-10 (Above): The interior of Long's pamphlet on U.S. housing policy. Offset-printed and thus costly to produce, Long relied on a folksy, populist narrative tone, punctuated by occasional exclamation marks and all-caps, bold text. Source: Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

FIGURE 2-11 (Left): Although the primary aim of Samuel Long's 1946 pamphlet was to argue for the elimination of wartime rent price controls, the underlying contention was whether or not a housing shortage existed. Long argued that the housing shortage was merely a product of higher wartime wages and higher demand—an argument that largely mirrored the position expounded by Friedman and Stigler on behalf of NAREB. There was, by implication, no need for public housing, or any new federal intervention into the housing market. Source: Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

more space." Eliminating rent controls would reduce demand for space by making that space more expensive. So long as landlords were tolerant of subletting, "there is almost no limit to the amount of homeseekers that can be absorbed."[85]

Long's self-presentation and language rises beyond the esoteric and ought to be examined more closely. "Housing for Everybody" was produced hurriedly (it has several typographical errors) yet expensively (being offset printed) in response to a policy speech by an administration official, its purpose to shape public discourse. Its author is a small-time contractor, yet he seems painfully aware of his low status, overcorrecting by billing himself with the imperious "S. Livingston Long" on the pamphlet rather than as Samuel Long. His language is bombastic. Several passages are delivered in bold all caps text. Wilson W. Wyatt is described, in one headline, as "OFF THE BEAM!" and is told, in another passage, that he "can go fishing." Expertise in general is disdained. Notes Long:

> *It requires neither the reasoning of an Einstein nor the calculations of a C.P.A. to understand that the lower the rent, the more space will be held by tenants once they get in possession of the premises under the protecting hand of rent control.*

And this is where Long's pamphlet—and his world view—pivots away from that of NAREB. To small builders like Long, economists like Milton Friedman were just more self-important outsiders proclaiming expertise from the top. As later examples will show, small landlords, brokers, and builders would increasingly break political ranks with the larger real estate industry, a grass roots insurgency from inside. The alignment of their views during the mid-1940s would prove a temporary one that posed a threat to the cooption tactics that NAREB and its allies were then employing to try and redirect federal intervention away from housing and towards urban redevelopment. The activities of these smaller members of the real estate industry would, as later examples will show, serve as a home for critique of urban blight from the right.

During the next two years, progress on a housing bill was halting, the political rhetoric as shrill as ever. According to Bauer, by spring of 1947 "the housing and housers' morale is certainly at an absolute bottom," noting a "lack of political steam."[86] In response, Alexander Crosby (who had authored the 1944 CIO-PAC brochure "Must Our Heroes...") replied to Bauer that "the whole damn country seems out of joint." Matters ran hot and cold, with Crosby receiving an unofficial hiring query from a federal agency in anticipation of the passage of Wagner's new housing bill, the Taft-Wagner-Ellender bill, and then just weeks later being told that all hopes of the bill's passage had faded. That fall, *Fortune* published an entire issue dedicated to the housing crisis, and expressed exasperation at the political rhetoric that would doubtless follow this decision:

> *The builders' representatives will merely conclude that FORTUNE's editors are rosy-hued socialists, an ideological category that, in the political lexicon of the National Association of Real Estate Boards and the National Association of Home Builders, includes everyone who criticizes U.S. housing.*

This, from a magazine published by Henry Luce, one of the country's most influential Republican businessmen.[87] By February of the following year, the NPHC complained even of the housers' own language, of "clichés [that] don't help" such as

> *...the greedy landlord, the maniac tenant...*

the slum-dweller who would put coal in his bath tub if he had one; nor the slick mortgage-foreclosing banker versus Little Nell, nor yet the communist agitator versus the strong, sturdy, upright enterpriser.[88]

Lobbyists, meanwhile, the NPHC characterized as spreading "hysteria," such rumors that the Taft-Ellender-Wagner bill had "the secret purpose… to promote socialism," while noting that the general public seemed to possess an "easy-going adaptability to circumstance" that some housers—and politicians—misread as apathy.[89]

Despite the messy politics, during the immediate postwar years, several housing and urban redevelopment bills did continue to advance through Congress. Senate bill 1342, which Wagner had introduced in August 1945, passed out of that chamber on April 8, 1946, but its House equivalent died in committee later that year.[90] Reintroduced by Senator Taft as S. 866 on March 10, 1947, the proposed legislation became known as the Taft-Ellender-Wagner, or T-E-W bill.[91] Like previous versions, the T-E-W bill made progress in the Senate, passing on April 22 of 1948. In the House, it faced a tougher audience. President Truman addressed Congress on July 27, explicitly calling for the passage of T-E-W, in hopes that presidential pressure would assist in its passage much as FDR had done with Wagner-Steagall in 1937, albeit more openly. The tactic did not work, and S. 866 died in the House when the Republican majority leadership refused to bring it to the floor for a vote. Instead, the House passed a bill—subsequently approved by the Senate—that called for a far weaker package of adjustments to FHA loan programs (among other smaller changes), but had no money for public housing or urban redevelopment. Truman signed the resulting bill, titled the Housing Act of 1948, but packed his announcement with invective:

In short, the Congress in enacting this bill has deliberately neglected those large groups of our people most in need of adequate housing—the people who are forced to live in disgraceful urban and rural slums.

The most astonishing part of the process by which this result was achieved is that the Members of the House of Representatives were never permitted to consider and vote on the Taft-Ellender-Wagner bill.… The record shows clearly where the responsibility lies for this denial of the democratic process.

"It is a matter of great regret to me," Truman closed his remarks," as it will be to millions of ill-housed families…."[92]

Rather than capitulate, in fall 1948 the Truman administration regrouped and began to plan another housing bill effort, largely based on the bill that had died in the House. On November 24, HHFA director Raymond Foley made these plans public, and asked for speedy consideration from Congress. "Since these proposals have already been the subject of extensive committee hearings in both the Senate and the House of Representatives," Foley announced in an official statement, "early action on this legislation will be sought."[93] Accordingly, after the 81st Congress commenced in January 1949, and a brief spate of competing partisan housing bills, the T-E-W bill was essentially back on, this time as S. 1070. On April 22, the renewed bill passed the full vote of the Senate.[94]

As before, the problem with passage was the House, whose version of the bill, H. 4009, was introduced on April 4.[95] In response, the real estate industry continued its lobbying in opposition to the proposed program. John F. Kennedy, then a fresh, 32-year old representative from Massachusetts, accused the industry of a propaganda campaign:

> *...for the most part this flood of pamphlets uses the same old arguments except for one new note. Instead of merely promising, as always, that 'private enterprise can do it,' now they are making a much bolder claim: 'Private enterprise has done it'*

and further, implied that, "anyone who would criticize such an industry, or try to reform it, must... have purely subversive intentions." Among the sources Kennedy credits for this political rhetoric are business associations representing the savings and loan industry, the construction industry, and, unsurprisingly, NAREB. On the other side of the table from NAREB were, as Kennedy sarcastically noted, "those dangerous subverters, *Fortune, The Wall Street Journal,* and [Republican] Senator Taft."[96]

The support of such establishment (even conservative) parties as Kennedy cited suggested that the T-E-W bill was on safe grounds, but this did not mean that the lobbying efforts of the real estate industry were an exercise in punching at shadows. The urban redevelopment provisions of the bill, long advocated for by many in the establishment wings of the real estate industry (mostly prominently including NAREB and its ally, the ULI), had grown into a potential Trojan Horse. The National Public Housing Conference, largely through the influence of Catherine Bauer, attempted to broaden the scope of these urban redevelopment provisions into a vehicle for that old goal, the development of housing on suburban, rural, and empty lands. If passed, such language would allow federal money to be used to develop new housing on greenfield sites with no associated clearance, finally freeing public housing from strictures of the 1937 Act's "equivalent elimination" clause.[97] Building housing on empty land was the bread-and-butter of the real estate industry, and for the housers to try and widen the scope of their efforts to such locations was a direct threat. The real estate lobby expended a great deal of effort in eliminating these amendments to the bill.

On June 7, House Republicans attempted to table the housing bill in the House Rules Committee, as they had the previous year's bill.[98] In response, Representative Kennedy renewed his attack on "the real estate lobby's propaganda."[99] Citing housing starts down 12% from 1948, and a weakening economy, Kennedy argued that "we have needed a bold housing program ever since 1943, [and] we need it doubly now," and any real estate industry claims about the growth of new housing chicanery, the debate long ago settled in favor of public housing. "The evidence is all in," Kennedy added in the statement he republished in the *Congressional Record.* Of public housing, "there are 20,000,000 words of it in congressional hearings since 1944. The people want it."[100] As it turned out, so did most of the House of Representatives. Facing a strong demand for a vote on the floor and a procedural change in handling bills, the Republican-led rules committee released the bill to the full House on June 16. Although there was continued debate over the role of public and low rent housing, H. 4009 went to a full vote on June 29, passing by 227 to 186.[101] President Truman signed the bill into law on July 15.[102]

The Housing Act of 1949, and the opportunities of blight

Most of the debate over Taft-Ellender-Wagner was, as seen above, a repeat of the debates over Wagner-Steagall more than a dozen years prior, a fight between housers and the real estate industry over the nature of federal intervention in housing. The concern with urban redevelopment that had seemed so urgent during the war years had, as Bauer noted in 1945, "fizzled."[103] An urban redevelopment program had indeed made it into the 1949 bill, but

debate around it had been minimal.[104] The housers got funding for another 810,000 units of public housing, a new farm housing program, research money, and (perhaps most importantly) a formal declaration of national housing policy.[105] The language of the policy itself was a strong victory for the housers, centering the entire program on

> *the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family, thus contributing to the development and redevelopment of communities and to the advancement of the growth, wealth, and security of the Nation.*[106]

All five points of the new policy were explicitly related to providing improved housing conditions. The policy, in effect, became a Congressional mandate for federal housing efforts, stabilizing and clarifying those efforts.

"Blight" is mentioned only twice in the National Housing Policy, a key component of the 1949 Act. First, in the preamble, Congress stated the needs for the policy included "the elimination of substandard and other inadequate housing through the clearance of slums and blighted areas," placing this language immediately prior to its affirmation of a quest for "a suitable living environment for every American family." The second mention is in policy objective four, which authorizes funding to, among other things, "eliminate substandard and other inadequate housing through the clearance of slums and blighted areas."[107] It would seem, then, that the inclusion of the redevelopment provisions and the use of the term "blight" within the 1949 Act was of little importance. In fact, it would prove to be one of the most critical provision of the bill.

For the housers, the 1949 Act would prove an abject failure, with all of Bauer's hopes for a high-minded balancing act managed from Washington dashed, because of one inclusion and two exclusions from the text of the act.

The inclusion was blight itself. Under Title I of the 1949 Act, the HHFA was authorized to make available loan or grant monies "to assist local communities in eliminating their slums and blighted areas." The amounts were staggering: More than $1 billion in loans and $500 million in capital grants.[108] By way of comparison, the total federal budget for 1949 was $39.7 billion.[109] Federal money was now available for the purpose of clearance, and blight was an acceptable trigger for such clearance, alongside the slum. This was a significant departure from the 1937 Act, wherein only slums were available for federal clearance monies. Blight, the 1949 Act implied, was an equal problem to slums, and deserving of an equal remedy, despite the fact that, for several decades of debate over the meaning of blight, the one point on which almost all parties had agreed was that blight was not equivalent to a slum, but either a stage of decay in urban condition on the way towards slum conditions, or possibly some form of economic malaise that operated independently of physical conditions and could ultimately create slums. (The APHA had, as discussed earlier, suggested the former definition.) The concept of blight, present in the 1949 Act, became a crucial trigger for the access of funds that opened up new possibilities for housing but also opened up new avenues for the redirection of federal intervention towards purposes other than housing.

This brings us to the first of the two exclusions in the bill, absences that would serve to undermine the goals of housers was the lack of any link between clearance and housing construction. The

first of these was the double-bind of the 1937 Act's equivalent elimination clause. In the 1949 Act, section 105 allowed for redevelopment to occur under "local determinations," requiring that the land cleared must be used in accordance to a "redevelopment plan" that "conforms to a general plan for the development of the locality as a whole." While the 1949 Act did *allow* for the housing of residents displaced from clearance within new housing constructed in that cleared area, it did not require it, and in fact allowed municipalities to consider their duty by displaced populations satisfied if "decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings equal in number to the number of and available to such displaced families and reasonably accessible to their places of employment." Other than this relocation provision, Title I (the redevelopment provisions of the 1949 Act) had nothing to say about housing.[110] The equivalent elimination clause of the 1937 Act had linked public housing with slum clearance, and while this had rankled housers by eliminating the possibility of net new housing units, it had also limited slum clearance to the support of housing programs. The 1949 Act dispenses with the link, not only expanding clearance potential to blighted areas as well as slums, but also excluding any *requirement* for clearance to serve the purpose of public housing construction. With deep irony, the elimination of a clause once so reviled by housers turned out to hurt the houser cause, in that it freed redevelopment advocates from any responsibility for social welfare.

The final exclusion from the 1949 Act is perhaps the most mystifying: No definition for either "slum" or "blight" was included within the text. "Slum," with more than a century of usage, would seem to be less critical to define given its long cultural history (although the legislators of the 1937 Act had felt it necessary to define it). The 1949 Act dispenses with a definition, and further does not define the term "blight." Given that blight had a recent history of contested meanings, only recently legitimized by the work of the APHA, the omission is puzzling. It was entirely plausible that the 1949 Act would have repeated or refined the 1937 Act's definition of slums, and would have provided a definition of blight, perhaps based on the APHA's work. Instead, there is absence, silence. The consequences of this omission are profound. With more than $1.5 billion in federal funds authorized, Congress had essentially handed a blank check to municipalities. Any applying municipal government, or arm of that government, had only to declare someplace blighted—with little way for anyone to contest such a claim—and then secure vast amounts of money to condemn, clear, and resell that land for virtually any purpose deemed, by that same municipality, as in the public interest.[111] As historian and architect Roger Montgomery observed nearly two decades later, "innovation was frequently encouraged."[112]

For communities seeking to eliminate substandard housing and construct new, public housing, the 1949 Act could provide funding for both clearance and construction. For those who did not have slums to clear, and had thus been unable to participate significantly under the terms of the 1937 Act, the legislation opened up new opportunities. More than this, for those who sought government largesse to combat decentralization, protect downtown property investments, or construct ambitious redevelopment projects, the 1949 Act was a gold mine. In cities that *did* have slums, such as the older cities of the Eastern Seaboard or the heavily industrialized cities of the Midwest, these aspects of the 1949 Act might prove harder to pick out from more well-intentioned attempts to improve urban conditions. The cities of the West Coast, however, were another matter. Here, where the

built environment was mostly a product of the 20th century and therefore relatively young, the real estate industry would come to see the Housing Act of 1949 not as a threat to private enterprise and a harbinger of socialized housing on a grand scale, but instead as a sizeable slush fund for remaking the city to suit the interests of the propertied establishment. Blight—a term ever so pliable, a work of legal rhetoric ever so richly endowed—would become the key to the real estate industry's cooption of public housing programs and the National Housing Policy. The answer to stopping public housing was astonishingly simple: Gain control of the money flowing from Washington, and with the justification "blight" could give to just about any choice, pour that money onto projects that had little or nothing to do with housing, but everything to do with enhancing the power of the local political establishment and the interests of the real estate industry. In subsequent chapters, I will examine two case studies, both located on the West Coast: Oakland, California; and Portland, Oregon. As they will show, this process of cooption began almost before the ink from the President's signature on the 1949 Act was dry.

Just a month after the signing, several housers gathered for a victory dinner to toast their success, much as they had after the passage of the 1937 Act. Once more, some wag crafted a series of congratulatory songs. The opening ditty, "The Housing Boys," is telling:

I'm Egan
I'm Vinton
I'm Foley
Slum clearance now interests us solely
The cause we're espousing is good low-rent housing
And we will deliver it slowly
CHORUS: We're the housing boys of the USA
Our specialty's low-rent
But what do we do with a Mayor who
Wants redevelopment.[113]

It is as if, just a month after passage, some of the housers were beginning to realize that the redevelopment provisions were in direct conflict with all the hopeful language they had stuffed into the National Housing Policy. The 1949 Act was deeply flawed. One might even call it "blighted."

NOTES to CHAPTER 2

1. "Tune – My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean," from Victory Dinner, Passage of the Housing Act of 1937, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

2. Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the origins of our time.* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 178-179. See also Timothy McDonnel, S.J., *The Wagner housing act: A case study of the legislative process*. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1957), 270.

3. "The Wagner-Steagall Housing Act," *Architectural Forum,* September 1937, no page number.

4. "Dear Mister President," from Victory Dinner, Passage of the Housing Act of 1937, Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers, Bancroft Library.

5. Gail Radford, *Modern housing for America: Policy struggles in the New Deal era*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 185-186.

6. Many of the details of Bauer's career from H. Peter Oberlander's able biography of her, *Houser: The life and work of Catherine Bauer.* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1999).

7. Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985), 187.

8. Federal Home Loan Bank Act, 12 U.S.C. § 1421 (1932). Radford describes this act as "the first permanent piece of federal housing legislation." Radford, *Modern Housing for America,* 87.

9. In pre-FHA mortgages, loans were not self-amortizing, meaning that at the end of a loan period—say, after ten years of payments—much of the loan's principle would remain owed. A debtor then had to pay off the remainder in a so-called "balloon payment," or to secure a new loan for the remaining balance.

10. See Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 178-197, and Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier,* 196-197.

11. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier,* 196.

12. Radford, *Modern Housing for America,* 179-180.

13. Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 258-259.

14. "The Wagner-Steagall Housing Act," *Architectural Forum.*

15. See McDonnell, *Wagner Housing Act*, 188-189, as well as Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 188-189.

16. As Timothy McDonnell noted of 1920s efforts at rent control and public housing in New York, NAREB "actively fought any attempt to enact into public policy the philosophy of public housing groups," and advocated strongly for "the ideal that each American family should own its own home, this ideal being one of the chief marks distinguishing American society from the social forms of older European countries." McDonnell, *Wagner Housing Act,* 20-21. Gail Radford, meanwhile noted that NAREB was one of the more effective opponents of Wagner-Steagall, connecting free-market housing solutions to the ideological "themes of freedom and democracy." Radford, *Modern Housing for America,* 188-189.

17. Hearings before Senate Committee on Education and Labor on S. 2392 (Slum and Low-Rent Public Housing), 74th Congress, 1st Sess. (1935), Washington" Government Printing Office, 1935, 86.

18. Bauer did admit that it was possible that a blighted area could be suitable for a housing program, given that such areas were, in Bauer's framing of this concept, places where the land values were depressed. Even then, however, clearance itself would add to the costs, and might also cause owners of nearby blighted areas to raise their prices based on their anticipation of eventual government purchase. Further, such clear and replace strategies rarely served the extant populace well, as Bauer noted that British housers had found out through experience. Thus even building on areas that Bauer defined as blighted were not the ideal conditions for establishing a strong, publicly-owned, low-income housing program.

Bauer, *Modern Housing,* 243.

19. *Hearings before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor,* 1935, 87-89. This is, again, very consistent with Bauer's previously published positions in *Modern Housing.* "Modern housing, if it is to be done at all, cannot be a patchwork. It is not a 'reform' within the old pattern. It is either an entirely new method of providing an entirely new standard of urban environment, or it is nothing. Once this point of view is accepted, exclusive emphasis on slum-clearance becomes as illogical as if the early automobile manufacturers had directed all their efforts to buying out the still prosperous carriage-makers and razing their factories, instead of building automobiles" Bauer, *Modern Housing,* 247.

20. *Ibid*, 87.

21. *Ibid.,* 85-87.

22. "Summary of a Confidential Draft of Senator Wagner's Housing Bill," Labor Housing Conference, March 25, 1936, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

23. According to McDonnell, who based his study closely on correspondence and private notes of Warren J. Vinton, the committee's secretary, the full attendees were Vinton, Keyslering, Bohn, and Buaer, along with Edith Elmer Wood (a long-time New York housing advocate), Ira Robbins, Mary Simkovitch, and Helen Alfred (the last two representing the NPHC), Coleman Woodbury, Charles Abrams, Bleecker Marquette, A.R. Clas, and Horatio Hackett. Langdon Post attended representing the New York Housing Board, and Herbert A. Berman represented Harold Ickes and the PWA. McDonnell, *The Wagner Housing Act,* 158. Bohn's admiration for Bauer was interpreted by several close friends as romantic affection for her, and though Bauer flirted with him frequently in correspondence there is no evidence that she ever carried on an affair with him. The two did remain lifelong friends, however. See Oberlander, *Houser*, 141-142, 161, 168, and 196.

24. "Summary."

25. McDonnell,*Wagner Housing Bill,* 210-214

26. Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 178-179. See also McDonnell, *Wagner Housing Act,* 270.

27. McDonnell, *Wagner Housing Act,* 170-171. Katznelson notes that the president himself was not willing to support Wagner's antilynching bill for fear of losing the support of southern Democrats. Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 160.

28. "The Wagner-Steagall Housing Act," *Architectural Forum,* September 1937, no page number.

29. Kaztnelson, 25.

30. McDonnell, *Wagner Housing Act*, 342.

31. "The Wagner-Steagall Housing Act," *Architectural Forum,* September 1937, no page number.

32. "Summary."

33. "The United States Housing Act of 1937 [As amended] And provisions of other laws and executive documents pertaining to the United States Housing Authority" (Washington: Federal Works Agency, September 1939), 6.

34. *Ibid.*

35. It is interesting to speculate here: Was the overlap in location of clearance areas and communities of color not only ideological racism, but also a case of pragmatic racism? Disenfranchised people would have proved relatively easier to displace, given they cannot express their frustrations at the ballot box.

36. "The Wagner-Steagall Housing Act," *Architectural Forum,* September 1937, no page number.

37. Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 291-314, quote from 307.

38. Harold D. Smith (Director of the Bureau of Budget) to Rep. Sam Rayburn (Speaker of the House of Representatives), February 13, 1941, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

39. "USHA Speeds Defense Housing; 101 Projects to Cover Wide Area," *The New York Times,* August 1941, 3. Many feared it would not be enough, nor built fast enough. Writing in September 1942, well after the U.S. entry into the war, the AFL's Boris Shishkin, a longtime public housing advocate,

worried that "the war housing 'crisis' we have all been envisaging for the past two years is beginning to assume a very ominous and a very material shape," comparing the USHA administrator John Blandford to a sleeping Snow White who "looks so beautiful asleep that he isn't scheduled to wake up" and the authority's staff to a particularly lazy version of the seven dwarfs, singing "Off to Work We Go" but never actually beginning work. Boris Shishkin to Catherine Bauer, September 5, 1942, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

40. In July 1941, for example, the New York Times reported on the difficult cases encountered by up-state communities. "At least one important plant expansion planned by a defense industry up-State has been cancelled and started elsewhere because the company saw no way of housing its additional workers," the paper reported, noting that a general conservatism regarding growth and a fear of declining tax revenues (given public housing pays no taxes) had caused a reluctance on the part of several small and mid-sized communities. "Responsible government officials have reached the conclusion that unless there is a rapid acceleration of local effort to supply housing for defense industry workers... the situation may cause curtailment of plant expansion." "Up-State Industry in Housing Crisis," *The New York Times,* July 1941, Section F, 3.

41. Catherine Bauer to "Mr. Stanbery," United States Housing Authority, September 22, 1941, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

42. Sara Stevens, *Developing expertise: Architecture and real estate in metropolitan America.* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2016), 87-91.

43. "The Urban Land Institute," (brochure), n.d., Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers, Bancroft Library.

44. Steven T. Stewart to William W. Wurster, November 13, 1941, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

45. "NAREB on rebuilding blighted areas," *American Society of Planning Officials Newsletter*, Vol. 7, No. 10, October 1941, 89, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

46. National Housing Agency, *Bulletin 14: A Summary of Studies and Proposals in the U.S.A. on Assembly of Land for Urban Development and Redevelopment*, September 1944, 4, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

47. *A Handbook on Urban Redevelopment for Cities in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Federal Housing Administration, November 1941, iii-ix.

48. Catherine Bauer, "Post-War Housing Can Save the West, (Statement by Miss Catherine Bauer)", January 15, 1942, 1, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

49. Ibid., 2.

50. Bauer notes that many wartime factories would likely have to close, having been built in haste and likely not convertible to other uses, but that much war production might be replaced by manufacturing of goods for new markets, from an improved domestic economy driving domestic demand, to greater exports into the Pacific region, assuming that the U.S. would effectively replace the Japanese Empire. Ibid., 3.

51. Ibid., 5.

52. The source for this information is a brochure-cum-prospectus for the ULI sent to William W. Wurster in 1941. The back cover includes an address in Chicago, suggesting the brochure was produced prior to the ULI's 1941 move to Washington, D.C. "The Urban Land Institute," (brochure), n.d. Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

53. American Society of Planning Officials, "Conference on Planning Problems, Defense, Urban Rehabilitation," (program), February 13-14, 1941, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley..

54. Richard G. Baumhoff, "Attack on Urban Blight, to Succeed, Must Be Made on Many Fronts; Problem Present Throughout U.S.," originally published in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, February 16, 1941, reprinted in *American Society of Planning Officials Newsletter*, Vol. 7, No. 3, March 1941, 20, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

55. "Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, United States Senate, Seventy-Seventh Congress, Second Session, on H.B. 6483," excerpts, included in David L. Krooth to Catherine Bauer and Warren Jay Vinton, October 26, 1942, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

56. *Ibid.*

57. National Housing Agency, *Bulletin 14,* 27-28.

58. Senator Elbert D. Thomas, "Statement by Senator Thomas when introducing S. 953," April 2, 1943, reprinted in National Housing Agency, *Bulletin 14,* Appendix A, n.p.

59. National Housing Agency, *Bulletin 14,* 20. The NHA was formed as a result of Executive Order 9070, February 24, 1942, Exec. Order No. 9,070, 7 C.F.R. 751, 1947.

60. Senator Robert F. Wagner, "Statement made by Senator Wagner when introducing S. 1163," June 4, 1943, reprinted in National Housing Agency, *Bulletin 14,* Appendix A, n.p.

61. National Housing Agency, "Summary of Pending Federal Legislation: The Neighborhood Redevelopment Bill," February 19, 1944, in National Housing Agency, *Bulletin 14,* Appendix A, n.p.

62. Catherine Bauer, "The Public Housers' Responsibility for a Post-War Program," (pamphlet). New York: National Public Housing Conference, 1943, 11, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

63. UAW-CIO, "Must our heroes...," 1944, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

64. Alexander L. Crosby to Mr. and Mrs. William Wilson Wurster, October 31,1944, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

65. UAW-CIO, "Must our heroes...," no date.

66. Crosby to Wurster, October 31,1944, , Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

67. Catherine Bauer to Leon Keyserling, January 4, 1945. Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

68. *Ibid.*

69. United States Senate, Hearings before the Subcommittee on Housing and Urban Redevelopment of the Special Committee on Post-War Economic Policy and Planning, United States Senate," First session, pursuant to S. Res. 102, January 12, 1945, Testimony of Seward H. Mott, director, Urban Land Institute, 1602-1603.

70. Subcommittee on Housing and Urban Redevelopment, "Report to the Special Committee on Post-War Economic Policy and Planning, United States Senate," August 1, 1945, 17.

71. *Ibid.*, 19.

72. *Ibid.*, 22-23.

73. S. 1342, 79th Cong. (1945).

74. Quoted in Philip H. Hill, "Housing—Legislative Proposals," *Law and Contemporary Problems 12*, 1, Winter 1947, 175.

75. The League was founded as the Intercollegiate Socialist Society in 1905, changing its name in 1921. It's student branch, the Student League for Industrial Democracy, gained more fame after it renamed itself the Students for Democratic Society in 1960.

76. Harry W. Laidler, "Preface," in Charles Abrams, *A Housing Program for America.* (New York: League for Industrial Democracy, 1946), 4.

77. Charles Abrams, *A Housing Program for America.* (New York: League for Industrial Democracy, 1946), 31.

78. *Ibid.*, 29.

79. *Ibid.*, 6.

80. Daniel J. Hammond and Claire H. Hammond, editors, *Making Chicago Price Theory: Friedman-Stigler Correspondence 1945–1957*, (London: Routledge, 2006) xiii; see also Milton Friedman and Rose D. Friedman *Two Lucky People: Memoirs*. (Chicago:

University of Chicago Press, 1999), 122–123.

81. Milton Friedman and George J. Stigler, *Roofs or Ceilings? The Current Housing Problem*. (Washington: The National Association of Real Estate Boards, 1946), 8, 13.

82. *Ibid.*, 14.

83. *Ibid.*, 15

84. Samuel Livingston Long, *Housing for Everybody in Thirty Days: By Adopting the Long Housing Plan.* (pamphlet), October 10, 1946, Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley. Biographical information culled from 1940 United States Census, (Population Schedule), Glendale, Los Angeles, California; p. 59, dwelling 719, lines 55-56, May 3, 1939.

85. Long, *Housing for Everybody.*

86. Catherine Bauer to Alexander L. Crosby, April 18, 1947, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

87. "Let's Have Ourselves a Housing Industry," *Fortune,* 36, 3, September 1947, 2.

88. National Public Housing Conference, *A Housing Program... for Now and Later*. (Washington: National Public Housing Conference, February 1948, 1.

89. *Ibid.,* 8-9.

90. Hill, "Housing—Legislative Proposals," 177.

91. Ashley A. Foard and Hilbert Fefferman, "Federal Urban Renewal Legislation," *Law and Contemporary Problems 25*, 4, Autumn 1960, 645.

92. Harry S. Truman, "Statement by the President Upon Approving the Housing Act," August 10, 1948, *Public papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman,* 1948, vol. 4. (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1966), 436-437.

93. Housing and Home Finance Agency, "Statement by Raymond M. Foley, Administrator of the Housing and Home Finance Agency," November 24, 1948. Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

94. Foard and Feffersman, "Federal Urban Renewal Legislation," 647-648. The democratic bill was introduced two days after Truman's State of the Union address on January 5, in response to Truman's repeated call, within the speech, for a housing bill. This was likely partisan fallout from the House republicans spiking of S. 866 the prior session. Housing and Home Finance Administration, "To National Organizations Interested in Housing," January 10, 1949. In response to the introduction of a democratic sponsored housing bill, S. 138, the republicans introduced a rival bill on January 27. By mid-February, the cooler heads of bipartisanship had prevailed. Foard and Feffersman, "Federal Urban Renewal Legislation," 648.

95. Foard and Feffersman, "Federal Urban Renewal Legislation," 648.

96. John F. Kennedy, "Is There a Housing Shortage?" *Congressional Record*, April 14, 1949, 1.

97. Catherine Bauer, "RE: Modifications in the urban redevelopment provisions of S. 138 to permit community development on vacant land," (memo), February 4, 1949, Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers, Bancroft Library. See also National Public Housing Conference, "Why Title I of S. 138, 'Slum Clearance', should be broadened to aid and encourage community redevelopment on vacant land as well as the reconstruction of slum and blighted areas," (memo), February 15, 1949, Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

98. Foard and Feffersman, "Federal Urban Renewal Legislation," 649.

99. John F. Kennedy, "The Real Estate Lobby's Propaganda Versus the Actual Housing Situation." *Congressional Record*, June 7, 1949, 1.

100. *Ibid.*, 2

101. Foard and Feffersman note that the public housing provisions barely made the bill. A June 22 roll call vote preserved both the public housing and subsidized rent components by just five votes. Foard and Feffersman, "Federal Urban Renewal Legislation," 649.

102. "Housing help due for 135,000 farms: Loans for buildings, repairs are provided in new act signed by President." *New York Times*, July 17, 1949, 44.

103. Catherine Bauer to Leon Keyserling, January 4, 1945. Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

104. Foard and Feffersman, "Federal Urban Renewal Legislation," 649.

105. Housing and Home Finance Agency, Office of the Administrator, "Brief Summary of the Housing Act of 1949," July 1949, Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

106. Housing and Home Finance Administration, "Declaration of National Housing Policy," July 15, 1949, Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley

107. *Ibid*.

108. Housing Act of 1949, Section 101, S. 1070, 81st Congress, 1949

109. This is, of course, slightly an apples-and-oranges comparison. The 1949 Act was passed in late summer, while the 1949 budget was delivered to Congress eight months earlier, in January. Further, the funding for the 1949 Act was not to be dispersed in one lump, but rather over several years. Nevertheless, the comparison does give some sense of the scale of the program. It should be noted that, with inflation, the 1949 Act's $1 billion in grants and $500 million in loans amounts to more than $15.9 billion in 2018 dollars. President Harry S. Truman, "Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1949," January 12, 1948. Retrieved December 14, 2019, from https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/5/annual-budget-message-congress-fiscal-year-1949

110. Housing Act of 1949, Section 105, S. 1070, 81st Congress, 1949.

111. Section 110 containing definitions, starts that a "'Project' may include (1) acquisition of (i) a slum area or a deteriorated or deteriorating area which is predominantly residential in character, or (ii) any other deteriorated or deteriorating area which is to be developed or redeveloped for predominantly residential uses," so that housing is only a necessity if the cleared area was predominately non-housing prior to clearance. Put differently, any residential neighborhood declared blighted and cleared could be developed into virtually anything at all, so long as it met the provisions of the redevelopment plan which, in turn, was also crafted by local municipalities. Housing Act of 1949, Section 110, S. 1070, 81st Congress, 1949.

112. Roger Montgomery, "Introduction," in *Analysis of Blight Measurement Methods in the Community Renewal Programs of Eleven Cities.* Sophia Goodman, Compiler. (St. Louis, Missouri: Urban Renewal Design Center, Washington University, 1968), 1.

113. "Victory Dinner, Tuesday August 16, 1949, Passage of Housing Act of 1949." Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

CHAPTER 3
Oakland and the social science of opportunity: Housing, blight, and opportunism, 1938-1950

In early 1940, Catherine Bauer looked back on the Housing Act of 1937 with both appreciation and concern. The federal public housing program, whose legal footings she had helped to write and whose passage through Congress she had helped to secure, was not yet three years old, and already, there were projects underway across the nation. On its face, this would seem to indicate success, the growing implementation of a policy for which Bauer had long advocated. Yet there were difficulties, especially in California, the state that Bauer now called home.

That February, Bauer wrote to Nathan Strauss, the head of the United States Housing Authority, the agency created by the 1937 Act. Her goal was to give Strauss a slice of her own views as an academic, consulting planner, and activist whose work was largely outside of the federal administration. She prepared a report for Strauss, addressing public housing efforts in twelve cities across the south and southwest, along with a closer evaluation of the California situation.[1] In the cover letter, she took a jocular stance, framing it in the form of an imagined radio interview. Bauer quoted herself as praising the work of the USHA, describing it as

> *...an almost superhuman job of inoculating this great jittery cow of a country with a healthy serum to which unfortunately many of our most cherished national prejudices and sentiments are strongly inimical if not downright allergic.*[2]

The picture that Bauer painted of California in specific, though, was less rosy. The chief problem: declaring a residential area a slum. While most local authorities had expected opposition from conservative politicians and operatives—many of whom were members of the real estate industry with a vested interest in opposing public housing—some were encountering opposition from the residents of the very areas whose conditions public housing was meant to fix. Writing of a project in San Francisco, Bauer noted that the opposition there was "really not in the least representative groupings of the real estate interests" but rather the residents of the project area. "Even very poor people out here deeply resent any inference that their neighborhood is a slum," Bauer noted, adding that in Oakland the situation was "very bitter" with "huge signs on houses saying 'Stop Thief!' and so on." Supporters and staff members of the Oakland Housing Authority (hereafter the OHA) were apoplectic, and tried to engage in educational activities meant to persuade the residents of the benefits of the new housing program. Success, however, was limited, and the authority found itself with little political credibility.[3]

The experience in west coast cities such as San Francisco and Oakland drove home, in Bauer's view, that there was a fundamentally different problem to housing policy on the Pacific Coast. "This whole matter of 'slum clearance' has to be considered in a somewhat different light west of the Mississippi," she wrote to Strauss. The problem, as always, came down to the "equivalent elimination" clause of the Wagner-Steagall House Act of 1937, which required that for every

unit of public housing constructed, a unit of "sub-standard" housing had to be removed. In western cities, slums were few or far between, even though the need for improved housing was, in the view of the housers, still significant. Housing authorities in western cities, however, had a hard time finding slum lands that were suitable for clearance, and this in turn limited their ability to build public housing. One possible solution: Widen the scope of what qualified for clearance to include what Bauer described as the "merely 'blighted' or run-down area." Bauer cautioned against this, however, noting that blight was still far too vague, far too difficult for a lay public the see and therefore far more politically dangerous. "All the sites about which there has been trouble are perfectly sound from a city-planning point of view," Bauer noted, adding that "unless the authority is strong enough to put over an advanced course in city planning education, it will always run into difficulties."[4]

In the case of Oakland, city planners and housing advocates braved the danger and pursued the strategy of relying on "blight" to justify urban intervention. In this chapter, I will describe Oakland's attempt, from 1948-1949, to define blight for itself. Conducted by the staff of Oakland's Planning Commission, the results of these efforts were presented to the city council in June, 1949, in a report titled *Redevelopment in Oakland.* This effort was meant to seek out *and find* blight in the city, a subtle but important distinction, for if blight could not be located in the city, then federal urban renewal funds would not flow to Oakland. Thus this measurement of urban conditions was at its heart predicated on seeking out a specific outcome named by federal (and California state) legislation, an example of seeking out a problem to fit a newly available solution.

To locate blight, Planning Commission staff did not rely on a pre-existing definition of blight, nor on measures of urban conditions taken from an existing social-scientific model, such as the housing standards of the American Public Health Association. Instead, they created a hybrid model that combined data from several sources, and about diverse urban qualities. After tabulation, every census tract in the city was granted a numerical "penalty score" of zero through 121, with those properties carrying the highest numbers representing the worst conditions in the city. The Planning Commission's staff then simply declared that any census tracts in the bottom 11 percent were blighted. Several of the metrics used to construct these penalty point totals were problematic. Some seem arbitrary, such as lot size or overcrowding of dwelling units. Others—and this is especially true of the building age criteria—act as proxies for changing tastes in architectural styles. The 1948-1949 attempt thus is emblematic of how planners, policy-makers, and politically powerful members of the real estate industry constructed as a means to secure funding—as opportunism—and of their deploying blight as an argument about architectural obsolescence. Despite these characteristics, it is noteworthy that Oakland chose to anticipate the potential federal urban renewal program with a complex and ambitious process of citywide measurement of urban conditions, when a far more expedient (and less diligent) method of defining and measuring blight might have met federal scrutiny.

Shaping this attempt are several important events, ranging from the experiences of the OHA in the immediate wake of the passage of the 1937 Act, through the wartime anxieties of the city's elites about Oakland's future, to the passage of state-level redevelopment legislation in 1945 and the anticipation of federal legislation in 1948 and 1949. Ultimately,

Oakland's locally-derived blight survey anticipated the federal policy enshrined in the 1949 Act, in which every municipal government across the nation was free to define blight for itself, thus setting its own terms for access to federal funds.

Public housing as prequel: The 1937 Act and Oakland

Before examining Oakland's 1948-1949 blight identification efforts, it is first necessary to examine how the city responded to the Housing Act of 1937, with its linkage between urban housing reform and the existence of slums. Doing so gives us several key pieces of information. First, it helps set the contextual stage for the activities of the late 1940s, especially regarding the wider political picture of urban intervention in Oakland. Second, it helps foreground Oakland's blight identification efforts by examining how the concept of slum was itself both materially and politically troublesome. Third and last, it provides a locally manifested version of the national events recounted in the previous chapter, showing how an effort to reform urban housing conditions transformed, in part via wartime anxieties, into a search for nebulous problems that, in the eyes of the real estate industry, might work to destabilize and undermine urban property investments.

By the late 1930s, the ascendant political force in Oakland was the Knowland family, who controlled the leading newspaper, the *Oakland Tribune.* As one twentieth century political scientist observed, Oakland's politics were part of "a newspaper-centered coalition," where "the influence of the Knowland family has run through every facet of city life, from civic functions to social life to political influence." Beginning in the first decades of the twentieth century, members of the Knowland family served as directors of local banks and real estate firms, civic institutions, and political bodies. In 1938, the Knowlands acquired the newspaper, and through its influence, propelled the family into Republican politics, at both state and national levels. Family head J.R. Knowland, firmly in control at the *Tribune,* acted as a political kingmaker for others as well, and helped to build a Republican-party machine within Alameda County that lasted for decades, despite the growing number of Democratic registrations within Oakland. From the late 1930s well through the 1960s, if anything major happened in Oakland, it likely happened with the approval of the Knowlands, who had "unparalleled *direct* influence over the city's politics" (emphasis original).[5]

Knowland and his allies were part-and-parcel with the local real estate industry, and with the *Tribune* rooted in the city center, the Knowlands were direct downtown property owners, the kind of investors who historian Robert Fogelson has called "the downtown business interests." Members of this group included "banks, utilities, and insurance companies, the major newspapers, the property owners (and managers), and the commercial realtors," who tended to act both "on their own" and via group efforts such as chambers of commerce, real estate boards, and other civic institutions. As the major land owners within city centers, the "downtown business interests" were, in other words, the most powerful local members of the real estate industry, and in Oakland's case, this largely coincided with the Knowland machine. [6]

In the wake of the passage of the 1937 Act, (as well as a 1938 statewide act that enabled California municipalities to establish housing authorities,) the Oakland Planning Commission began an investigation of whether or not public housing was needed or "desired" within the city.[7] The commission during this time

included two general types of members. In the first group were four people united by a strong aesthetic sensibility, and included an architect, a parks manager, and a nurseryman. [8] The second interest represented on the commission was the real estate industry, with two members, both prominent in the Oakland Real Estate Board.[9] One union leader—who despite his position was in fact a Republican closely tied into the Knowland machine—rounded out the commission. As was typical of planning commissions, all were appointees of the mayor and city council.[10]

Serving the commission was John G. Marr. Born in 1903, the 34-year old "city planning engineer" had come to Oakland's government less than a year prior, after a stint with the federal Public Works Administration. Although Marr was trained as an engineer, his specialty was urban planning, with previous experience laying out subdivisions in Florida.[11] In the words of a later retrospective of Marr's career, published by Knowland's *Oakland Tribune*, Marr "started the city's urban renewal program [and] formed the Oakland Housing Authority."[12]

In April 1938, Marr delivered to the commission a report calling for the creation of the Oakland Housing Authority (OHA). Marr had compiled this report after the Oakland City Council asked the Planning Commission for advice regarding the 1937 Act. To help compile the report, Marr relied on an extensive statistical data from the Real Property Survey of 1936, and the 1934 Department of Commerce's Real Property Inventory program. (Additional supplementary data came from the newly formed U.S. Housing Authority.) The focus of the report: To assemble, through this data, a fuller picture of the actual housing conditions in the city, especially regarding its low-income, low-rent tenants.[13] Marr's conclusion was straightforward: To establish the OHA, and to petition the USHA to send representatives "to review available data, assist in organization of authority and outline steps for future procedure."[14]

Marr's characterization of the city's conditions is thus central to his argument in favor of establishing the OHA, and yet the way that these conditions are laid out within the report are vague, and may account for Marr's request for additional technical help from the federal government. The problem was that although Oakland did, in Marr's view, require help with low-income housing, its urban fabric did not conform to eastern ideas of the nature of urban decay. With its mid-nineteenth century origin, Oakland was, as Planning Commission staff noted in the 1938 report "a young city compared with Eastern cities of approximately the same size." This created problems when seeking to justify intervention into the local housing market. In the Planning Commission's words, Oakland

> *...now has many desirable residential areas which are definite municipal assets. Under such conditions it will be necessary to make a most critical investigation, examining all phases of the entire problem, if the city is to justify any housing project before the more acute manifestations of 'slums' found in the Eastern cities are eradicated.*[15]

Yet, according to the text of the 1937 act, the federal government could not justify the expenditure of funds for public housing unless there existed slum conditions that would, in turn, be eliminated by such a project. It was the classic problem of the "equivalent elimination" clause. It also nicely anticipated the same fears that, two years later, Catherine Bauer would express to Nathan Strauss at the USHA: That tying housing projects to the logic of eliminating slums was inadequate in western cities such as Oakland.[16] Marr's 1938 report is an explicit example of the

problem, for as the planner goes on to state "Oakland does not have slum areas," yet there "is much bad housing" [emphasis original].[17]

For those in the Oakland community who opposed the construction of public housing, the bind of the equivalent elimination clause might have been a welcome bulwark against what they saw as heavy-handed government interventionism, but in this case, even members of the real estate industry balked at such restrictions. Marr's report is not merely the work of an idealistic young planner, for its endorsement by the Planning Commission was also an endorsement by the real estate industry itself. Included in the back of the report are two letters of support. The first comes from the Building Trades Council, a labor group whose support for public housing was then typical of the larger national political landscape. The second, however, came from Frank D. Courneen, the president of the Oakland Real Estate Board and a preeminent member of the real estate industry.[18] Courneen's career went back well into the 1920s, when he had headed up the Alameda Investment Company, a major subdivision developer on its namesake island.[19] A well-healed executive, Courneen was nevertheless a Democrat, albeit one closely aligned with the rising star of Earl Warren and, by extension, the Knowland Republican political machine.[20]

In his letter of support, dated March 31, Courneen committed the Oakland Real Estate Board to an official position in favor of public housing. Courneen took a pragmatic view. There was indeed much housing in Oakland that was, in his view, substandard. There were also plenty of residents in the city who could not afford the necessary rents to make better housing possible to build and financially break even, much less make a profit. Moreover, several areas of the city remained in need of "clearance, re-planning and reconstruction." Most remarkable, Courneen stated "that the provision of such housing is a Governmental function of city concern."[21] The organization of the OHA would, as Courneen put it on behalf of the real estate industry, help to bring "orderly development and the elimination of blighted or 'twilight' areas."[22]

With the approval of the real estate industry, on April 29, just a month after the submission of the Planning Commission report, the Oakland City Council created the OHA, appointing as its first board a five-man team consisting of a hotelier, a building trades labor representative, two real estate industry executives, and as chairman, an executive from the Bank of America. The first board thus had no housers, although the labor member came from the American Federation of Labor, an organization that had, at the national level, supported the legislation leading to the 1937 Act. The interim technical staff during the first year was Marr, from the Planning Commission.[23]

A full accounting of the activities of the OHA is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is worthwhile to examine a few key events in the authority's first years of existence, in order to understand how the issue of measuring urban conditions—and the concept of blight—existed as a site of struggle in Oakland. Three series of events are of relevance. First is the OHA's casual approach to the identification of urban problems, as exemplified in its official reports, an approach that placed the construction of a housing project its primary objective, and the identification of actual urban conditions something to be manipulated in justification of that objective. Second is the OHA's casual substitution of the word "blight" for the word "slum" throughout its early planning documents, despite this condition having no status under the 1937 Act. Third

and finally is the issue of the relationship between the OHA on one hand, and a coalition of small property owners and the real estate industry writ large on the other, a relationship that was strained by the OHA's attempts to place the term "blight" or "blighted" on specific parcels of land and, in turn, destroy land values, as well as by the OHA's larger intervention into the local private housing market. This last issue is reflected both in the language and policies of the OHA, and in a dispute that arose between the OHA and owners of property upon which the authority wished to construct housing.

From its inception in Spring of 1938, the OHA—working hand-in-hand with the Planning Commission—placed as its first and overarching priority the establishment of a housing project to be funded under the auspices of the 1937 Act. The initial inclination was for the OHA to choose "a site occupied in the main by sub-standard housing," thus in keeping with the spirit of the 1937 Act and its stated goal of eliminating urban slums. The OHA also initially considered construction on unbuilt land, an option that was not generally in keeping with the 1937 Act but that conformed to the perspectives of housers such as Catherine Bauer, who felt that demolition of extant substandard neighborhoods served to increase project costs and reduce gross available housing units in a city, thus making public housing less effective.[24]

Rather than stick to this approach, the OHA punted its site selection to the Planning Commission, and the commission took an entirely different strategy. In a June 1939 report, the commission evaluated potential sites on factors such as the existence of "municipal facilities" with excess capacity, such as roads, transit lines, "available school facilities which were not being used to full capacity," adjacency to potential employers, and underutilized existing recreational facilities. Only two criteria related to existing housing conditions: "the extent of areas of substandard housing," and "the probable trends of blighted areas." While many of the commission's considerations thus affect the daily life of potential project residents, and thus are concerns over social welfare, they are mostly outside of concerns over the existing conditions of the built environment. As if to underscore the matter, the commission argued that a housing project in Oakland "could not be placed in the worst housing areas." To winnow the field, the commission engaged in "a process of elimination" in which potential sites were pitted against each other on such broad criteria.[25] In concentrating on matters unrelated to either the 1937 Act's slum clearance provisions—and only weakly considering the existing conditions of the city's housing—the commission's recommendations to the OHA are an example of a flawed process, one that placed project location ahead of the resolution of actual problems present in the built environment. Was this a ploy by a commission that was sympathetic to the houser cause, and sought to construct a public housing project in Oakland without saddling it with the burden of slum clearance? Or was this an attempt by officials to secure for the city a large public project, and the government contracts and associated employment it would bring? The motives are unclear, but in either case, this was urban diagnosis following prescription, a case of problem formation taking second place to a selected solution.

In 1938 Marr had asserted to the Planning Commission that Oakland had no slums, and Marr persisted in this view during his 1939 tenure as interim technical advisor to the OHA.[26] The words of the OHA's first annual report noted that

> *The situation in Oakland is by no means as difficult or deleterious as found in other*

> *older cities. It is, however, symptomatic of a future which undoubtedly will be no different than the past in other older cities unless the present policies are revised.*[27]

"Slum" does not appear here. In fact, it never occurs at all, not in any of the 74 pages of the Marr's first annual report for the OHA. "Slum" is not used to describe any part of Oakland, nor what parts of Oakland might turn into if the OHA failed its work, nor even to describe other cities whose conditions were far worse. This, despite the fact that the 1937 Act specifically ties the provision of public housing to the elimination of *slums*, and that the OHA sought to finance its activities primarily though federal monies authorized by that act. Instead, the OHA repeatedly used softer phrases, such as "substandard housing" or, even more frequently, variations of the word "blight."

Underlying this avoidance of the term "slum" and the embrace of the term "blight" were real estate considerations. The project site that the Planning Commission ultimately recommended, a twelve-block section of West Oakland, was justified not as a slum, nor even as blight. Instead,

> *...all of the area [was] classified as containing substandard housing or verging on such classification. The Commission and the Authority realized that their recommendations must be directed towards forestalling and limiting the spread of blighted areas. A project of this character offers opportunities for a direct attack upon the problem of blighted areas which is rapidly becoming one of the most difficult problems in all cities of over 200,000 population. Here in Oakland the possibility exists to do something <u>now</u> which can prevent more drastic and expensive measures if postponed until some future date. [Emphasis original.]*[28]

Put differently, both the Planning Commission and the OHA saw the role of housing as the prevention of future blight, and as a bulwark against continued spread of existing blight. Because planners and public officials of the time perceived blight as an active state of decay (rather than the ultimate nadir of the slum), combatting even the potential of blight was an act that served the interests of investors—of the real estate industry—rather than answering the needs of those in the city whose living conditions were at their worst.

Here, the OHA inadvertently touched on one of the key ways that its housing program was shaped by the interests of the real estate industry: In accepting the Planning Commission's recommended first site, the OHA also accepted criteria that placed commercial land use ahead of the needs of low income residents. The long duration of federal loans under the 1937 Act exacerbated the issue. As the OHA report notes, "... if projects were to be designed with a life expectancy of sixty years (the period of amortization of the loan)," then a housing project "could not" be put in the areas of Oakland with the worst housing conditions. "The extent of commercial and industrial intrusion mitigated against continued usefulness for low-rent housing use, if so located."[29] A public housing project, if placed too close to the port or the city's other industrial areas, for example, it might impact the growth of those latter uses. The Planning Commission therefore chose sites where housing would be out of the way of more profitable potential future land uses, and the OHA accepted this logic.[30]

The central concern, then, was how the construction of a public housing project might impact the local real estate industry. With several members of that industry serving on both the Planning Commission (which had taken on the task

of selecting the site for the OHA's first project) and the OHA itself, this in itself may be unsurprising. More interestingly, the OHA shaped its housing program to suit those real estate interests. Site selection was the first and most obvious of these cases. The Planning Commission's selection of a West Oakland site was driven in part by fears that its expected sixty-year lifespan would constrain future industrial and commercial growth.[31] Yet the Planning Commission also believed—and the OHA agreed—that the first project ought to be located in a purely residential zone so as to result in the demolition of a large number of residential units, because "the real estate market will be disturbed less if only the same number of dwelling units created are destroyed simultaneously."[32] This was the dual-edged sword of "equivalent elimination," here justified as a way of protecting the local real estate industry.

The OHA's acceptance of the Planning Commission's recommended site—a 19.2-acre West Oakland location between Cypress and Union Streets, stretching from 8th to 12th—placed that location in an unclear category (see Figure 3-1). Oakland planners—Marr at the head of them—had previously claimed there were no slums in the city, yet the 1937 Act specifically linked federal funds to the clearance of slums. The West Oakland site, known as "Project Cal 3-1," could not then be a slum, whatever the federal government wanted.[33] But was it blight? The OHA soft-peddled even this, calling Cal 3-1 only "in the first stages of urban blight," adding that "it is axiomatic" that the areas chosen for public housing in Oakland "will become more and more blighted."[34] In the OHA's view, blight was present in Cal 3-1, but it was not yet extensive.

The OHA called the incipient blight of Cal 3-1 an "opportunity... for the accomplishment of a dual purpose with housing projects," both to construct new housing, and to eliminate "blight" before it further spread.[35] Yet there was a different dual purpose at hand in describing Cal 3-1 as blighted. First, it served the interests of the real estate industry by purging rental housing at the bottom of the market, through enforcing standards. One of the more prominent criticisms of the 1937 Act as well as of the OHA was the notion that public housing would produce unfair competition for the private real estate market. Yet the OHA and the Planning Commission, guided by both the professional expertise of Marr and the partial political leadership of members of the real estate industry, saw this circumstance differently. As F.D. Courneen and the Oakland Real Estate Board had already noted, in their support of a public housing program, the bottom of the residential market was not profitable to serve.[36] The OHA built on this, stating that any facilities that did serve such markets were thus "substandard facilities in the lower rental range," and adding that "competition... should be welcomed by municipalities because of the tendency to make is necessary to improve such facilities to a reasonable standard."[37] The implication was clear: By supporting public housing, leaders in the real estate industry were advocating for an act of civic cleansing that would sweep away the embarrassment of landlords who failed to maintain their properties. Here, then, was an urban housing policy whose benefit was the policing of social standards within the private-sector real estate industry. As we will later see both in Oakland and in other sites, the support that upper-echelon members of the real estate industry gave to government intervention in the urban landscape would increasingly drive a wedge between those elites and the smaller members of their own industry.

Declaring Cal 3-1 a blighted area was also an act that directly benefitted the OHA, in that it was a way of stating that

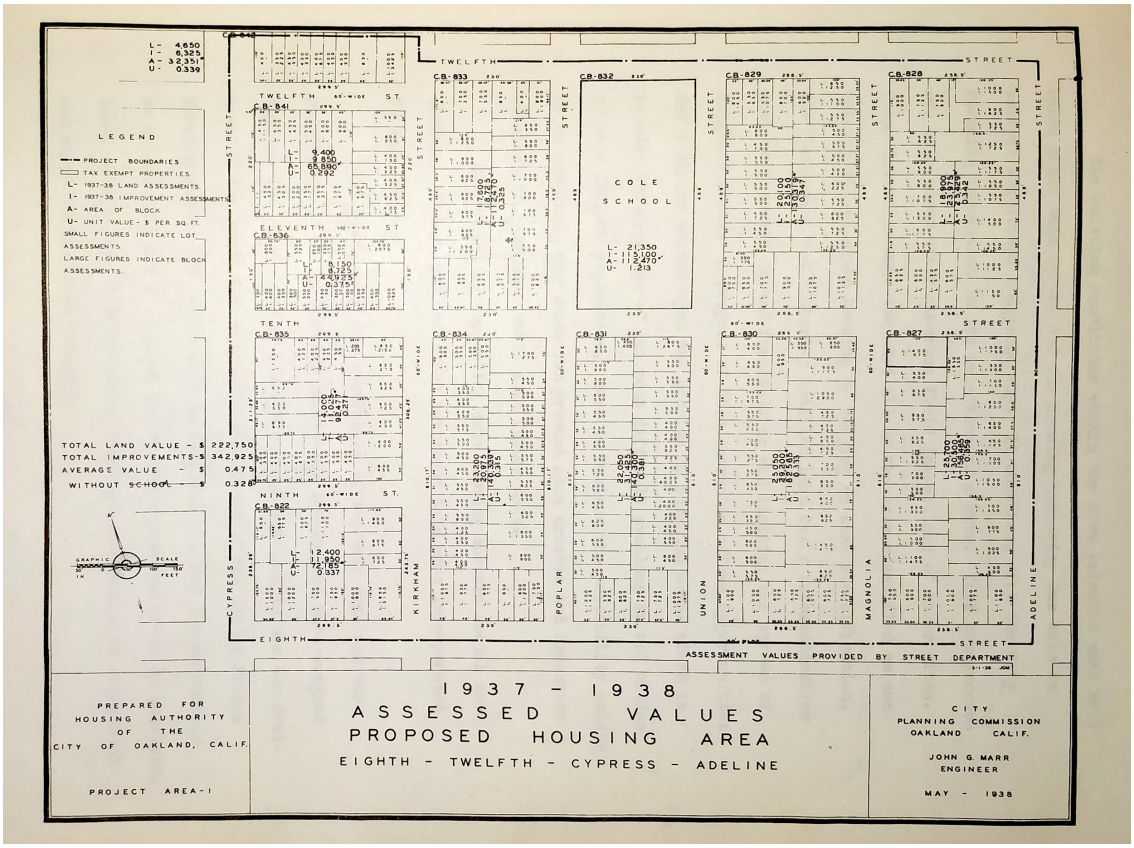
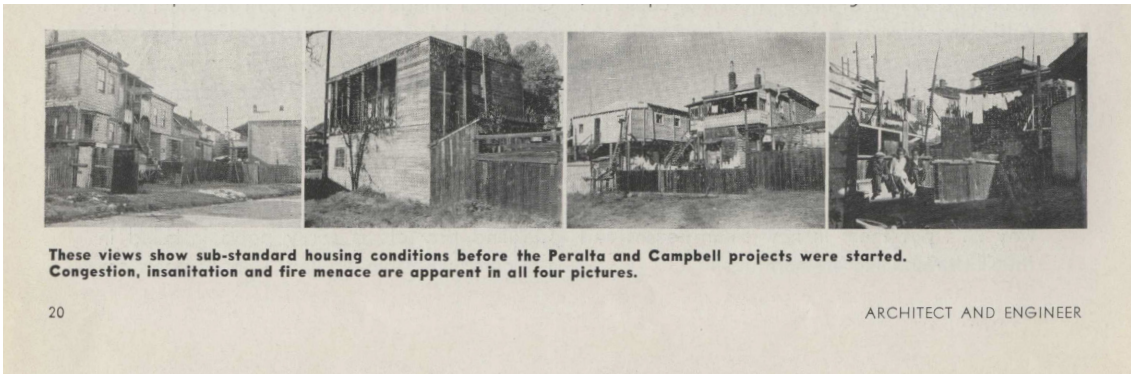


FIGURE 3-1: Site Cal 3-1, the location selected by the Oakland Planning Commission for the first Oakland Housing Authority public housing project, this one indicating the assessed values of properties in the area. Property value and, by extension, the cost of land acquisition became a minor political controversy in 1941, but ultimately did not block the OHA's construction activities. Only two other maps of Cal 3-1 were included in the OHA's first annual report, the other two being a map showing which extant structures were owner-occupied and which rented, while the other showed the footprints of the proposed project buildings. Caption. Source: Oakland Housing Authority, *First Annual Report of the Housing Authority of the City of Oakland, California.* (Oakland, California: Oakland Housing Authority, June 30, 1939), 38.



These views show sub-standard housing conditions before the Peralta and Campbell projects were started. Congestion, insanitation and fire menace are apparent in all four pictures.

20 ARCHITECT AND ENGINEER

FIGURE 3-2: *Architect and Engineer* depicted the neighborhood that had been cleared for the Oakland Housing Authority's projects through photographs of the backs of buildings, a widely used tactic of representational devaluation during midcentury. Source: *Architect and Engineer,* October 1942, 20.

such properties were, in another favorite OHA phrase, "substandard," and by extension, less valuable. The acquisition of an occupied urban site was, after all, far more expensive than the acquisition of an empty site at the urban fringe, an argument made by Catherine Bauer as far back as 1934.[38] Anything that drove down prices—including the act of declaring a place blighted—helped reduce the cost of land assembly.

Property owners in the Cal 3-1 site fought for higher compensation (or even to challenge the right of the OHA to condemn property), while union representatives such as C.L. Dellums at the Committee for Industrial Organization attempted to ensure fair deals for both African-American homeowners and future public housing residents. Despite such friction, the project went on to be constructed.[39] Site Cal 3-1 was transformed into "Peralta Villa," while another site nearby, started after Cal 3-1 but completed first, was transformed into "Campbell Village." Their completion—starting with Campbell Village in 1941 and followed by Peralta Village in 1942, transformed large portions of West Oakland, both materially and aesthetically. Both were superblock campuses of multi-family buildings, all designed in a minimalist, high-modernist style reminiscent of the European housing projects visited by Bauer during the early 1930s.

In October 1942, after the opening of these two projects, (as well as that of Lockwood Gardens, in East Oakland) *Architect and Engineer* magazine gave 14-pages of coverage to the OHA's efforts. Staff writer Fred Jones generally lauded the authority's work. The only discussion of the area's previous built environment takes the form of four small photographs halfway through the article, each showing wood frame structures dating to the late 19th century. Underneath, Jones's caption claims that "these views show sub-standard housing conditions before the Peralta and Campbell projects were started. Congestion, insanitation and fire menace are apparent in all four pictures."[40] (See Figure 3-2.) Each of the photos clearly shows a rear property view. Sidewalks and front porches, typical of houses from this era of construction, *are not evident*. In only one photograph is a street visible in front of a structure, and here it is unclear if this is in fact a city street, or if it is an alley. It is important to note that the OHA had at its disposal photos of the front sides of structures, including a view of 10th and Willow made in the earliest stages of dem-

FIGURE 3-3: 10th and Willow Streets in Weat Oakland, looking southeast at future location of the OHA's Campbell Village project. Even with early demolition underway, the street looks handsome, clean, and reasonably maintained. There is not even evidence of land use mixing such as industrial encroachment or jury-rigged retail uses. Moses L. Cohen for the Oakland Housing Authority, January 10, 1940. Oakland Housing Authority collection, Oakland Public Library, copl_079.

olition for the Campbell Village project. Those photos, however, show a street of maintained homes, some so handsome that, even mid-demolition, they appear clean and orderly (Figure 3-3). As other scholars have noted, depicting potential clearance sites through photos of the *backs* of properties was a standard tactic during this era, a conscious attempt to represent portions of the city through images of those areas never meant to be seen publicly and, therefore, often less orderly or maintained.[41]

The OHA projects also served as a means to distribute federal funds towards a local business field long aligned with the real estate industry, the construction industry, with its ecosystem of carpenters, plumbers, general contractors, nurserymen, concrete suppliers, and the like. In the same October 1942 issue of *Architect and Engineer* that had covered the OHA's efforts, at least six contractors who had been part of these projects paid for advertisements—two at full-page—to publicize their involvement. On the inside cover of the issue, for example, the Pacific Paint and Varnish Company (located in Berkeley) noted that its paints had been integral to the construction of Campbell Village and Lockwood Gardens, the latter of which was "a 100% P.P. & V. job," going on to note that the OHA projects were "well designed and well built... commanding nation wide interest" (see Figure 3-4).[42] Whether or not the OHA projects did anything to eliminate slum conditions or to combat what planners and the real estate industry saw as urban blight, they were certainly pipelines for federal funds directed to a traditional ally of the real estate interests, the local construction industry.

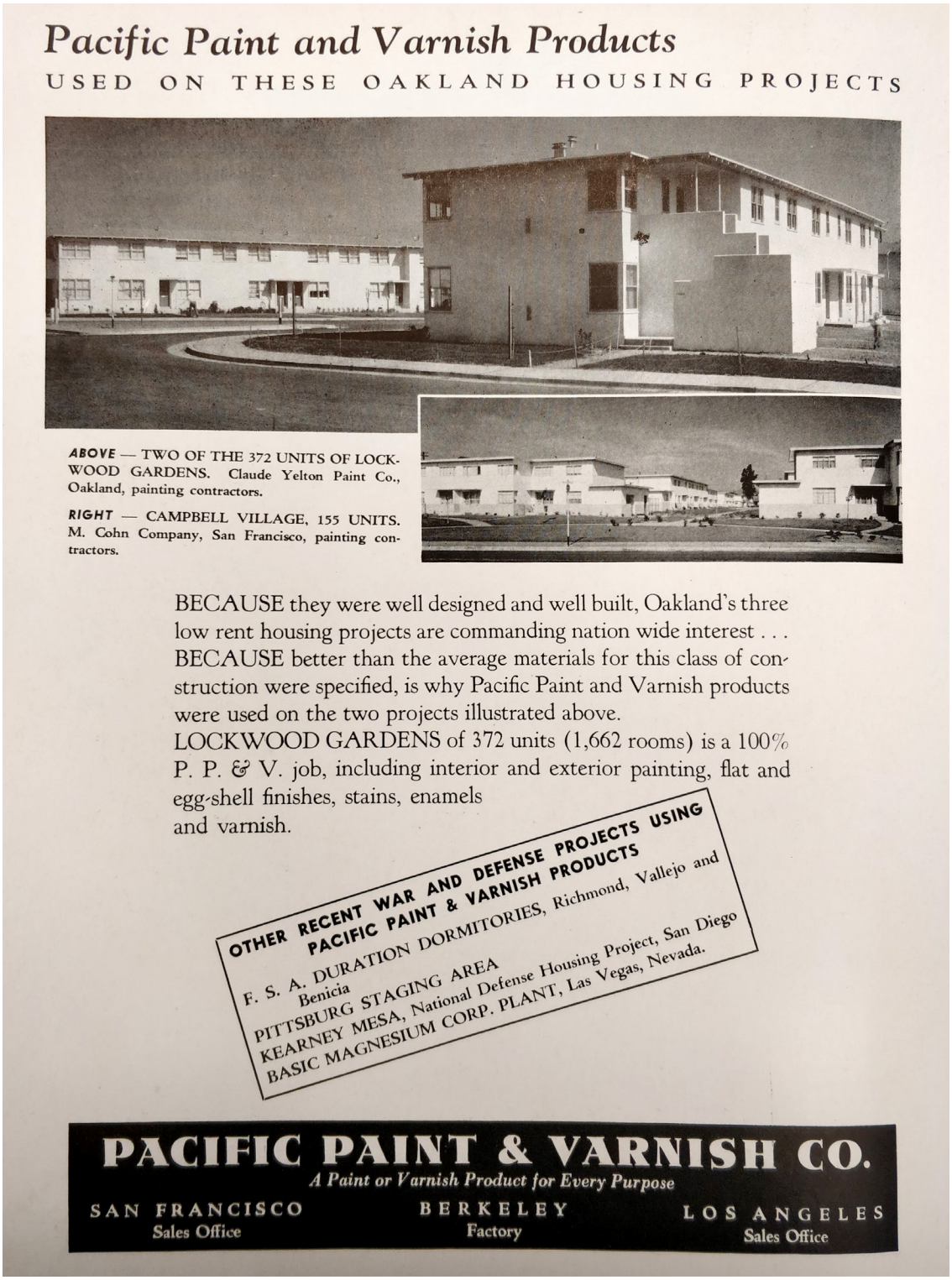


FIGURE 3-4: Pacific Paint and Varnish used the inside cover of *Architect and Engineer* to highlight its involvement with the Oakland Housing Authority's prewar projects. The company also used the thinnest of pretexts to claim this work as defense-related. Source: *Architect and Engineer,* October 1942, 1.

Oakland and the wages of a defense city

If the advertisements of the OHA-affiliated contractors in the October 1942 issue of *Architect and Engineer* were testaments to the potential of federal public housing monies in the local economy, they were also evidence of a shift towards a defense mindset in Oakland. Two contractors—Pacific Paint and Varnish, and K.E. Parker—chose to depict their work as defense-related. P.P.V. appended their advertisement with a notice that directed the reader's attention to "other recent war and defense projects using Pacific Paint & Varnish products," implying that both Campbell Village and Lockwood Gardens were defense worker housing.[43] Meanwhile, K.E. Parker Company, who had served as general contractors for Campbell Village, titled their advertisement with the tag line "A Parker Job for war workers" (see Figure 3-5).[44] The claims were only partially true. None of the OHA projects open in 1942 were products of defense housing authorized under the Lanham Act of 1940, and thus they were not defense housing. However, within days of the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the entry of the United States into the Second World War, the OHA passed resolutions granting preferential consideration to low-income applicants who were "engaged in a national defense activity."[45] OHA contactor claims that the authority's projects were defense housing, while thus not strictly speaking true, are nevertheless a fine illustration of how the issue of defense was reshaping the public discourse around every topic in Oakland, not the least of which was its built environment.

As several scholars have noted, the defense buildup prior to the war, and the continued defense activities during the war years of 1941-1945 had a profound effect on Oakland. With access to the sheltered waters of San Francisco and San Pablo Bays, the entire Bay Area rapidly became a nexus for shipbuilding. Defense plants drew workers from throughout the United States, so that by the end of the war, the entire region had grown significantly. In Oakland, this resulted in somewhere between 40,000 and 100,000 new residents by the cessation of hostilities in 1945. The demographics of the city changed rapid, as the African-American population nearly tripled, and the working classes grew, resulting in a significant growth in union power throughout the region.[46] As one scholar has noted, "the need for shelter overwhelmed the capacity of the private housing market," and temporary war housing built by the OHA under the auspices of the Lanham Act did little to alleviate the demand.[47] In the words of the OHA's first wartime report,

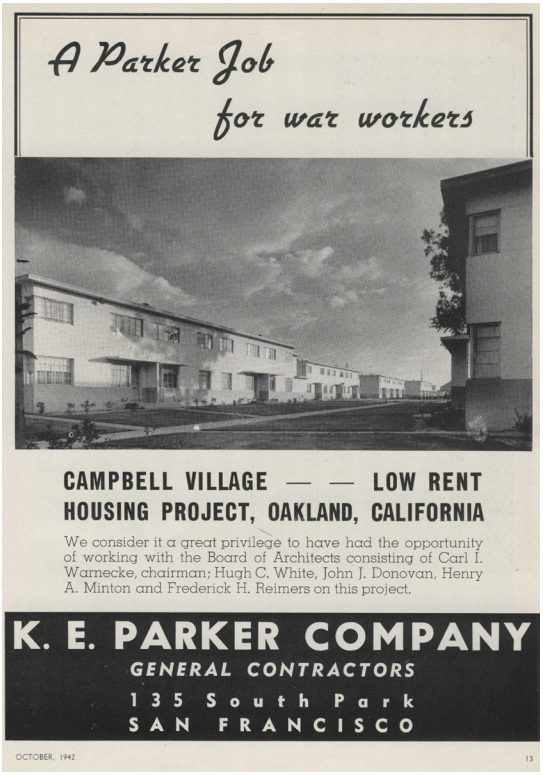


FIGURE 3-5: Like several contractors and suppliers who were involved with the Oakland Housing Authority prewar projects, K.E. Parker Company, a general contracting firm, used the pages of *Architect & Engineer* to highlight its involvement and, by implication, its readiness to take on defense-related construction contracts. Source: *Architect and Engineer,* October 1942, 13.

the result was a housing crisis that in some cases hindered the ability of Oakland-area industries to meet defense contracts. It was "a housing crisis such as has never before been experienced in the East Bay."[48]

In Oakland, such problems vexed the city's leaders, who struggled to predict the future peacetime world. Would Oakland decline, reverting to its prewar status as a quasi-suburb of San Francisco? Would it emerge as the new center of a larger, Bay Area regional metropolis? Or something else? To help work out possible answers, in March 1943 the Oakland City Council created the Oakland Postwar Planning Committee (OPPC). The make-up of the OPPC's general committee is a textbook definition of Oakland's urban elite. Forty-one persons strong, the committee was filled with representatives of four general interests: political leaders such as the entire city council; wartime manufacturers such as Union Diesel Engine, Chevrolet, and General Electric; the downtown-centric real estate industry, and the financial services industry. Mixed in were a handful of representatives from institutions such as the East Bay Municipal Utility District, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and the sole houser, OHA executive director Bernard J. Abbrot. The executive committee, meanwhile, was much tighter, including the mayor, the city manager, a representative of the Oakland Chamber of Commerce, one industrialist, two labor union leaders, and a representative of the San Francisco-based Bank of America. [49]

Those involved with the OPPC recognized the economic dangers that the end of the war might bring, and were willing to countenance subsidy during the coming "period of transition."[50] At stake was the need to "cushion the shock from a wartime to a peacetime footing" and, by extension, avoiding a slip back into the conditions of the Great Depression.[51]

The OPPC's final report was delivered in September 1945, after the close of the war, and contained two recommendations pertinent to the story of blight in Oakland. First is the acknowledgement that the strains of the war had taken a permanent toll on Oakland, one that had to be rectified through a variety of activities, from better building code enforcement to re-planning of whole swaths of the city. As the OPPC noted, "presently 'blighted' areas must be surveyed to determine whether re-development may be undertaken." The linkage here of "blighted" areas with a solution of "redevelopment" is a local mirror to the language of national debates in Congress and the media about the need for urban redevelopment. Second, the OPPC's recommendations for addressing any such blight are notable, in that they represent a significant shift in policy regarding the role of public intervention into the housing market. This is evident by the OPPC's opening recommendation to give "immediate consideration to the problem relating to the destruction of temporary housing units, built under the war housing program."[52] This referred not to the permanent projects constructed by the OHA in West and East Oakland, but rather to the inexpensive and quickly built temporary units authorized under the Lanham Act, such as those constructed within walking distance of the shipyards and drydocks of Oakland's harbor.[53] This elimination of units would, in turn, further strain the already overburdened local housing stock. The way to accommodate these newly evicted residents was, according to the OPPC, to trust the private sector. The committee's recommendation number 5 reads:

> *That all restrictions (Federal) – including priorities of materials, allocations of housing units, and certification of home buyers – regulating home building, be removed immediately, to permit home building by private enterprise, using private*

capital, to supply sufficient new homes to overcome the dangerous shortage of housing in the Oakland area, and to provide permanent housing for our expanded population as a replacement for present temporary war housing.[54]

This represented a significant change in urban policy for Oakland. Prior to the war, real estate leaders such as F.D. Courneen at the Oakland Real Estate Board had declared the provision of low-income housing as beyond the economic capacity of the private sector, as "a Governmental function of city concern."[55] In the postwar world, the provision of housing was to be exclusively private-sector, with the planning commission serving *only* as a regulator of where such housing might be suitable to build. The actual number of units built, as well as if they were to be single family or multifamily, was to be delegated to the local Chamber of Commerce.[56] Much of these recommendations were predicated on a belief that Oakland would experience a "period of exceptional construction activity which will surely follow the close of the war."[57] If blight was a factor in the landscape, it was one that the OPPC felt was best addressed by the private sector alone.

State and federal legislation trigger Oakland's search for blight

While Oakland's business and political leadership attempted to plan for a postwar city via the OPPC, other groups struggled with the same challenges at a state level. In November 1942, houser Louis Bartlett, a member of the California State Planning Board, penned a white paper titled "Reclamation of Blighted Urban Areas." In it, Bartlett—a houser and an ally of Catherine Bauer—laid out the fundamental specter of the postwar world: A return to the prewar conditions of the Great Depression. "War industries will then be slowed down or shut down, and several million soldiers will be home again, to be absorbed into the life and work of the community," Bartlett wrote. Yet, what would be waiting for them?

...street after street with abandoned or dingy stores, factories, and homes; or where the last are inhabited, they have become slums. We know about this, and city planners have adequate designs on their drawing boards to remedy it. But actual clearance of slums and rehabilitation of blighted areas has hardly begun.... [the] hurdle is the lack of legal machinery for acquiring land for large scale redevelopment on a reasonable and fair basis.[58]

Bartlett's white paper was meant to serve as an introduction to a piece of legislation penned by attorney Morse Erskine, to be introduced in the California legislature and, if passed, that would create a new type of municipal level entity with powers to redevelop urban land.[59]

It took three years and a great deal of lobbying by Bartlett and other housers before the state legislature finally gave in, passing the California Community Redevelopment Act in 1945.[60] This act allowed cities to declare urban areas meeting specific conditions as blighted, and then to create redevelopment agencies charged with making infrastructure improvements, property condemnation, clearance, land assembly, and resale of properties to private developers.[61] The Act's definition of blight was comprised, however, of twenty-four different factors, many of which were vague or even somewhat contradictory. For example, an area could be considered blighted if it had a "high density of population" or "overcrowding," but also if it had population loss. Also included were several factors seemingly difficult to measure, directly attributed to the built environment, or even to pin down to a

single geographic location, such as infant mortality or juvenile delinquency.[62] As one scholar put it, the definition of blight found in the California Community Redevelopment Act was "quite fluid - it was physical decay, social deviance, and economic misuse of the land."[63]

Although the California act offered municipalities the power to engage in redevelopment, the act was of little use while the availability of federal money remained a matter of Congressional debate rather than Congressional action. Federal legislation regarding the intertwined issues of urban redevelopment and public housing ground their way slowly through committees in Washington. It was not until 1948 that momentum in the capitol seemed to be mounting, and while no redevelopment bill passed in that year, the prospects seemed likely enough that the Oakland City Council finally decided to embark on a study of blight, as the OPPC had recommended it do three years prior. On April 20th, 1948, the council directed the Planning Commission and its staff undertake a citywide investigation of blight, in order to support possible applications for state assistance under the California act. Leading up the effort was John G. Marr, the same planner who had, in 1938, laid the groundwork for the establishment of the OHA.[64]

The efforts of Marr and his staff took a little over a year to complete, and it was these efforts that culminated in *Redevelopment in Oakland*, presented to the City Council in June 1949. In Marr's words, the sole reason for the project was to investigate how "the California Community Redevelopment Act... might apply to Oakland," and to "define the extent of 'blighted areas'" in the city.

Marr went on to state that the report was also meant to recommend some specific actions for redeveloping Oakland "for housing and industry." The choice of titling the city's investigation of blight as a plan for "redevelopment in Oakland," combined with the inclusion of recommended responses, are both clear cases of opportunistic attitudes towards the definition and identification of blight. The problem, as defined by the council and by Marr, was how to access funds through the California act (and, thanks to concurrent actions in Congress, the new federal urban renewal program), and this report was a solution to *that* problem, not to a specific problem of urban conditions. By the time the report was completed and ready for delivery to the Oakland City Council, the 1949 Act had passed Congress, and was safely awaiting the signature of President Truman. This impending funding source was thus the catalyst for finding blight in the city. As Marr's report went on to note, "up to the present time the lack of funds has been the principal obstacle in the path of redevelopment. However, the passage by Congress of the Housing Act of 1949 had changed the matter."[65] While the state act had helped, it had been federal action—taken while Oakland had compiled its report—that had sweetened the pot. With access to funding and the goal of engaging in redevelopment openly avowed as the driving motive behind the city's investigation of blight, it is of little surprise that Marr closed his cover letter by calling for the establishment of an "Urban Redevelopment Agency."[66]

The nature of how planners suggested those funds might be spent is critical to understanding why finding blight was so crucial in the eyes of Oakland's planners. One of the chief concerns: The continuing dire shortage of housing. The Second World War had brought a rapid increase in population, and all but two census tracts had seen population growth from 1940 to the last year of the war in 1945. Though wartime housing booms were in part due to military personnel be-

TABLE 3-1: Oakland Population and Projections, 1940-1950. Source: City Planning Commission, City of Oakland. *Redevelopment in Oakland.* (Oakland, California: City of Oakland, June 1949), 17.

Description	Population	Gain over 1940
1940 Census	302,163	n/a
1945 Census (with military)	400,935	98,772
1945 Census (without military)	369,196	67,033
1950 estimate	438,000	135,837

ing stationed in Oakland, the city's growth had still been considerable, a gain of more than 67,000. Additionally, the city estimated that the 1950 population would continue to climb to more than 430,000 people.[67] (See Table 3-1.)

This continued population growth was a potential cause of blighted areas, in that the city had increased in population but not meaningfully done so in housing units:

> *New dwelling units were produced at a rate barely sufficient to replace housing which became obsolete during the period 1940-1950, let alone sufficient to care for this rapid population increase. The average net increase for 1940-1948 was at a rate of 1,517 dwelling units per year. These include the permanent but not the war emergency and temporary dwelling units.... The dilemma of too many people for too few dwelling accommodations is obvious.*[68]

Relying on the continuance of wartime emergency housing was not a solution. The 1949 report characterizes these units as the city's "sorest blight problem... hastily and cheaply built of substandard materials... poorly maintained... beyond the salvage point.... squalid and unkempt." Further, the California Community Redevelopment Act had declared "all temporary housing... as blighted."[69] Planners with the city determined that the housing shortage was extreme, and was set only to grow worse. City staff concluded that by 1950, Oakland would have a housing deficit of 44,884 units.[70] A projection further out, to 1970, was equally dire (Table 3-2). As Marr's report continued, "Interpreting these data, it is clear that Oakland's deficit of suitable housing will steadily mount if current population and dwelling construction trends continue." Even if builders in the city were able to construct at a pace described by city staff as the "absolute maximum level," there would still be a shortfall of 48,319 dwelling units.[71]
This housing shortage was a potential opportunity for the real estate industry—if only they could find some land. The report took the position that the acute housing shortage in Oakland was best met *not only* with the construction of low rent housing—the type of thing that had already been built by the Oakland Housing Authority in East and West Oakland—but *all* types of rental housing, including luxury apartments. In the words of the report, "the stimulation of building in all fields—low, medium, and high rental—is a must."[72] While the report does advocate,

TABLE 3-2: 1949 projections of a housing shortage in Oakland, California. Source: City Planning Commission, City of Oakland. *Redevelopment in Oakland.* (Oakland, California: City of Oakland, June 1949), 42-43.

Description	Low Estimate	Optimistic Estimate
Dwelling unit construction rate per year	1,600	3,000
Number of suitable units—1960	94,206	108,206
Permanent new units added (1960-1970)	16,000	30,000
Less 15% of 1960 suitable units	14,125*	14,125*
TOTAL suitable units—1970	96,081	124,081
Estimated population—1970	550,000	550,000
Number of persons per family	3.1	3.1
Number of units required	172,400	172,400
DEFICIT—1970	76,319	48,319
*Note: 15 per cent of 94,206 units is used in both columns as the depreciation figure.		

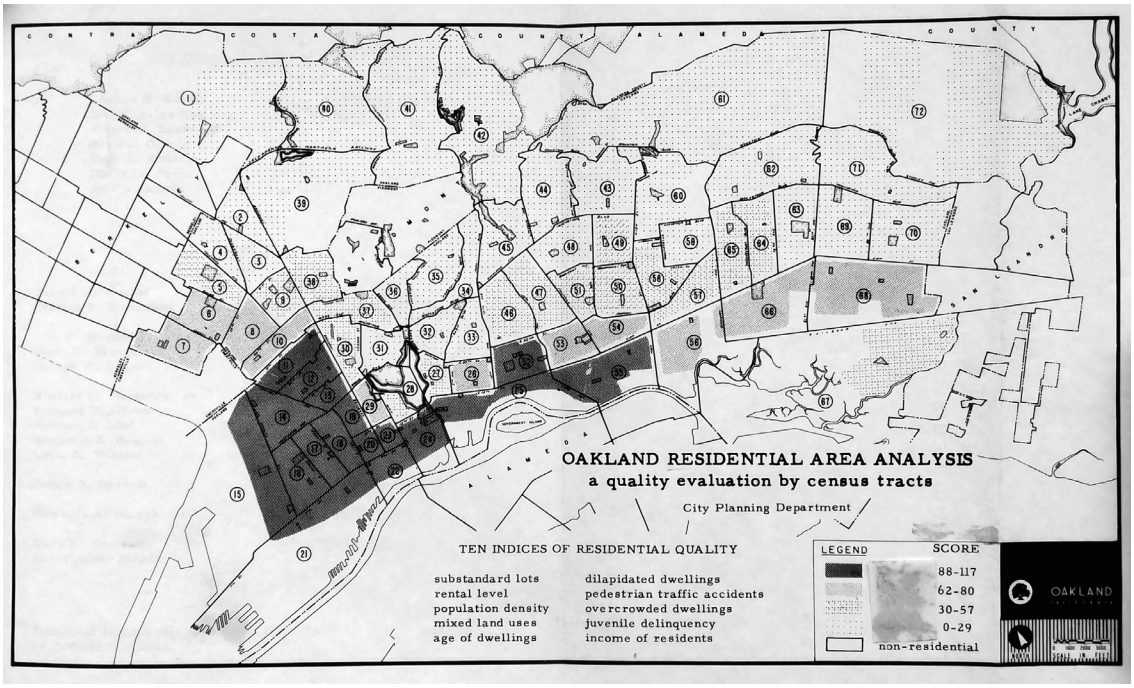
several times, for public housing projects, it also thus opens the door to using blight to justify the reconstruction of the city for market rate housing as well.[73] For urban elites interested in investing in new real estate development in Oakland, using the logic of blight (and the urban renewal tools it would enable) to support their ambitions was not a choice, but a necessity. As the report notes, by 1949 "practically all level lots have been absorbed by building."[74] If the city's urban elites wished to develop market rate or luxury housing, they would either have to clear large sections of the exiting urban fabric—an activity best accomplished through an urban renewal agency, with its power of eminent domain—or construct their projects in the already booming speculative real estate market of the suburbs. Finding blight in Oakland was thus necessary to generating buildable urban sites.

There was also a factor of fear motivating the actions of Oakland's planners to define, identify, and eventually remove blight from the city. The report opens with a stark, large, black-and-white map of the city, showing where Planning Commission staff had identified blighted areas. Their conclusion: essentially every neighborhood adjacent to the city center was blighted, with the exception of most of the Adams Point neighborhood to the northeast.[75] "This area lies in the heart of the city. It covers all of West Oakland, all of the Central Business District, and all area directly southeast of the business district as far as 14th avenue."[76] This location of Oakland's blighted areas largely mirrors famed planning consultant Harland Bartholomew definition of blight as a zone between the urban core and the wealthier outer ring neighborhoods, where land uses were in rapid transition.[77] (See Figure 3-6.) As the compilers of the 1949 report noted,

> *...large blighted areas now lie close to the heart of the city. Year by year this blight is spreading and sapping Oakland's economic strength. Decisive action is necessary to solve this problem once and for all.*

"Fortunately," the report concludes, "we now have a way to get the job done—redevelopment."[78]

FIGURE 3-6: In 1949, Oakland's planners believed that blight—shown here in black areas—surrounded the downtown core, which is represented here by the white trapezoid in the center. To the right (east) of downtown, the irregular white area is Lake Merritt, and the black section of the city further east of that is the future Clinton Park urban renewal area. Source: City Planning Commission, City of Oakland. *Redevelopment in Oakland.* (Oakland, California: City of Oakland, June 1949), unpaginated, between pages 7 and 8.



Oakland's home-grown social science of blight

Oakland's 1948-1949 effort to define and identify blight reveals not only how blight was deployed for opportunistic motives, but also how Marr and the city's planners constructed the idea, as well as their methods for identifying it in the landscape. This is, in essence, an attempt by Oakland planners to create their own social science of blight. Although the American Public Health Association's Committee on the Hygiene of Housing had completed its development of a blight identification method by 1945, and although their existence was known to city planning staff, Marr's staff chose not to use the APHA method in Oakland. The decision mirrored that of Congress, who likewise did not incorporate any definition for blight into any of its drafts for redevelopment and housing legislation.

The reason for such an omission is uncertain. As noted in chapter one, the APHA method was rigorous if not downright elaborate, and this may have been a reason that they were not more widely adopted in cities throughout the nation, much less in Oakland. Yet, as *Redevelopment in Oakland* went on to explain, there were other factors at play in this specific context. First, there is the influence of the 1949 Act, national legislation that had developed in parallel with the creation of *Redevelopment in Oakland*. The 1949 Act had, after all, eschewed a federal definition of blight (as well as totally eliminated the federal definition of slum that had, since the 1937 Act, been central to federal housing policy). The final text of the act

was grounded in the concept of "decentralization," or, as its Section 105 put it, "local determinations."[79] Under this logic, the determination of what constituted an urban problem, as well as how to address that problem, was to come from the municipal level of government. This policy position of the federal bill, whose text was relatively stable after its passage in the Senate in April 1949, may have influenced Oakland's planners to eschew any form of standardized methods for finding "blight," and suggested that a locally derived system would be closer in spirit to the 1949 Act.

Second, there was the influence of how "blight" was conceived of within the 1945 California Community Redevelopment Act, the state legislation that enabled the city to engage in redevelopment. The blight measurement factors of the state act were perquisites to legally establishing a redevelopment agency. Additionally, the state act was far more specific than the requirements of the federal urban renewal program. In short, finding blighted areas that qualified under the provisions of the state act should also mean qualifying for federal funds.

To find blight, the staff of the city's Planning Commission sought to identify and measure conditions based upon the 24 factors of blight outlined in the California Community Redevelopment Act of 1945. Several of these factors were, however, problematic, as "not all of these criteria can be intensively investigated on a city-wide basis, because of practical limitations." The factors listed in the act were not entirely empirical, and many were beyond the means of cities to measure.

Other omissions are more puzzling. Several factors of "blight" listed in the California Community Redevelopment Act were *not* enumerated in the Oakland report. For example, several economic indicators under the California Act's "Land and Public Utilities" theme were not examined. Further, the report did not comment on the lack of provision of public services, nor the cost of extending them, even though these would seem factors easily measured by city staff. Building activity—easily measured through the issuance of permits—had likewise not been included, surprising considering that a shortage of adequate housing was critical to the argument of the overall report. Similarly, the distribution of parcels ownership was not enumerated, even though such records would have easily been accessible from Alameda County, and despite the fact that the division of parcels among several owners is described several times within the report as a hindrance to redevelopment. Finally, the report does not address any of the factors listed in the California Act under the condition of "Value." (A full list of the state Act's conditions, factors, and sources for those factors measured in Oakland is shown in full in Table 3-3.)[80]

Several factors of blight considered meaningful by Oakland's planners were cases where urban conditions diverged significantly from emerging and mainstream thought about ideal urbanism were mixed land uses, considered by Oakland planners as "hazards to safety, health, and morals, as well as being objectionable from an aesthetic viewpoint."[81] Another was a relative lack of parks and playgrounds—based upon the American Public Health Association's recommended average of ten city. The quintessential American urban street grid system, because it facilitates through traffic and precludes superblock developments, was considered a negative factor.[82]

Some of the factors of blight described in the report are rooted in concerns for basic human welfare and public health. For example, the availability of

TABLE 3-3. Conditions and factors of blight, from the California Redevelopment Act of 1945, with sources shown for those factors measured in Oakland's 1949 efforts. Lines shown in yellow indicated provisions not measured in Oakland's 1949 blight measurement project. Source: City Planning Commission, City of Oakland. *Redevelopment in Oakland.* (Oakland, California: City of Oakland, June 1949), 15-16.

Condition	Factors	Source
Buildings	Defective design and character of building.	Not enumerated citywide in report
	Faulty interior arrangement.	Bathing facilities, 1940 U.S. Census
	Faulty exterior spacing with inadequate light and air.	Not enumerated citywide in report
	Over-age buildings, buildings needing major repair or unfit for use.	Age: 1940 U.S. Census. Repair: 1940 U.S. Census. Owner occupancy, 1940 U.S. Census
	Obsolescence because or poor sites, design, or mixed use.	Not enumerated citywide in report
	Unsafe structural conditions.	Not enumerated citywide in report
Population	High density of population.	1945 U.S. Special Census
	Overcrowding of dwelling units.	1940 U.S. Census, 1945 U.S. Special Census
	Inadequacy of recreation facilities.	Not enumerated citywide in report
	Excessive juvenile delinquency and crime rates.	Juvenile Crime: 1947 Report of the Oakland Council of Social Agencies, Crime rates for "Class I offenses" from Statistical Division of the Oakland Police Department, Jan 1947-July 1948.
	Loss of population.	1940 U.S. Census, 1945 U.S. Special Census
Land and Public Utilities	Uneconomic lot shapes and sizes.	Not enumerated citywide in report
	Street plan and subdivision not adjusted to topography.	Not enumerated citywide in report
	Improper or inadequate provision of public utilities.	Not enumerated citywide in report
	Land subject to inundation.	Not enumerated citywide in report
	Uneconomical use of land detrimental to the public health, safety, and general welfare.	Rent rates, 1940 U.S. Census
	Uneconomical extension of municipal services to outlying areas.	Not enumerated citywide in report
	Disproportionate expenditure for police and fire protection and other public services.	Records of the Oakland Fire Department for Jan 1947-July 1948.
	Dispersion of ownership of land.	Not enumerated citywide in report
	Lack of building activity.	Not enumerated citywide in report
Health	Unsanitary conditions breeding disease and increasing infant mortality.	TB rates: Oakland Health Department for 1944-1945 and 1947, Infant mortality: No source mentioned, data from 1945 only.
Value	Impairment of tax structure owing to depreciated property values.	Not enumerated citywide in report
	Inadequate tax receipts in relation to service costs.	Not enumerated citywide in report
	Disproportionate number of tax foreclosures.	Not enumerated citywide in report

sanitation facilities, such as bath tubs or showers, flushing toilets, and running water were all considered essential to private as well as public health. They were also tangible conditions that were easily measured.[83] Yet other health factors proved less clear cut. For example, the authors argue that "crowding and poverty lead to tuberculosis and other diseases," yet note that "no claim... [can be] made that there is a direct relationship between tuberculosis and any single environmental factor." [84] A link between health and the built environment was argued to be true, based on correlations between various conditions considered to be factors of blight, but arguments about causation were expressly avoided.[85]

Ideas of overcrowding and density were equally problematic. Overcrowding was highly subjective, with the Oakland effort defining it as wherever "more than 1.5 persons live in one room." [86] Yet the selection of this standard seems arbitrary, for it would classify a studio apartment shared by a couple or by two roommates as contributing to blight. More difficult was density, a factor that Oakland's Planning Commission staff openly admitted was problematic. As the report authors state, "it probably can validly be concluded that large families and doubling up are common among the occupants of blighted districts"[87] However, this did not necessarily mean that blight could be found by measuring density. The core of the problem: density could be found in both luxury apartment towers and in neighborhoods filled with both official and informal multifamily housing.[88]

Ultimately, the authors of the report admitted that subjective judgments lay at the heart of their blight assessment method "The real test of blight is not the scattered occurrence of a few of these symptoms," for [89]

> *...who can put his finger on a single cause for all this degradation? There is no single cause. The interaction of a great many forces produces blight. Therefore, the acid test of blight is to find where most or all of these traits occur simultaneously.*[90]

Blight, as conceptually constructed in Oakland, "is not a condition which can be directly observed or defined. It is a complicated pattern caused by many related conditions and exhibiting independent symptoms."[91] Because blight was not a single factor, it could not be measured empirically on its own. Instead, city planners in Oakland argued that blight amounted to a correlation between several discrete negative factors.

Because of this complication, the existence of blight was not always thought to be immediately evident to Oakland's citizens. The authors of the 1949 report worried that frequent exposure to blighted conditions had desensitized the public. "It is difficult for people who have lived in a community for a long time to be aware of its faults," the report states, noting that "human beings have an infinite capacity for adjusting themselves to their surroundings." This was not praise, however:

> *While this kind of thinking may result in peace of mind for the individual, it has proved disastrous to the city as a whole. All progress really stems from dissatisfaction. Unless people are conscious of the defects of their community and are genuinely anxious to improve it, very little can be accomplished.* [92]

Alongside the analysis of collated data, the report also contains passages of prose argument for the ills of blight. Areas of blight were defined as "grim, ugly neighborhoods" where

> *housing has fallen into disrepair, industrial and commercial uses have intruded among*

residences, traffic conditions are hazardous, recreation areas and other community facilities are inadequate, and the general environment has degenerated to an unwholesome level.

Blight is "ugly," linked to "disrepair," and to "degeneration" to an "unwholesome level." This language is not constructed around objective measurements of empirical data, but instead is rhetorical in nature.[93]

Blight as obsolescence and style

One of the more interesting factors of blight picked out in Redevelopment in Oakland is that of architectural obsolescence, as represented by factors such as "over-age buildings," and "obsolescence because of poor sites, design, or mixed use." [94]

The first and most intriguing of these arguments is how wooden structures were depicted as contributing to blight, merely because of their age. In Oakland, "the preponderance of all structures are wood-frame construction adapted to the milder climate." These buildings, the report authors argue, are "a lighter and less permanent type of structure than is found in the East."[95] The actual structural soundness of wooden buildings is not considered. Instead, a generalized argument is made that the older a structure is, the more it contributes to blight. In making this argument, the report authors openly acknowledge the subjectivity and lack of scientific data for this factor:

Fifty years is a long time in the life of any wood-frame building. No one has ever calculated with any degree of finality the economic life of various types of structures, but for wood-frame construction an accepted estimate is 30 to 35 years.[96]

The result of these concerns about the integrity of wood-frame buildings, however, was expressed in a factor that related only to the age of a building, regardless of its construction type. Older masonry or cast-iron buildings, though they would not share the same structural weaknesses as wooden frame buildings, were simply lumped in under the category of "overaged" structures. Further, it is unclear how or to whom "30 to 35 years" is "an accepted estimate," especially in a country whose eastern cities have wooden structures running to several centuries in age.

More important, in arguing for the factor of "overage" structures, the actual condition of the buildings is not considered in a building's age. In part, this was because actual conditions relating to the need for repairs and maintenance *was* measured, but as tabulation from different data, estimates of building conditions taken from the U.S. Census of 1940. According to this census data, 14.4% of the city's housing stock—14,930 units—were in need of "major repairs." Again, the clustering of these areas near to the city core is noted, and so too is the fact that this property was unlikely to change any time soon. "Generally, lots are too small and costs too high to permit owners to rebuild independently."[97] The use of census data to determine structural conditions is questionable. While the data were then less than ten years old, they were the product of personnel not trained in the inspection of buildings. The report writers acknowledge this flaw, noting that "it must be recognized that any evaluation made by a large number of investigators is subject to individual judgments," however "there is no evidence that the study is not representative of average conditions." One wonders why report compilers had not used data from the Work Progress Administration's Real Property Survey of Oakland. The RPS data were then only 2-4 years older than that from the census, but

unlike the census the RPS had been compiled by former real estate and building trades personnel, people trained to know about structural conditions. Further, the RPS had been comprehensive, including not just every residential building but also every residential unit in the city. These data were unlikely to have been significantly more outdated than census data from 1940. As the report elsewhere notes, "permanent residential construction has been at a standstill since 1930."[98]

Regardless, the use of 1940 U.S. census data means that the consideration of age did not contribute any meaningful knowledge about the structural integrity of buildings. What, then, was the purpose of considering structure ages? Put another way, just what ideas did "overage structure" really convey? Matters of style seem one possible meaning behind the concept of "overage," yet *Redevelopment in Oakland* approaches architecture in contradictory ways. On one hand, the report argues that "Oakland is a young and growing city compared with those in the East," and thus "the facades of Oakland's older buildings appear relatively modern compared with the relics in eastern cities."[99] Yet on the same page, the report argues that the "rapid increase in maintenance and upkeep costs and the factors of obsolescence and style certainly become very appreciable after 30 to 35 years."[100]

The report frames obsolescence as a mostly pragmatic concern relating to the arrangement of structure interiors and how they enable or hinder programming of spaces. Older houses close to downtown, for example, had often been converted from grand homes for individual wealthy families to either multiple unit rental properties, or offices for second tier professionals. If left alone, it was predicted that "more intensive uses" would result in the structures being "further subdivided." Allowing individual buildings to change or be replaced by the property market was characterized as not providing a solution. By implication, these older houses would need to be removed at a wholesale level in order for them to be replaced by structures that complied with modern ideas about good urban land use.[101]

Style, on the other hand, is more slippery, lingering in the background of the report's arguments on the age of structures, but rarely dealt with explicitly. While the report briefly praises the design of the Oakland Housing Authority's two West Oakland public housing projects, Peralta Villa and Campbell Village as "modern" and "well constructed," linguistically, it is mostly silent about architecture, except to the degree that styles are characterized as a weakness—as buildings grow in age, styles might mark buildings as obsolete.[102] Further, the Oakland report does *not* advocate for Le Corbusier style "towers in the park" approach to urban design. Heights were recommended to be limited to three stories, "except in private apartment developments close to the Central Business District."[103] The report cover (Figure 3-7) is perhaps the most compelling architectural argument. An acutely angled aerial image of a late 19th century neighborhood—probably in West Oakland—is shown large, with white lines ruled over it to reveal the rigid grid pattern of the city streets. The distant portions of the image fade into an industrial haze. Dark and foreboding, the image looks almost like a scarred, charred, still smoking battlefield. Superimposed over this aerial view is a kidney-shaped illustration of an idealized new urban housing development—except that it doesn't look urban at all. Instead, there are several long, low, horizontal white structures in a Modernist or International style, nestled into a lush green landscape studded with swimming and reflecting pools and framed by the branches of trees, all connected by curvilinear streets. The vision is reminiscent of

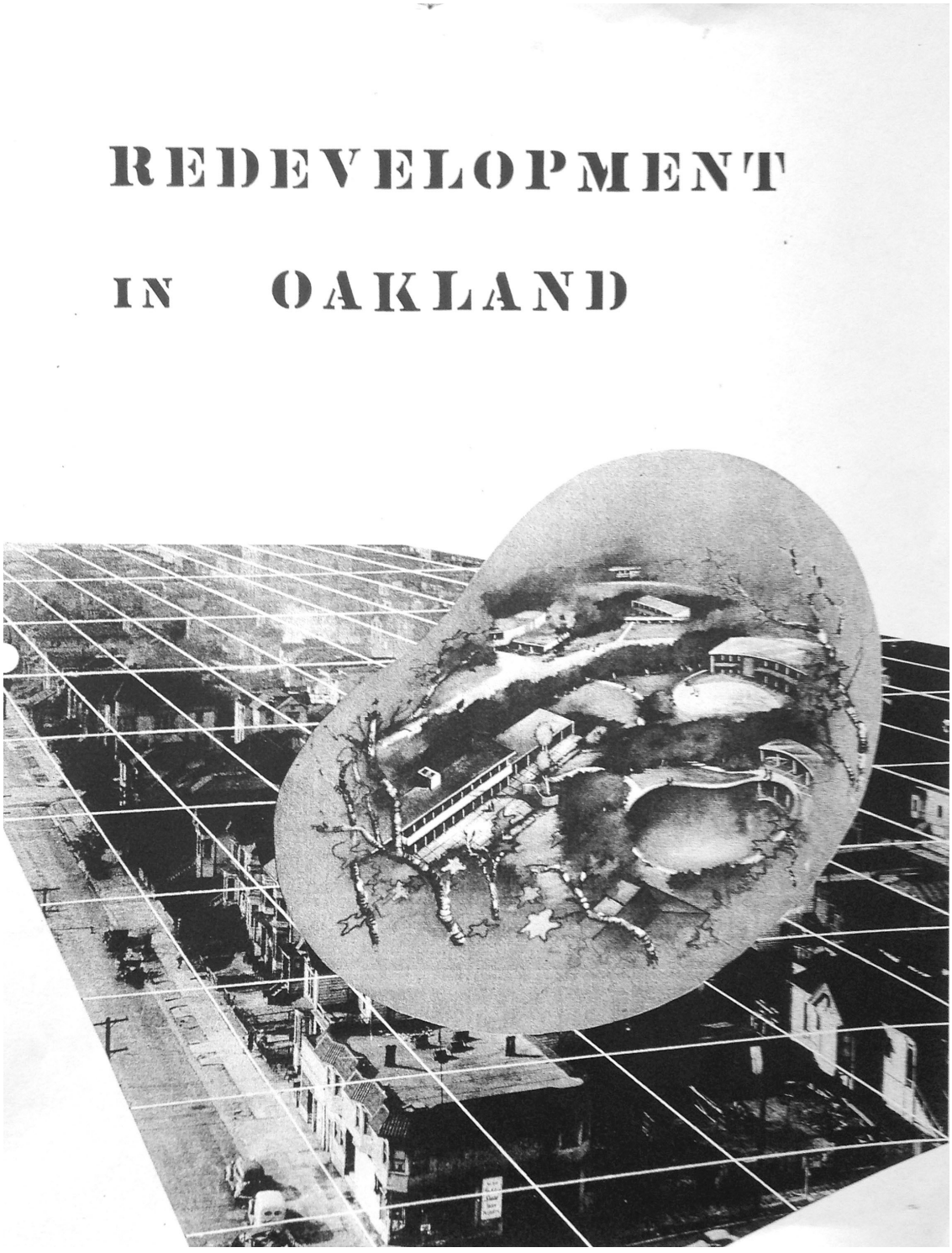


FIGURE 3-7: The cover illustration of *Redevelopment in Oakland* superimposed an illustration of a built environment similar to the kind of "modern housing" advocated by Catherine Bauer atop a grid of American-style urbanism. Source: City Planning Commission, City of Oakland. *Redevelopment in Oakland.* (Oakland, California: City of Oakland, June 1949), cover.

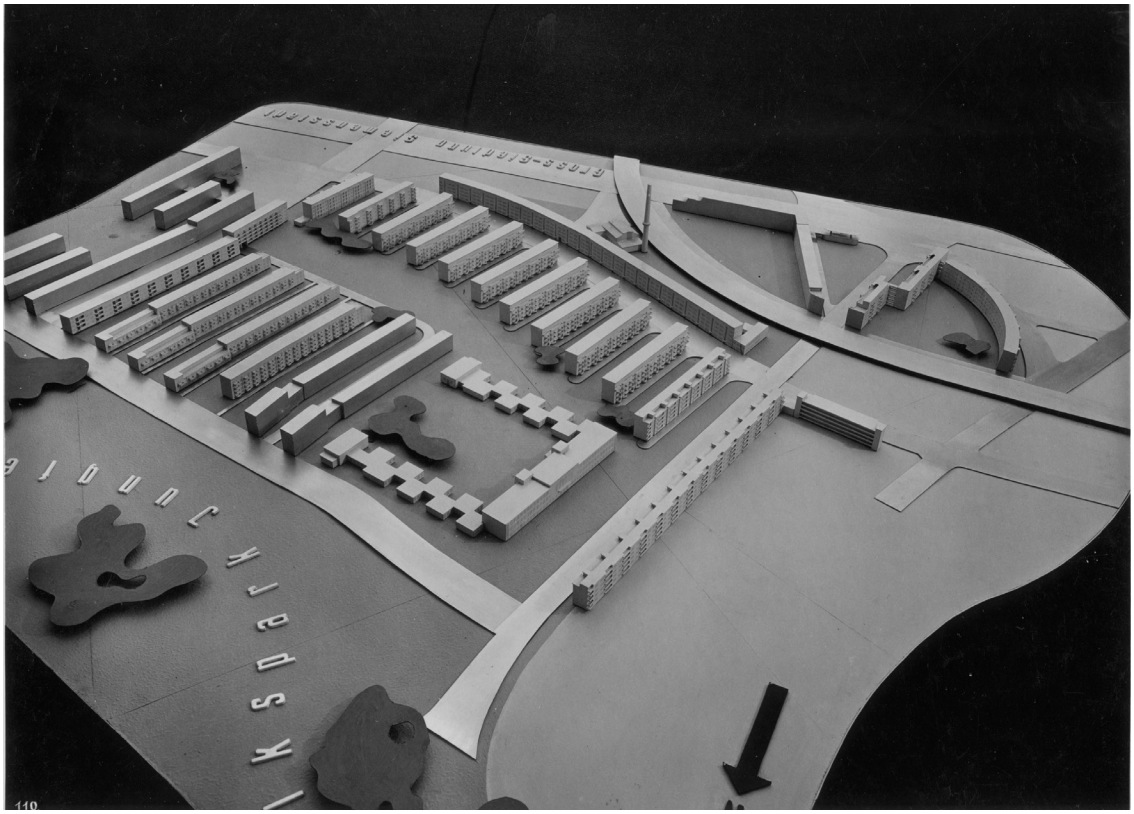


FIGURE 3-8: A model of Siemensstadt, a company town designed in the late 1920s in part by Walter Gropius, who had founded the Bauhaus. It and other large-scale European housing projects achieved fame among U.S. planners and architects thanks largely to Catherine Bauer's 1934 book, *Modern Housing*. The idealized city depicted on the cover illustration of *Redevelopment in Oakland* draws directly from the aesthetics of developments such as Siemensstadt. Note that the buildings in the model are a mix of rectilinear and gently curving, and that the vegetation models, as well as the model plinth, are organic or kidney-shaped forms. Both aesthetic themes echo in the Oakland illustration. ArkDes (Architecture and Design Center), Stockholm, ARKM.1970-103-031-07.

developments such as Siemensstadt (on the outskirts Berlin) or any number of European housing projects advocated in the 1930s by housing activist Catherine Bauer (Figure 3-8).

Contrasting the bleak representation of Oakland's urban grid with this watercolor image of Germany imported to the U.S. contributed to one of the report's recommendations to the city government: to propagate dissatisfaction. As previously noted, the report complains that Oakland citizens had become lulled into complacency with their built environment. "City dwellers only become aware of congestion, noise, ugliness, and dinginess when they return home from the unspoiled countryside. The shock of the contrast lasts until the blinders are put on once again and the disagreeable features of the city are shut out of their consciousness."[104] Removing these blinders was to be one of the chief tasks the city would have to take on in

order to support redevelopment. "The job that remains to be done, then, is to make the public aware of the need for improvement." Redevelopment was something that "everyone wants" and that need not be sold. Instead, citizens would have to be reminded constantly of the negative aspects of their city, of the ills that comprised blight and that were before them every day. Public support would be crucial if the city were to succeed. "Redevelopment is an issue which effects the future of every resident of Oakland," concludes *Redevelopment in Oakland*. "Is the city going to forge ahead through this process of renewal? Or is it going to retrogress and decay? The answer is up to the people of Oakland."[105]

Wither Redevelopment in Oakland?

Marr's report, identifying many areas of the city as "blighted," did not generate an urban renewal project in 1949. Oakland had no urban renewal that was authorized under the text of the original 1949 Act—its first federally funded project did not break ground until 1962, thirteen years after Marr's report.[106] The reason for the delay, at a basic level, is that the public support for redevelopment that Marr had hoped for did not materialize. Instead, *Redevelopment in Oakland* met with extensive resistance—much of it organized by smaller members of the real estate industry.

Even before Marr's report was completed, the future of public housing became a contentious topic in Oakland. As the California Housing Association described the situation,

> *Certain real estate groups hired sound trucks to go up and down the streets of the most crowded slum areas, blaring out the threat that "your homes are about to be torn down; you will have no place to live; public housing will not admit you; go down to the City Council meeting and fight this menace."*[107]

Leading the charge—and probably paying for the sound trucks—was the Apartment House Owners Association of Alameda County (AHOA), who, along with other real estate industry groups, opposed the Marr report. One allied group circulated a petition among residents and property owners in the areas Marr's staff had declared blighted, arguing that public housing was an unfair act of subsidy, discriminated against those who wished to one day buy homes, and, bizarrely, did not serve those with low incomes. Meanwhile, a property owner in the city's Hoover-Foster neighborhood circulated a paper flyer, steeped in Cold War rhetoric. "In the early days of the Russian revolution," it warned, "Lenin said that to make communism succeed, first destroy the little businessmen. This is the first step in that same direction."[108] In 1942, Catherine Bauer had observed the anger, anxiety, and opposition that residents of potential housing sites sometimes expressed, especially in West Coast cities.[109] By 1949, some members of the Oakland's real estate industry had learned to harness that anger and fear, and began to form a coalition between residents, small home owners, and landlords, a coalition fueled by a populist rhetoric that depicted those with a direct stake in "blighted" areas as the little guy, and actors such as planners and city officials as agents of tyranny. As a result, throughout late 1949, council meetings dealing with the matter routinely became demonstrations, filled with cheers and boos, and political chants of the word "recall!"[110]

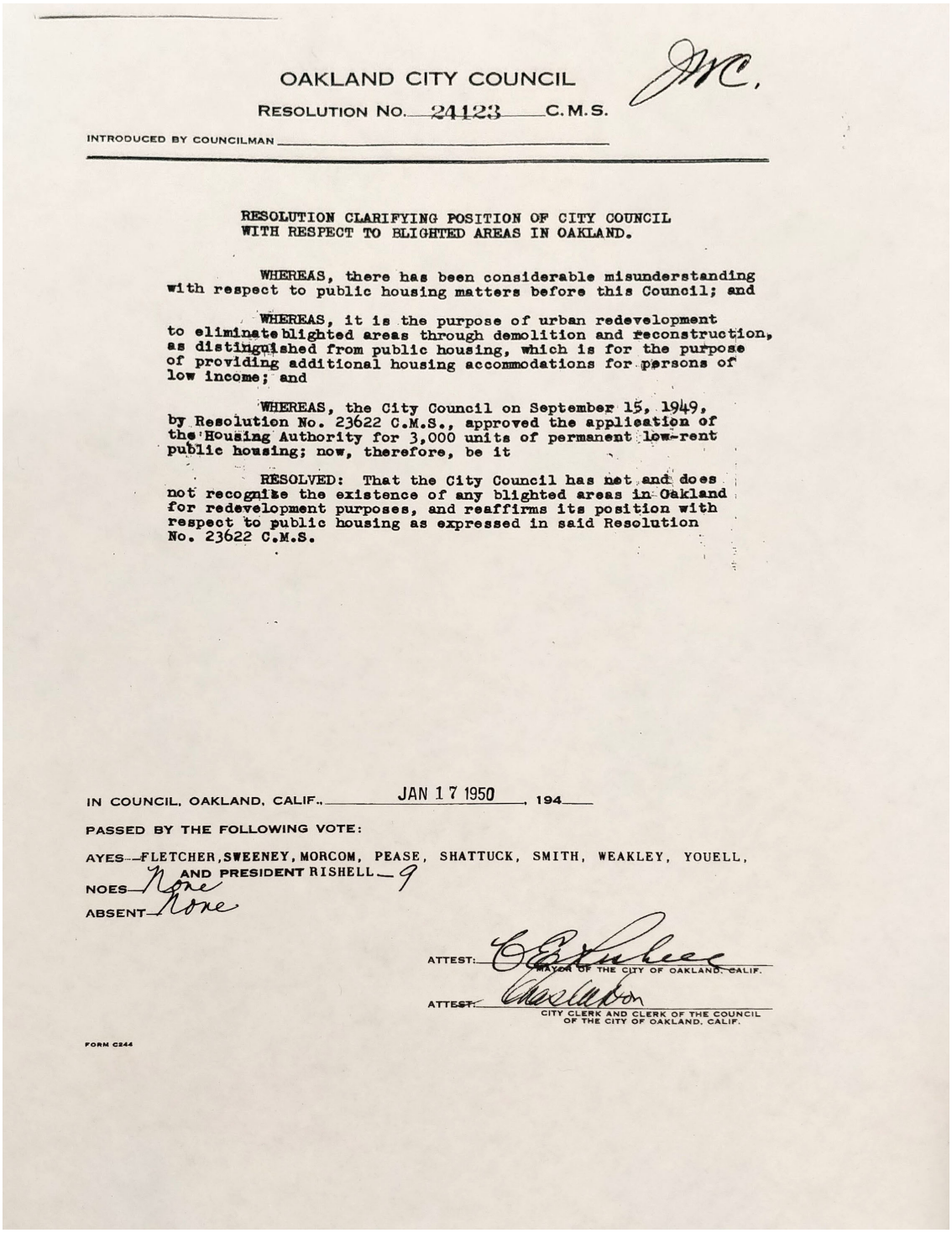
It was in this atmosphere that the Planning Commission, in a 5-4 vote, caved and refused to adopt *Redevelopment in Oakland*. The commission gave its official notice of rejection in a report at the Oakland City Council on August 24, witnessed by what the *Oakland Tribune* called "probably

the largest crowd to attend a council meeting in the history of the city."[111] There was, however a hitch: Through rejecting Marr's report directly, the commission failed to deliver to the City Council a formal recommendation regarding the report. The distinction is procedural and seemingly small, but politically, it was critical. Without a formal recommendation from the Planning Commission, the council was left to grapple with the issue of public housing on their own, with no other body on which to rest responsibility. The result was chaotic, with one councilor recommending that the Planning Commission's report be declared "out of order" because it did not address the council's prior instructions, while another councilor later claimed that the City Council itself could not either adopt or reject Marr's report, as the Planning Commission's rejection of *Redevelopment in Oakland* gave the report no status for consideration.[112]

Council action dragged on through several meetings, finally coalescing at yet another packed council meeting on September 15. The result: Housing yes, but the clearance of blighted areas, no. While Marr's report may have been rejected by the Planning Commission, his identification of a lack of low-rent housing in the city was difficult to ignore. Equally difficult to ignore was the president's signature on the 1949 Act, making available federal money in vast quantities. As Councilor Frank Youell put it, thanks to federal taxes, "we're going to pay for public housing whether we get it or not," noting that if Oakland didn't apply for such funds, they would be distributed in some other place. Yet there was more than mere pork-barrel politics at play here, as Youell went on to tell the crowd that "if we say we don't want any [public housing], we say there are no poor people in Oakland." The crowd, according to the *Oakland Tribune,* booed at this, but Youell's arguments persuaded enough of his fellow councilors, and in a split vote of 5-4, the council approved an application to the federal government for money towards an additional 3,000 units of public housing.[113] To address the blight controversy, the council specifically excluded such areas from consideration for public housing. Whatever units were to be built, they would be sited only on land that was "presently owned by the United States Government, or other public bodies, or on other vacant land."[114]

Despite this action of the Oakland City Council, opposition to housing programs did not go away, and nor did discussion of *Redevelopment in Oakland* and its characterization of widespread blight. Immediately after the September 1949 council meeting, the AHOA began to circulate petitions to recall the councilors who had voted in favor of public housing.[115] These efforts grew real enough that on January 17, 1950, councilor Frank Youell introduced a resolution to "clarify" the council's stance regarding blight in Oakland. Youell, perhaps thinking of the political activism on the part of the AHOA and others, noted that "many people in Oakland have been frightened by the idea of the condemnation of their homes or that the value of their property has decreased on account of being in a blighted area." Although the council had never accepted *Redevelopment in Oakland* and therefore never acted to declare any portion of the city as blighted, Youell felt that political circumstances required that they "reaffirm the action of the Council."[116]

Youell's resolution is short but fascinating (see Figure 3-9). It opened by acknowledging the "considerable misunderstandings" about public housing in Oakland, then continued with a deft separation of the concepts of redevelopment and urban blight, on the one hand, and public housing on the other. Restating the council's support for an additional 3,000 public housing units, its last clause states



OAKLAND CITY COUNCIL

RESOLUTION NO. 24123 C.M.S.

INTRODUCED BY COUNCILMAN _____

RESOLUTION CLARIFYING POSITION OF CITY COUNCIL WITH RESPECT TO BLIGHTED AREAS IN OAKLAND.

WHEREAS, there has been considerable misunderstanding with respect to public housing matters before this Council; and

WHEREAS, it is the purpose of urban redevelopment to eliminate blighted areas through demolition and reconstruction, as distinguished from public housing, which is for the purpose of providing additional housing accommodations for persons of low income; and

WHEREAS, the City Council on September 15, 1949, by Resolution No. 23622 C.M.S., approved the application of the Housing Authority for 3,000 units of permanent low-rent public housing; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED: That the City Council has not and does not recognize the existence of any blighted areas in Oakland for redevelopment purposes, and reaffirms its position with respect to public housing as expressed in said Resolution No. 23622 C.M.S.

IN COUNCIL, OAKLAND, CALIF., JAN 17 1950, 194__

PASSED BY THE FOLLOWING VOTE:

AYES—FLETCHER, SWEENEY, MORCOM, PEASE, SHATTUCK, SMITH, WEAKLEY, YOUELL, AND PRESIDENT RISHELL—9

NOES—None

ABSENT—None

ATTEST: _____ MAYOR OF THE CITY OF OAKLAND, CALIF.

ATTEST: _____ CITY CLERK AND CLERK OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF OAKLAND, CALIF.

FORM C244

FIGURE 3-9: Frank Youell's resolution to "clarify" the issue of blight in Oakland. Its passage formally rejected *Redevelopment in Oakland,* the work of John G. Marr and his staff. Oakland City Council, resolution 24123, passed January 17, 1950.

that "the City Council has not and does not recognize the existence of any blighted areas in Oakland for redevelopment purposes...." In a rare moment of unity on the issue of housing and blight, the resolution passed unanimously.[117] This resolution is the end of the story for Oakland's first attempt to systematically define and locate blight. After the Youell resolution, John G. Marr's *Redevelopment in Oakland* became little more than a dust-magnet on a shelf. The fight for public housing in Oakland did continue, and urban renewal projects—some of them justified by claims of repairing blight—did later take place within the city, but those stories go beyond the scope of this chapter. They also flowed from yet other ideas of what blight was and was not in Oakland.[118]

While the methods for identifying and locating "blight" developed within *Redevelopment in Oakland* were thus never applied to the city, and died among a political controversy, they still illustrate important aspects of how the concept of blight "worked" under the terms of the 1949 Act. First, *Redevelopment in Oakland,* and the locally-derived social science of blight it contains, is a rare and early example of a genuine attempt to meet the spirit of the 1949 Act. As such, it contained expressions of both the strengths and weaknesses of a policy that linked three ideas together: The provision for and/or improvement of low-income housing; the reconstruction of postwar American cities; and the elimination of "slum" and "blight" conditions. As argued previously, Congress treated blight as a set of arguments to be made locally, rather than as either an empirical and measurable quality, or as a social science based on standardized practices such as those established by the American Public Health Association. The events in Oakland illustrate how Congress's choice resulted in a local political battlefield in which blight—what it is, where it is located, and who defines it—played a central role.

As seen in Oakland, there were both strengths and weaknesses to blight's "slipperiness." In younger cities such as Oakland, slum conditions were rare if extant at all, yet, as houser activists, city planners, and even some members of the real estate industry repeatedly noted, this did not mean that Oakland had no housing problems, or had no need for low-rent homes. Congressional reliance on the existence of "blight," the definition of which was to be locally derived, meant that communities such as Oakland could tailor federal intervention to address the urban problems that were specific and likewise local. Such qualities sometimes made blight a more powerful rhetorical tool, however, this same slipperiness of blight sometimes made it weaker as well

Just as planners could assemble subjective arguments that said much of Oakland was blighted, those opposing the city's proposals (such as residents and property owners in so-called blighted areas, or those who opposed government intervention into the housing market) could use this subjectivity as a lever for arguing that blight was not present at all. There's a bit of the proverbial blind men and the elephant to the matter: Congress's inaction in defining blight is a way of denying local actors the ability to have a shared vision of it, leaving planners to grope at the trunk and call it a snake, and skeptics able to touch the elephant and call it something else entirely. For those in Oakland who valued the status quo—or who feared that its opposite, change, would bring only a loss in status—the slipperiness of blight was both a threat to their interests and an opportunity for opposition. It is precisely because of that slipperiness that several oppositional parties were able to convince the Oakland City Council to declare, in 1950, that they did not see any blight when they looked at Oakland.

Another important takeaway from the Oakland case study is the way it makes visible the struggles to convert a federal program originally intended to improve housing conditions into a vehicle primarily for the remaking of the American city, with housing as only a secondary concern. In Oakland, this was a process of turning a housing program into a form of pork-barrel politics, in which securing federal funds was the first priority, and solving urban problems came in second, if at all. While the prewar establishment of the OHA appears to have derived from genuine concerns about the inadequacies of the private housing market—about those tasks of which the real estate industry had admitted it was incapable—the postwar search for blight was a product of a city council searching for a way to get its fair share of federal monies. This was no secret, with councilor Frank Youell stating as much in an open session of the city council.[119]

It is also worth noting that in Oakland we can see a developing fracture within the real estate industry. Prior to the war, the real estate industry was represented in politics by prominent executives with large firms, civic leaders who despite their conservative political leanings sometimes admitted the limitations of private enterprise, the needs of the civic body, and the financial benefits of cooperation with federal agencies in the business of constructing capital projects. This is best exemplified by the support shown, in 1938, by F.D. Courneen and the Oakland Real Estate Board for the establishment of the OHA, which included a blunt admission of the limits of real estate development in serving the community.[120] After the war, a subset of the real estate industry began to emerge as a significant political force, as smaller members of the field (such as "curbstoner" real estate agents, entrepreneurial landlords, and small-time construction firms) began to advocate for a different political position, one that opposed government intervention into the urban landscape on principle. While these actors frequently deployed deeply ideological rhetoric as justifications—such as likening public intervention with a slide into Communism—there were pragmatic aspects to this opposition as well, for smaller members of the real estate industry did not have the money and influence necessary to control the flow of federal money to their own benefit. In Oakland, such smaller real estate stakeholders—as exemplified by the AHOA—were unlikely to see themselves as political insiders, as parts of the Knowland machine, even if those same actors politically identified as Republicans or (more broadly) as conservatives.

Oakland, then, is the harbinger of the political landscape that followed the 1949 Act. The prewar dynamic of houser versus the real estate industry was fracturing. In the vein of S. Livingston Long (discussed in chapter two), there was a populist movement ascendant within the real estate industry. The smaller members of this industry organized and began to gather power, and as they did so, they made more difficult the achievement of compromise between the housers and more establishment real estate interests. In Oakland, a populist wing of the real estate industry used scare tactics to make common cause between landlords and tenants, resulting in the rejection of *Redevelopment in Oakland*. A critical component of this successful campaign was the undermining of the legitimacy of "blight," attacking it for precisely what it was: A term so discretionary that it could justify the condemnation and clearance of nearly anything.

NOTES to CHAPTER 3

1. Bauer's comments are cautiously favorable, noting that Houston's efforts served as a good example for publicity, while those in San Antonio, undertaken in conjunction with the Army, were "a horrible example of waste, fancy business, [and] sky-high project maintenance." Catherine Bauer, "Memorandum to the Administrator," February 22, 1940, 4, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

2. Catherine Bauer to Nathan Strauss, February 22, 1940, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

3. *Ibid*., 4-5. Note that the official title of the OHA is the "Housing Authority of the City of Oakland, California," rather a mouthful. Scholars from Edward C. Hayes, writing in the 1970s, to Robert Self, writing in this century, have referred to the organization as the OHA, a much less cumbersome title than the possible acronym "HACOC." For this chapter, I've followed their lead, for the sake of readability.

4. Catherine Bauer, "Memorandum to the Administrator," February 22, 1940, 8, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

5. Edward C. Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy: Who Rules in Oakland?* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972, 14-17.

6. Robert Fogelson, *Downtown*, 63-64. See also Harvey Molotch's "The City as a Growth Machine." Molotch wrote this influential article in the mid 1970s, hard on the heels of the end of the federal urban renewal program, and was doubtless influenced by his observations of how that program had sometimes been used to fuel ambitious downtown projects, rather than make improvements in housing for the poor and working poor. To Molotch, the "downtown" interest is wider, a "growth coalition" that comprises of much the same individuals: newspaper owners and editors, wealthy developers, and leading politicians. Interestingly, Molotch does not mention professional planners even once, implicitly excluding them from his definition of the growth coalition. Harvey Molotch, "The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place." *American Journal of Sociology 82*, 2, September 1976, 309-332.

7. This was known as the Housing Authorities Law, passed by the legislature in March,1938. The law established the authority of California municipalities to create housing authorities, as well as to enter into cooperative agreements with them, to grant tax exemptions for public housing projects, and to grant to housing authorities the powers of eminent domain. Oakland Housing Authority, *First Annual Report of the Housing Authority of the City of Oakland, California.* (Oakland, California: Oakland Housing Authority, June 30, 1939), 15-16.

8. Membership included the following individuals: architect Edward T. Foulkes; East Bay Regional Parks District manager Elbert M. Vail; nurseryman Arthur E. Navlet (who in 1938 was the chairman of the commission, as well as a founding member of the Business Men's Garden Club of Oakland); Mrs. Elizabeth S. Smith, whose husband was an independent dentist, and who had first joined the commission in the early 1930s; These members might be thought of as the inheritors of the reform tradition—a tradition that was never fully at odds with the city's business interests, but that strongly favored issues such as beautification, public hygiene, and general civic order. Information on Foulkes comes from the Pacific Coast Architecture Database, (Person 1175, accessed July 29, 2019), http://pcad.lib.washington.edu/person/1175/, as well as "E. T. Foulkes Services Tomorrow," *Oakland Tribune,* December 12, 1967, 2. Information on Elbert M Vail culled from 1940 United States Census, (Population Schedule), Brooklyn Township, Oakland, California; p. 19, dwelling 6150, lines 9-13, April 20, 1940. Biography for Arthur E. Navlet from Martin Snapp, "The Original Happy Place," *California Magazine*, December 16, 2016, retrieved July 31, 2019 from https://alumni.berkeley.edu/california-magazine/just-in/2017-02-23/original-happiest-place-earth as well as from Arthur E. Navlet, "Howard Gilkey and the California Spring Garden Shows," *Pacific Horticulture* Vol. 37, No. 4, October 1976, 27-31. Smith's biographical information comes the 1940 United States Census, (Population Schedule), Oakland,

California; p 32B, dwelling 1047, lines 78-80, April 30, 1940. For more on Smith, see "Planning Board Members Honor Mrs. E.S. Smith," *Oakland Tribune,* March 29, 1951, 34.

9. Member James L'Hommedieu was a developer of luxury suburban housing, while Zura E. Bells was a real estate executive, and in 1938, both served in leadership positions with the Oakland Real Estate Board, a local business advocacy organization. For a brief sketch of L'Hommedieu's career, see the obituary of his son and namesake. Martin Espinoza, "James Howard L'Hommedieu Jr.," *Santa Rosa Press Democrat,* August 3, 2009. Retrieved July 29, 2019, from https://www.pressdemocrat.com/news/2261629-181/james-howard-lhommedieu-jr. Zura E. Bells, meanwhile, is remarkable for having been made a poster boy for correspondence school LaSalle in a 1929 advertisement in *Popular Mechanics,* which noted that Bells had moved from being "the manager of a music goods store" to "vice-president and sales manager of a prominent real-estate firm." "Discontent: The First Step to Success," *Popular Mechanics,* Vol. 52, Number 9, November 1929, 6. The 1938 city directory for Oakland lists Bells as the president of "Bells-Gilberg Ltd." and, rather unusually and ostentatiously, "member, Okld City Planning Comm." *Polk's Oakland (California)City Directory*, Vol. 45, 1938, 107. See also "Realty Board Elects Officers," *Oakland Tribune,* January 6, 1938, 32.

10. This was Charles W. Real, a leader in the local chapter of the Teamsters union. In 1933, Real, then the secretary-treasurer of the Oakland local of the Teamsters, was arrested on suspicion of hiring a former boxer to beat to death a non-union or "scab" taxi driver during a strike. Real was ultimately released when the district attorney, Earl Warren, dropped the charges on a lack of evidence. "Real Freed in Taxi War Beating Case," *Oakland Tribune,* February 24, 1933, 1. In both the 1942 California governor's race and the 1948 presidential election, Reel was a vocal supporter of Warren, and his obituary lauded him as "active in Republican political circles." See "Charles W. Real," obituary, *Oakland Tribune,* November 2, 1966, 16. In some ways, Real is an example of how the Republican political machine (with its strong ties to the Knowlands) united both the real estate industry and reform traditions. Another example of such political cross-fertilization on the Planning Commission was architect Edward T. Foulkes, who on one hand was, perforce of his occupation, a civic-minded aesthete, yet as designer of the 1923 Tribune Building tower, he was also directly tied to the Knowland machine and the local Republican party. "E. T. Foulkes Services Tomorrow," *Oakland Tribune,* December 12, 1967, 2.

11. Marr was born on August 25, 1903, in Brooklyn, New York. *California Death Index* (John G. Marr, SSN 578487313, accessed August 6, 2019, no persistent link). See also "John Marr, Planner, Dies at 64," *Oakland Tribune,* March 19, 1968, 22.

12. "Marr to Executive Post Here," *Oakland Tribune*, April 12, 1964, 34.

13. City Planning Commission, City of Oakland. *Preliminary Report of the Oakland City Planning Commission to the City Council: Need for a Low-Rent Housing Project in Oakland, Calif.* (Oakland, California: City of Oakland, April 5, 1938), 10.

14. *Ibid.*, 1.

15. City Planning Commission, *Preliminary Report*, 10.

16. Catherine Bauer to Nathan Strauss, February 22, 1940, 8, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

17. City Planning Commission, *Preliminary Report*, 11.

18. City Planning Commission, *Preliminary Report*, Appendix C.

19. "Mortgage Men in Statewide Organization," *Oakland Tribune*, June 13, 1926, M5.

20. In 1935, the Courneen household in Alameda was subject to a minor case of class crime, when two "youths" crashed a party, raided a medicine cabinet, and used razor blades found there to surreptitiously vandalize Mrs. Courneen's fur coat, as well as one of Mr. Courneen's suits. "Youths Sought for Malicious Mischief," *Oakland Tribune,* June 25, 1935. In 1948, Courneen, described as "a long-time Democrat," was appointed the head of a group calling itself the "Democrats for Dewey-Warren-Allen," supporting the vice-presidential bid of Earl Warren. "Dewey Democrats Name Head," *Oakland Tribune,* October 21, 1948, 6. Later in

1938, Courneen would praise the Oakland City Council for not raising its tax rate for the year, in a public display of fiscal conservatism. "Civic leaders laud council," *Oakland Tribune,* August 26, 1938, 21.

21. F.D. Courneen to City Planning Commission, March 31, 1938, reprinted in City Planning Commission, *Preliminary Report*, Appendix C.

22. Courneen to City Planning Commission.

23. Oakland Housing Authority, *First Annual Report of the Housing Authority of the City of Oakland, California.* (Oakland, California: Oakland Housing Authority, June 30, 1939), 9, 17. The first chairman, F.A. Ferroggiaro, was an executive with Bank of America in Oakland. Joining him were two members of the real estate industry, John P. Brennan, a developer, and Norman Ogilvie, a real estate executive. The hotelier was Charles D. Carroll, who was also involved with local theaters. The labor representative was initially Glenn W. Hawkins, of both the AFL and the Construction and Trades Council, but Hawkins was quickly replaced by Hugh S. Rutledge of the same institutions.

24. Oakland Housing Authority, *First Annual Report,* 29, 62.

25. *Ibid.*, 34-35.

26. City Planning Commission, *Preliminary Report*, 10.

27. *Ibid.*, 11.

28. Oakland Housing Authority, *First Annual Report*, 39.

29. *Ibid.,* 34.

30. Another way that planners for the OHA circumvented the declaration of slum conditions is evident in the authority's approach to meeting the "equivalent elimination" clause of the 1937 Act. Rather than declare any specific place a slum, the OHA came up with an agreement with Oakland's municipal government to count towards its elimination quota those buildings throughout the city that violated city building codes. "The City, through the cooperative agreement and equivalent demolition agreement entered into on July 13th, 1938, has been cooperating with the Authority in securing the demolition of sub-standard structures... whether wrecked voluntarily by the owners or condemned under the police power of the City." Each demolition was extensively documented, with testimony from fire and building inspectors, as well as city planning staff. By June 1939, 100 buildings, containing 150 residential units, had been demolished in this manner. A complete report of these activities was made available to the USHA. *Ibid.*, 62-63. The USHA apparently did not accept all of these cases, as the 1940 annual report of the OHA noted only "137 dwelling units have been eliminated" by these efforts, a number lower than the 1939 report. Nevertheless, that the USHA accepted even these 137 off-site, discrete demolitions towards the "equivalent elimination" clause of the 1937 Act is a notable workaround that allowed the OHA to help secure federal money without explicitly declaring any specific place in Oakland as a "slum." Nathan Strauss at the USHA, a dedicated houser, was no doubt more than happy to find a way around the strictures of the dreaded equivalent elimination clause. Oakland Housing Authority, *Housing Begins at Home,* (Oakland, California: Oakland Housing Authority, 1940), n.p.

31. Oakland Housing Authority, First Annual-Report, 34-35.

32. *Ibid.*, 62.

33. *Ibid.,* 49.

34. *Ibid.,* 40.

35. *Ibid.*

36. F.D. Courneen to City Planning Commission, March 31, 1938.

37. Oakland Housing Authority, *First Annual Report,* 32.

38. Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1934), 243.

39. Chris Rhomberg, *No there there: Race, class, and political community in Oakland.* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2004), 88.

40. Fred Jones, "Oakland's low rent housing projects," *Architect and Engineer,* October 1942, 20.

41. Chronopoulos, "Robert Moses and the Visual Dimension of Physical Disorder, 216-219;

42. *Architect and Engineer,* October 1942, 14-27, as well as advertisements in the same issue on pages 1 and 11-13.

43. "Pacific Paint and Varnish products used on these Oakland housing projects," advertisement, *Architect and Engineer,* October 1942, 1.

44. "A Parker Job for war workers," advertisement, *Architect and Engineer,* October 1942, 13.

45. Oakland Housing Authority, *Third Annual Report, 1941-1942*, (Oakland, California: Oakland Housing Authority, 1942), 3.

46. Beth Bagwell, *Oakland: The Story of a City,* (Oakland, California: Oakland Heritage Alliance, 1996), 232-243, as well as Self, 23-25, and Rhomberg, 96-98. Bagwell cites a higher number of about 100,000 new residents in Oakland, while Rhomberg cites a lower figure of 43,182 people, but cuts off his figures at 1944 rather than 1945. All three characterize this growth as strengthening labor politics in the city, ultimately leading to a flexing of power with a general strike in 1946.

47. Rhomberg, *No There There*, 98-99.

48. Oakland Housing Authority, *Third Annual Report,* 2.

49. The eight-person executive committee comprised of P.D. Richardson with the Bank of America; two city officials in the form of Dr. John F. Slavich, mayor, and Charles R. Schwanenberg, city manager; Harold D. Weber and Don W. Follett of the Oakland Chamber of Commerce, labor representatives Robert S. Ash of the Central Labor Council and J.C. Reynolds of the Building Trades Council, and local financier William Cavalier. On the 41-member General Committee, at least nine are directly identifiable as members of what Robert Fogelson has called the "downtown business interest" which, in the case of Oakland, largely coincided with the city's real estate industry and the Knowland political machine. Joseph R. Knowland himself, editor of the *Oakland Tribune*, sat as a member of the General Committee. Oakland Postwar Planning Committee. *Oakland's Formula for the Future*. (Oakland, California: City of Oakland, September 1945), 3.

50. Oakland Postwar Planning Committee, *Oakland's Formula,* 4.

51. As noted in the city's 1943 resolution establishing the committee, "...plans are maturing whereby the Federal Government will provide funds to assist with the construction of necessary projects, *as a measure for promoting employment...*" [emphasis added]. Oakland City Council, resolution 12478, passed March 2 1943, reprinted in Oakland Postwar Planning Committee, *Oakland's Formula,* 1-2.

52. Oakland Postwar Planning Committee, *Oakland's Formula,* 7.

53. For more on these developments, see Marilynn S. Johnson, "Urban Arsenals: War Housing and Social Change in Richmond and Oakland, California, 1941-1945," *Pacific Historical Review,* 60, 3, Aug 1991, 283-308, especially 299-301.

54. *Ibid.*, 8-9.

55. F.D. Courneen to City Planning Commission, March 31, 1938, reprinted in City Planning Commission, *Preliminary Report*, Appendix C.

56. In fairness, the OPPC recommended that the Chamber of Commerce work with Pacific Gas and Electric, the Oakland Real Estate Board, and the OHA on such matters, but the locus of direction is still given over to the Chamber, an unelected private advocacy group, rather than to planners working on behalf of a publicly elected government. Oakland Postwar Planning Committee, *Oakland's Formula,* 34-35.

57. *Ibid.*, 37.

58. Louis Bartlett, "Reclamation of Blighted Urban Areas, Preliminary Draft" white paper, November 2, 1942, in Louis Bartlett to Catherine Bauer, November 9, 1942, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

59. Louis Bartlett to Catherine Bauer, November 9, 1942, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft

Library, UC Berkeley.

60. Bartlett, a former mayor of Berkeley, California, was a tireless advocate and frequent correspondent of Catherine Bauer. His correspondence with Bauer contains accounts of several fits and starts towards a state redevelopment bill, and detail numerous private meetings and informal conversations to either persuade or take the political temperature of various potential stakeholders. See primarily correspondence filed in carton L 31, correspondence with the California Housing and Planning Association, 1942-1944, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

61. Michael Dardia. "Subsidizing Redevelopment in California," (white paper). (San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California, 1998), 2-3.

62. This list of factors of blight is taken from an interpretation of the Act made by Oakland planning staff in 1949, see City Planning Commission, City of Oakland. *Redevelopment in Oakland,* (Oakland, California: City of Oakland, June 30, 1949), 15-16. The same report notes that it is difficult to attribute some of these factors to the built environment or even specific locations. For example, should a crime be attributed to the built environment where it occurs, or where the criminal lives? See City Planning Commission, City of Oakland. *Redevelopment in Oakland,* 27-28.

63. Clement Kai-Men Lai. *Between 'Blight' and a New World: Urban Renewal, Political Mobilization, and the Production of Spatial Scale in San Francisco, 1940-1980,* (dissertation). (University of California, Berkeley, 2006), 150.

64. City Planning Commission, *Redevelopment in Oakland.* 10.

65. *Ibid.*, 10.

66. *Ibid.*, 4.

67. A 1945 Census found that there were 31,739 non-resident military personnel in the city. As these were considered to be only "temporary," Oakland planners removed them from their population count, resulting in a 1945 population of 396,196. *Ibid.,* 18-19.

68. *Ibid.*, 17.

69. *Ibid.*, 43.

70. *Ibid.*, 42.

71. As the report notes, these estimates are based upon 100% occupancy. "Provision of one or two per cent of vacancy which is desirable in any normal housing market to permit the tenant to choose a location, and the landlord to maintain his facilities, would require even more construction." City Planning Commission, *Redevelopment in Oakland.* 43.

72. *Ibid.,* 17.

73. Intriguingly, however, the Oakland report does not advocate Corbusier's "towers in the park" approach to urban design. Heights are recommended to be limited to three stories "except in private apartment developments close to the Central Business District." *Ibid.,* 60.

74. *Ibid.,* 8.

75. Downtown itself, shown bounded by Grand Avenue and Grove, 8th, and Alice Streets, is considered outside of the scope of the city's blight measurement project. City Planning Commission, City of Oakland. "Blighted Areas," (map). *Redevelopment in Oakland*, unpaginated, between pages 7 and 8.

76. *Ibid.,* 31.

77. Chronopoulos, "Robert Moses and the Visual Dimension of Physical Disorder," 210.

78. City Planning Commission, *Redevelopment in Oakland,* 62.

79. Housing Act of 1949, Section 105, S. 1070, 81st Congress, 1949

80. City Planning Commission, *Redevelopment in Oakland,* 15-16.

81. *Ibid.*, 34.

82. *Ibid.*

83. Intriguingly, the city's inventory of residential bath facilities did not include "transient hotels"

or "other non-household accommodations." Thus single-room occupancy hotels, a traditional source of housing for many low-income workers, temporary workers, and non-employable poor populations were excluded from consideration as dwelling units worthy of study. *Ibid.,* 20.

84. *Ibid.,* 31.

85. *Ibid.*, 29.

86. *Ibid.*, 17.

87. *Ibid.*, 25.

88. *Ibid.*, 18.

89. *Ibid.*, 31.

90. *Ibid.*

91. *Ibid.*

92. *Ibid.*, 62.

93. It is also interesting that mixing industrial and commercial uses with residential ones—the continued resistance to zoning—is another definition of blight. *Ibid.*, 10.

94. *Ibid.*, 15-16.

95. *Ibid.*, 19.

96. *Ibid.*

97. *Ibid.*, 21.

98. *Ibid.*, 32.

99. *Ibid.*, 19.

100. *Ibid.*.

101. *Ibid.*

102. *Ibid.*, 35-36.

103. *Ibid.*, 60.

104. *Ibid.*, 62.

105. *Ibid.*

106. The city's first redevelopment project, Clinton Park, would not launch until well past the middle years of the 1950s, and even then, it was a relatively weak program with no federal funds and focus on basic improvements to the public realm and private financing for "rehabilitation." See Alexander Benjamin Craghead, *Blight and the younger city: Unraveling the motives and methods of redevelopment* (master's thesis), UC Berkeley, April 2015, 45-56.

107. "Successful Public Hearings Held," *California Housing Association Newsletter,* November 15, 1949, 2, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

108. "Large crowd protests city housing plan," *Oakland Tribune,* August 25, 1949, 1

109. Catherine Bauer to Nathan Strauss, February 22, 1940, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

110. See both "Large crowd protests city housing plan," *Oakland Tribune,* August 25, 1949, 1, and "Public housing OK'ed, recall promised," *Oakland Tribune,* September 16, 1949, 1,

111. "Large crowd," *Oakland Tribune,* August 25, 1949. Voting to reject *Redevelopment in Oakland* were developer James L'Hommedieu, along with lumber executive David N. Edwards, pharmacist Emille M. Serpa (who was also the chairman of the commission in 1949), and attorney Homer W. Buckley. Three members, Elizabeth Smith (who did not work, and whose husband was a dentist), dentist Galen H. Drury, and insurance broker Harry W. Spencer all voted to support Marr's recommendations, but were outnumbered. Note that both L'Hommedieu and Smith were the only members serving on the 1949 Planning Commission who had also served when that body had approved Marr's recommendation to create the OHA in 1938. Sources for biographical information from the 1940 U.S. Census, the most recent available census. The 1950 census would be more useful, but it will not be available until mid 2020 at the earliest. Sources as follows. For Homer W. Buckley, 1940 United States Census, (Population Schedule), Oakland, California; p 10B, dwelling 803, line 57, April 13, 1940. Galen H. Drury, 1940 United States Census, (Population Schedule), Oakland, California; p 5B,

dwelling 215, line 53, April 10, 1940. David N. Edwards, 1940 United States Census, (Population Schedule), Oakland, California; p 11B, dwelling 875, line 47, April 14, 1940. Emile M. Serpa, 1940 United States Census, (Population Schedule), Oakland, California; p 12A, dwelling 304, line 3, April 28, 1940. Harry W. Spencer, 1940 United States Census, (Population Schedule), Oakland, California; p 14A, dwelling 279, lines 16, n.d. For sources on L'Hommedieu, see previous note 23. For sources on Smith, see previous note 22.

112. "Large crowd," *Oakland Tribune,* August 25, 1949.

113. "Public housing OK'ed, recall promised," *Oakland Tribune,* September 16, 1949, 1, 14.

114. Oakland City Council, resolution 23622, passed September 15, 1949.

115. "Notes from Around the State," *California Housing Association Newsletter,* December 27, 1949, 2, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

116. Minutes of the Oakland City Council, January 17, 1950, 209.

117. Oakland City Council, resolution 24123, passed January 17, 1949. The resolution is also, however, a remarkably apt work of parsing. Note that Youell's resolution states that the council "does not recognize" blight "*for redevelopment purposes*" [emphasis added]. It says nothing about recognizing blight for the purpose of building public housing. In fact, there would have been serious difficulties if the council had issued a blanket statement saying there was simply no blight at all in the city, for how, then, could the city justify its applications for funds under the auspices of the 1949 Act? Despite this crucial point, the *Oakland Tribune* reported the news with the headline "No blighted areas in Oakland is official decision of city." The story even quotes councilor Youell as saying "there is no such thing as a blighted area in Oakland," even though Youell's resolution very carefully says otherwise. "No blighted areas in Oakland is official decision of city," *Oakland Tribune*, January 18, 1950, 7.

118. The political controversies of 1949-1950 seemed to make the Oakland City Council gun-shy about both housing and redevelopment. Additionally, in 1950 Proposition 10 passed, making it state law that any public housing project in a California city must be approved of by voters in a municipal election. See Rhomberg, *No There There,* 128-129. For more on the first urban renewal project in Oakland, Clinton Park, see Craghead, *Blight and the Younger City* (master's thesis), University of California at Berkeley, 2015.

119. This refers to Youell's statement at the September 15, 1949 Oakland City Council meeting, discussed prior, as reported in "Public housing OK'ed, recall promised," *Oakland Tribune,* September 16, 1949, 14.

120. F.D. Courneen to City Planning Commission, March 31, 1938, reprinted in City Planning Commission, *Preliminary Report*, Appendix C, discussed at length earlier in this chapter. This was part and parcel with the tactics of who Fogelson calls the "downtown interests," the larger members of the local real estate industry. It is also a reflection of the national activities of organizations such as NAREB, and its ULI affiliate, who simultaneously poured skepticism onto Congressional ambitions for a federal-ly-funded intervention into American cities, and advocated for the inclusion of redevelopment provisions in any postwar housing bill.

CHAPTER 4
Blight and the betrayal of housing: Industry first in Portland, Oregon, 1950-1953

In the winter of 1944, two of Portland's establishment public institutions—the Library Association, and the Portland Art Museum—joined forces to host an exhibition and lecture series on modern city planning. Nell Unger, on behalf of the library, reached out with an invitation to Catherine Bauer, in hopes of enticing her to join "an evening panel discussion" that would include "one or two lecturers from the east in the field of the history of city planning and techniques. We should like very much," Unger added," to have you cover the social aspects."[1] Bauer accepted the invitation, travelling to Portland in late April.

In her speech, Bauer stated that she was relatively unfamiliar with Portland, and had relied upon several correspondents to give her some context. Nevertheless, she seemed to have drawn an accurate assessment of the city's political mood. Outlining the city's many unfulfilled plans, Bauer noted Portland's reputation for "conservatism:"

> *There is no American city to which a single epithet so universally applies as to Portland. Coming across the continent during the past month, whenever I said I was stopping here the immediate comment was always identical. 'Portland' said all kinds of people in a dozen places, 'is a very conservative city.' But, radical and reactionary alone, they said it with respect, as one might say that a mountain is high or a river deep.*[2]

Bauer attempted to recast this conservatism as "a kind of solid strength, a city with a sense of its own dignity and responsibility," and went on to argue that the first of those responsibilities was "the use of Columbia River power to develop peace-time industry." To do so, Portland's leaders would need to engage in serious planning, ensuring that there was sufficient power and, as critically, sufficient space to support new industrial development tailored to the needs and desires of the postwar consumer. As Bauer noted,

> *...possible impediments can surely be overcome if the Northwest, and you in the Portland region, know what you want and need, and go after it with some of the energy and spirit with which you started out. But you cannot hamper yourselves with romantic distinctions between 'public' and 'private.' The job requires plenty of both kinds of enterprise, just as a great reclamation project does....*[3]

Bauer's words wove together several disparate ideas: Portland as a conservative city built upon private enterprise; Portland as a potential node of postwar industrial expansion; and Portland as a place that could only achieve that by blending public and private efforts. Her words also connected social progress to the pioneer ideal, a powerful myth in this northwestern city.

The conservatism that Bauer identified would, however, give shape to federal intervention in Portland. In this chapter, I will show how the city's first experience with locating "blight" and engaging in federally-funded redevelopment further exposes the growing political tensions of the American city at midcentury. As in

Oakland, Portland's planners wrote their own definition for blight, one assembled in great haste and using data that were, at best, outdated and vague. Locating blight in Portland, in turn, was not driven by concern for urban housing conditions, but rather served the interests of area industrialists and the commercial wing of the local real estate industry whose goal was to clear space to house their vision of the postwar manufacturing economy, even if this meant the total elimination of housing from the city's redevelopment plans. This experience makes evident how the slipperiness of blight was recognized by the real estate industry as an opportunity for the redirection of federal housing funds towards purposes having nothing to do with housing in the slightest, a total betrayal of the spirit of the 1949 Act. This is thus the story of how the real estate industry coopted public housing and housers to attempt their own uses of blight.

Their efforts were, however, a failure. The first proposed urban redevelopment project in Portland was defeated at the polls in 1952. In the wake of this defeat, the coalition between the housers and the larger members of the real estate industry, already tentative, broke down completely. The result was an open political struggle in which the latter chose to abandon their pretense of politeness, cooperation, and civic-spiritedness rather than support the construction of even a single new public housing unit within the city.

Portland is thus an important illustration of both the opportunities and challenges that come from the slipperiness of blight. It also shows how that slipperiness enabled planners and members of the real estate industry to manipulate federal funds intended for housing reform towards ends that had little or nothing to do with housing, thus helping to illustrate how the concept of blight allowed the Housing Act of 1949 to become a venue for non-housing projects. This is thus in some ways an explanation of how the federal public housing program became primarily a federal urban renewal program via the powers conferred upon local municipal authorities through the tool of blight.

Politics as prologue: "Federal carpetbaggers" and "No-Sin Lee"

Portland is, like Oakland, a "younger" city. It was founded in 1845 as a colonial entrepôt, and experienced a significant period of growth during the Gilded Age. By the interwar period, Portland was a major metropolitan region with an urban population well above 300,000, an international port and a heavily industrialized city.[4] Its building stock consisted primarily of three eras of construction: The boom years of the late 1870s and 1880s, a brief period of boom between the Lewis and Clark Exposition of 1905 and a recession caused by the increasing hostilities in Europe in 1915, and the 1920s boom years that rapidly expanded the city's streetcar and Model-T suburbs. In short, by midcentury there were few buildings in the city that were more than fifty years in age, and absolutely nothing a hundred years old or older. Moreover, despite a large amount of industry related to lumber mills, heavy manufacturing (such as shipbuilding and machinery assembly), and commodity distribution, the city had no so-called factory slums, no eastern-style tenements. The residential landscape consisted of a smattering of multifamily units (mostly in a ring around the downtown core) and vast swaths of single-family homes.[5] (Figure 4-1.)

This is not to say the city had no housing problems at all. Like much of the country, the Great Depression took its toll on Portland, and the city had its

FIGURE 4-1: A postcard view of Portland from two years before the start of the Great Depression. Its downtown, only a portion of which is visible here, was dense but not dynamic, with significant developments throughout the 1920s. Most growth occurred in the sprawling eastside residential districts, seen in the middle distance, fifty square miles of housing development. Also not seen in this view are the city's important industrial zones, such as its grain port, its shipyards, or its many timber-dependent manufacturers. Portland Archives A2004-002.2783.

"Hoovervilles" filled with homeless and itinerant workers, with the largest such encampments being in the Sullivan's Gulch area of the inner east side of the city, and just south of downtown near the foot of the Ross Island Bridge. (See Figure 4-2.) However, the city's relatively conservative culture did not perceive these as significant urban problems. When the Housing Act of 1937 made federal funds available for slum clearance and public housing, relatively few of the city's political leaders took up the cause.[6] Oregon's legislature moved quickly, and that same year created enabling legislation that allowed the creation of housing authorities. The final formation of such an authority, however, was up to the local level of government, and in Portland, that proved an uphill battle. Support for an authority was never very strong on the City Commission, and with no consensus to act, the commission put the issue to the voters in December 1938.[7] The local real estate industry fought the

FIGURE 4-2: Although there were no conventional slums in 1930s Portland, there were many improvised residential areas filled with itinerant and unemployed workers, collectively called "Hoovervilles," such as this one just a mile or so south of downtown near the Ross Island Bridge. Arthur Rothstein, *Squatters' shacks along the Willamette River in Portland, Oregon. Many of the men living here during the winter work in the nearby orchards of the Williamette and Yakima Valley in the summer*, July 1936, Farm Security Administration, Library of Congress, LC-DIG-fsa-8b27937.

measure, arguing that supporters of public housing were feminine, naïve, or socialistic, or all three. After a strong anti-public housing campaign backed by the local real estate industry and filled with ideological arguments that equated public housing with anti-Americanism, the issue died at the polls.[8]

Matters changed with the advent of war and the onset of a defense economy. Only four days after the Imperial Japanese Navy bombed U.S. military installations at Pearl Harbor, the city council established the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP). Their motivation, according to historian Jewel Lansing, was to comply with a federal requirement that cities hoping to receive federal war production funding provide subsidized housing for war workers.[9] In short, if Portland hoped to receive a Kaiser shipyard or some other defense-related industries, it would have to build public housing. With so many business opportunities on the hook, the council set aside its ideological arguments—or at least, it seemed to do so. Mayor Earl Riley—formerly a strong opponent of public housing—described his advocacy for creating HAP as a way of preventing the federal government, who he labelled with a bizarrely Confederate-sounding term "carpetbaggers," from intervening directly in the city.[10] Indeed, HAP leadership (who were appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the City Commission) included prominent members of the real estate industry, some of whom had been publicly and adamantly opposed to public housing prior to the war.[11] HAP was thus a kind of inoculation against New Deal policies.

Despite these political complexities, the result of HAP's work was impressive. Thanks in part to the construction of two vast housing projects, Guilds Lake on the northwest side of town, and Vanport

FIGURE 4-3: Vanport, Oregon—along with Guild's Lake—were among the largest public housing programs built under the auspices of the defense housing programs authorized by the Lanham Act. Built by the Housing Authority of Portland, these temporary developments primarily housed workers that had moved to the Portland region to work in the area's shipyards, especially those of the Kaiser corporation in both Portland itself and nearby suburban Vancouver. Vanport's name is a portmanteau of Kaiser's two primary shipyard locations. Combined with several smaller developments, HAP's wartime public housing construction topped that of any major American city, even New York, but none of it was constructed under the auspices of the 1937 Act civilian program. If not for defense industry, there would have been no public housing in Portland. Photographer unknown, Aerial photo of Vanport, 1943, Housing Authority of Portland. Portland Archives and Records Center, A2001-025.626.

to the north along the Columbia River, by 1944 Portland had constructed 18,504 units, a greater amount of public housing than any other municipality in the nation, even New York.[12] (See Figure 4-3.) It still was not enough. The rapid expansion of Portland's industrial activities—especially for Kaiser's Vanship and Oregonship shipyards—rapidly drew in population from all over the nation, especially from rural areas.[13] The resulting demand for housing severely strained the aging building stock of the city. People lent out spare rooms in houses, or when there were none, rented out attics and basements to war workers. Larger houses were often subdivided and converted into apartment buildings, and purpose-built apartment structures burst at the seams.[14] With such a population boom, little new housing stock beyond the efforts of HAP, and little materials (or

for that matter available carpenters) with which to affect alterations and repairs, the urban fabric suffered heavily. Houses that were merely old before the war were often worn to the edge of their effective lives before the closure of hostilities.

After the war's end in 1945, Portland's civic and business leaders debated the future of HAP and its public housing projects. Postwar debates among the HAP board frequently centered on the ultimate disposition of these sites, and though shipyard executive Edgar Kaiser floated the idea of replacing Vanport with permanent housing, there was no meaningful attempt to keep public housing around after the war.[15] On May 30 1948, a broken dike flooded Vanport with Columbia River water, claiming 15 lives, destroying more than 17,000 units of housing, and permanently settling the issue.[16] The federal government, meanwhile, began to plan the transfer of wartime housing assets—whose land acquisition and construction had been financed federally—to local authorities. By the time that Vanport washed away in 1948, it seemed that HAP was destined to be disbanded, as had been hoped all along by those in the local real estate industry, a case of grudging wartime ideological and material set-asides literally as well as figuratively being washed away by the peace.

If the May flooding of Vanport seemed to be an end to public housing in Portland, other events of the Spring of 1948 proved an unlikely source of hope, when commissioner Dorothy McCullough Lee was elected mayor, ousting the incumbent candidate Earl Riley. Lee had espoused a law-and-order platform in a city rife with vice problems, while Riley (who, as later historians have noted, was taking kickbacks from vice operators) had run primarily on the qualifications of incumbency. Riley's move was ill-judged, as a grisly 1947 murder was followed by not one but two sensational reports, one from the City Club (a good government civic institution) and the other paid for by the city itself, lambasted Portland's leadership for complicity in prostitution, gambling, and worse. In the May 21st primary election—less than ten days before the Vanport flood—Lee defeated Riley by a factor of 4-1, a tremendous landslide (Figure 4-4).

Although Lee was, like Riley, nominally a Republican, her politics tended to be more progressive. To some degree, the genesis of such politics lay in her involvement in them at all. Lee, who had a law degree from U.C. Berkeley, opened Oregon's first all-woman law practice (with Gladys Everett) in 1924, ran and won a seat as a state representative in 1928, and then as a state senator in 1932. Although an advocate for public morality (such as temperance) and a fiscal conservative, she also strongly supported public education, kindergartens, pensions, and other welfare reforms. Of her candidacy for mayor of Portland in 1948, Lee positioned herself as less a reformer than a politician who would "enforce the law," yet given the scale of corruption in the outgoing Riley administration, this inevitably placed her politically in the camp of those who advocated for reform, be it of the body politic, of society at large, or of specific policies relating to public issues such as housing. Upon swearing in as mayor in January 1949, Lee embarked on a general house-cleaning, changing the duties of the various commissioners, firing and hiring senior staff, and setting out an aggressive anti-corruption agenda. This type of wholesale change on the part of a new mayoral administration was an exception in Portland's history, and as Jewell Lansing described it, Lee "set the town on its ear." [17]

Into the vacancies created by Lee's house-cleaning, the mayor's new appointees were typically of a reform

FIGURE 4-4: Dorothy McCullough Lee was sworn into office on January 1, 1949, becoming the city's first woman mayor. Riding a tide of public anger over corruption scandals, Lee believed that she had a mandate to "enforce the law," and in the process began making wholesale personnel changes to the city's power structure, upsetting the status quo. Beside her, left-to-right, are commissioners William A. Bowes, Ormond Bean, and Fred L. Peterson. Peterson, an ally of the scandal-ousted former mayor Earl Riley, proved a constant source of opposition for Lee. Portland Archives A2005-005.261.759.

mindset. One of Lee's appointees to HAP's leadership, Father Thomas J. Tobin, is simultaneously exceptional and typical. Exceptional, in that Tobin's career is unique. A veteran of the Great War, Tobin was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1925, educated in Rome, spoke seven languages, and held a Ph.D. atop his theological training. He was a consummate church politician, serving as the archbishop's secretary, then chancellor of the archdiocese, then vicar general. Outside of the church, he was a vocal advocate for the civil rights of black citizens, a voice for housing reform, and a labor mediator.[18] While Tobin's career is thus anything but ordinary, he is also exemplary of the kind of leaders that Lee sought to install throughout the city, in that he had a track record of public-spiritedness, and held relatively liberal political views.[19]

As a result of Lee's election and her changes to various boards and com-

mittees, by the end of 1950, HAP soon found itself with a board that was divided.[20] On one hand were the reform or houser members, such as Father Tobin, Jane S. Rasmussen, and Francis Staten. Rasmussen was a long-time leader within the state's League of Women Voters, an active advocate for the involvement of women at every level of politics.[21] Staten was an outright houser, having once been the Seattle-based assistant regional director of the Federal Public Housing Authority.[22] On the other hand, there were the real estate interests, represented by apartment investor Herbert J. Dahlke (a Riley appointee), pro-business labor leader H.J. Detloff, who had advocated replacing public housing with industrial sites at the end of the war, and Fred W. Eichenlaub, of the Oregon Building Congress.[23] Rounding out the board was attorney Alfred H. Corbett, scion of the influential Corbett banking family.[24] Yet, there were also connections that ran across the typical lines of interest. Although Eichenlaub represented the building trades, his organization (the Oregon Building Congress) had been an ally of Lee, whose previous years on the commission had focused on infrastructure, and Eichenlaub in turn had been a Lee appointee to HAP. [25] Corbett, meanwhile, was a Democrat, having switched parties in 1949.[26] Meanwhile, Alfred Corbett's mother Gretchen (Mrs. Henry Corbett) and aunt Alta (Mrs. Elliott R. Corbett) were socially acquainted with Jane Rasmussen through leadership positions in the Oregon (Gretchen) and national (Alta) League of Women Voters. [27]

With this mixture of leadership, HAP meetings became a site of contentious debate. At the heart was a single question: If the city engaged in redevelopment under the aegis of the Housing Act of 1949, to what end did the city declare portions of its urban fabric as "blighted?" Was it for the betterment of housing conditions, as originally envisioned under the 1937 Act, and as imagined in the minds of housers like Staten and Tobin? Or was it as a tool to harness federal funds for private sector industrial and real estate opportunities, as it had been for Earl Riley and his allies when they had originally founded HAP? For the moment, a common cause seemed possible between housers and those members of the real estate industry who were more interested in urban redevelopment, for regardless of motive, in both cases the goal of securing federal funding was critical.

It was in this moment of political flux that the Planning Commission and HAP's board decided to explore potential funds available under the 1949 Act. The impetus came from the federal side, in late Summer 1950, when an employee of the Seattle office of the Housing and Home Finance Agency recommended, to HAP executive director Floyd S. Ratchford, that visiting officials from Washington, D.C. drop by that fall to "discuss and explain in detail the Urban Redevelopment and Slum Clearance Program and what it would mean to Portland." HAP welcomed the suggestion, and sent board member Alfred H. Corbett to Seattle for a luncheon meeting with the HHFA's national director of slum clearance, N.S. Keith.[28] As Corbett reported back to the HAP board in October, Keith described the HHFA's activities under the 1949 Act solely in terms of housing:

> *Mr. Keith pointed out that the City could either start out with bad houses and recondition them, or tear them down entirely if beyond repair, or it could start on an area where there are no houses and end up with good housing.*

Keith closed his meeting with Corbett by recommending that Ivan Carson, a west coast representative for HHFA, visit Portland in Keith's place, to field further questions and comments.[29]

The result was the a meeting at the University Club, a four-story, 1913-built Jacobean pile whose tenant was a male-only social organization for those who had graduated from select schools, mostly Ivy League institutions in the East.[30] There, on November 7, 1950, leading industrialists, important members of the local real estate industry, members of the Planning Commission and the city's wartime Lanham Act housing authority (HAP), and local politicians met behind closed-doors with their invited guest, Carson, whose official title was "West Coast Field Representative" for the "Division of Slum Clearance and Urban Redevelopment, Housing and Home Finance Agency." Carson was there for one purpose, and one purpose only: To explain to the city's insiders how Portland might benefit from the monies authorized by the Housing Act of 1949. There was a lot on offer. As Carson outlined the new program, "a total of one-half billion dollars had been appropriated for capital grants in aid of cities." [31] In 2018 money, this is more than $5.2 billion.[32] This was Portland's opportunity to cash in, and Carson was more than happy to encourage them to do just that.

Carson reiterated that Portland's leaders, if they wished to claim a share of federal housing and redevelopment money, would have to find "substandard housing." As he noted, federal funds were "allocated on a ratio of $70.00 per unit of substandard housing as found in the 1940 survey by the U.S. Census Bureau." As an unnamed secretary working for the Planning Commission later noted dryly, this might mean a total of $1,412,000 in federal funds for the city—essentially $1.4 million in free money. Still at the luncheon with Carson, still behind closed doors, several officials (including City Commissioner Ormond Bean and two members of the Planning Commission) made a *de facto* decision on behalf of the city government: Portland would pursue this federal funding. Bean, with no consultation with his fellow city commissioners and without any regard for democratic processes, directed the staff of the Planning Commission to begin the process by identifying potential redevelopment locations. Further supporting Bean's expediency, unlike in Oakland, there was no need for an extensive study of the actual conditions of the city. The HHFA's Carson recommended, instead, that

> *...the data contained in the above-mentioned housing survey of 1940 was the principle source of information in regard to such applications, and that he found that the local Planning Commission staff was familiar with these surveys and had the necessary data; that it would be a matter of compiling and arranging existing data in such a form as to show the reason for selecting given boundaries.*

The Planning Commission's president, Harry Sroufe, assured City Commissioner Bean that "the recommendation could be made in a comparatively short time." [33]

Sroufe was as good as his word. Less than a month later, on December 6th, the Planning Commission met with Commissioner Bean, several HAP board members, and a number of local real estate industry professionals at yet another private luncheon, this time in the Green Room at the luxurious downtown Imperial Hotel. Here, again, expediency was the rule of the day:

> *A large scale map showing the census tract boundaries in the central portion of the city had been prepared by the Planning Commission's staff. On each census tract there was a block which to a scale of 250 units to the inch graphically portrayed the total number of housing units in the census tract.... Small scale prints of the original of this map were displayed on several walls of the room, and the 1950 proposed zoning*

map was also placed on the wall.

At the meeting, a representative from the South Portland Neighborhood House (a Jewish community organization with a track record of liberal and progressive leadership) made a motion to authorize the City Council to "pass a resolution asking the Housing and Home Finance Administration to earmark for Portland the allowable amount of grants in aid." There was, in the words of the minutes, "considerable discussion... [that] almost became a debate on the old question of the desirability of federal subsidized housing for Portland." The potential for vast sums of federal money, however, ruled the day, and the gathered group of planners, politicians and real estate industry representatives metaphorically "kicked the can" on the issue of public housing in the city, advancing the city's application efforts for redevelopment funds without any final resolution on housing. [34]

No public meetings had taken place, and only a little over a month had passed. Further, the data being used for the debate was out of date by more than ten years, originating in the 1940 U.S. Census. This census data had not been compiled by professionals trained in structural inspections. In the words of a later urban renewal report, "census data that relied to some extent upon the subjective judgments of several hundred enumerators...." There was not even consensus on the existence of slums or blight in the city, much less what either "slum" or "blight" meant. Despite this hasty timetable, the lack of democratic process, and the vagueness of the data at hand, the Planning Commission's staff were prepared to push forward an application for federal redevelopment and housing funds. What mattered was that federal funds were within reach. [35]

Following the meeting, Planning Commission staff worked rapidly to identify potential sites for a redevelopment project. To supervise, the Planning Commission and HAP appointed a joint body known as the Committee on Urban Redevelopment, consisting mostly of members of the local real estate industry. On February 8, 1950, staff showed the committee maps, statistical data on the number and occupation characteristics of housing, and the age of structures. The origin of the data used in these documents is unstated, but seems likely to have been 1940 U.S. Census data, as had been the basis of the information displayed at the December 6, 1950 joint meeting. No functional, scientific criteria are mentioned. Instead, the data were used as a subject for discussion, the results of which were the identification of three areas worthy of additional study. The first of these was an area known locally as South Portland, immediately adjacent to the city center. The second location identified was a section of the inner southeast of the city, along Hawthorne Boulevard. The third and last location was in Northwest Portland on the edge between industrial land uses and traditional residential neighborhoods, located between N.W. Nicolai Street and N.W. Vaughn Street. [36] (Figure 4-5.)

For a city that had done nothing under the 1937 Act to turn around and so quickly commit to publicly funded urban intervention under the auspices of the 1949 Act seems, at first, surprising. As HAP executive director Floyd Ratchford noted to the board in September 1950, HAP

> *...has the support of every group who opposed public housing during the [1938 anti-public housing] campaign. The Portland Realty Board and the Chamber of Commerce are also in accord and the Authority is assured of their general support.* [37]

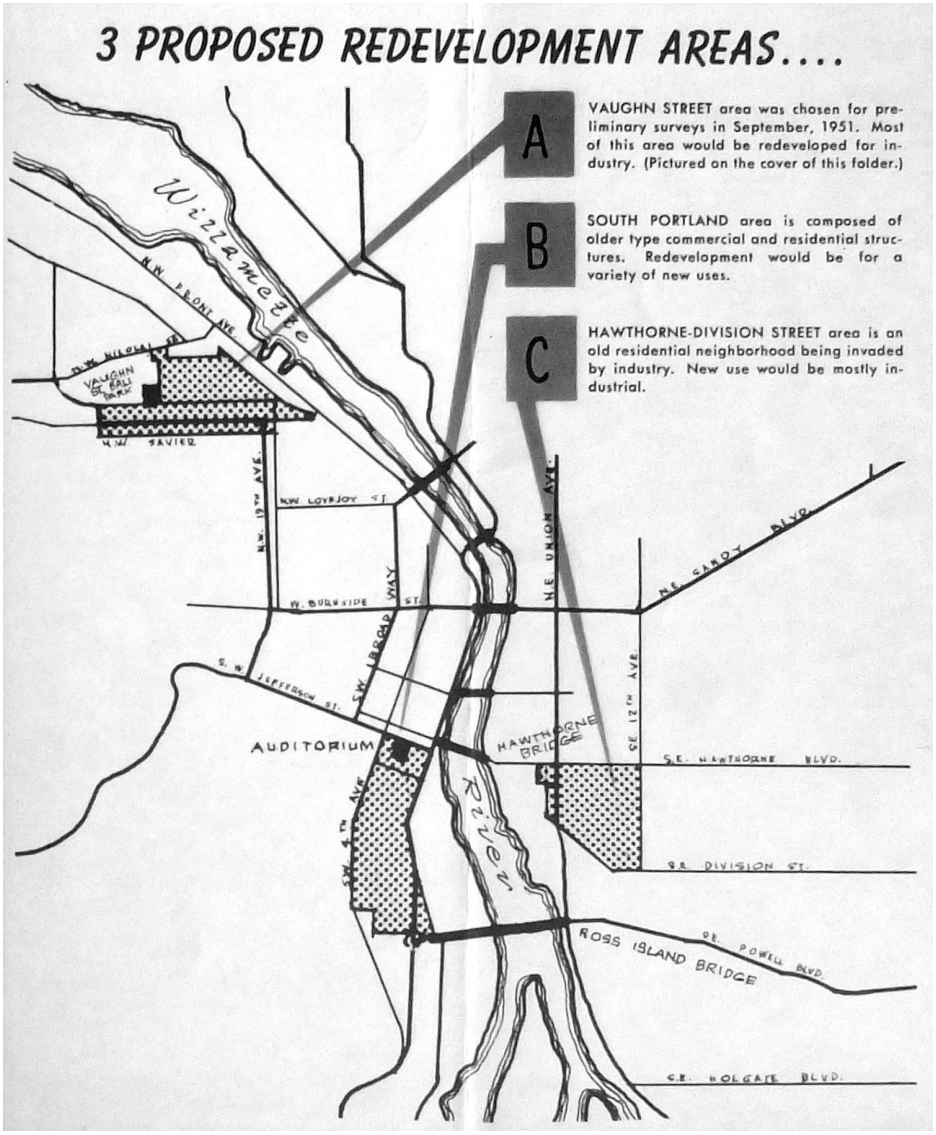


FIGURE 4-5: Using only outdated U.S. Census of Housing data and debate, the Portland Planning Commission selected three areas of the city for future urban renewal projects. Housing Authority of Portland, "Portland's Redevelopment Program," (brochure), c. 1952. Portland Archives (no accession number).

That support had been conditioned by the city's wartime experience. As in many U.S. cities, during the war, Portland's leading industrialists and real estate investors had expressed serious concern about the future of the region after the cessation of hostilities. In 1943, then mayor Earl Riley had appointed the Portland Area Postwar Development Committee, charging it with planning the city's peacetime future.[38] The makeup of the committee was straight out of Robert Fogelson's "downtown interests," with newspaper men, utility magnates, department store owners, and financiers, including Henry Corbett, whose son Alfred

would later serve on the HAP board.[39] The main result of the committee, after two years of work, was to propose an enabling act to the legislature, the purpose of which was to allow municipalities to engage in redevelopment. Known as the Industrial Expansion and Urban Redevelopment Act, the text was drafted at least in part by the office of mayor Riley. The bill would have authorized cities in Oregon with a population of more than 5,000 people to address "blighted and/or neglected areas" by the creation of "urban improvement commissions," giving these new entities the power to "undertake the replanning, clearance, rehabilitation, and reconstruction" of such areas. Intriguingly, the bill's language does not include the word "slum," but uses "blight" frequently, but unlike comparable, contemporary legislation in California, Riley's proposed Oregon bill offered no measurable definitions for "blight."[40] Notably the proposed bill did *not* restrict redevelopment to urban *housing*, but rather to any urban areas that were "blighted and neglected areas... and develop areas for industrial, commercial and public uses." [41]

While Oregon's 1945 bill ultimately failed to become law, it stands as an important precursor to the joint Planning Commission/HAP efforts of late 1950. It also helps to illustrate a significant change among Portland's propertied elites, for while they had largely opposed publicly-funded urban intervention under the 1937 Act, by the end of the war, they were more than willing to use tax money to affect change in the built environment. The difference was the intent, not the means. Under the 1937 Act, urban intervention meant public housing, but within the imagination of the Portland Area Postwar Development Committee, of mayor Riley, and of others connected to the real estate industry, urban intervention in the postwar era would mean the support of commercial and industrial uses. It is little wonder that, as Ratchford noted, "every group who opposed public housing" was, by 1950, in favor of federal intervention. Thanks in part to the slipperiness of blight, it was possible to use federal money to shore up private enterprise, rather than compete with it. With federal money sitting on the table, Portland thus identified its first redevelopment sites—its first blighted locations—by February 1951, or in only three months.

Housing reform without housing: Vaughan Street and industrial ambition

With three possible redevelopment sites identified, over the Spring of 1951, HAP and the Planning Commission began the process of applying for federal money and narrowing down their options for a first project. Much of the work then shifted to HAP, for while the Planning Commission traditionally supervised the city's planning efforts, HAP was already invested with the necessary powers of condemnation and expenditure, and with support from the City Commission, HAP "automatically becomes an Urban Redevelopment Agency, obligated to follow through as such an agency under the rules and regulations set up by the federal government."[42] HAP sent staff to San Francisco to consult with that city's redevelopment agency and learn from their experience. To assist with the final selection process, HAP formed the Urban Redevelopment Advisory Board. Chairwoman Rasmussen, executive director Ratchford, City Commissioner Bean, and the Planning Commission's Sroufe were made an ad-hoc nominating committee, inviting various members of the community to serve on the advisory body.[43] Ultimately, thirty-six individuals were selected, with the largest group represented being the real estate industry, with thirteen members, including the advisory board's chairman, Guy E. Jacques, who was the president of the Portland Savings

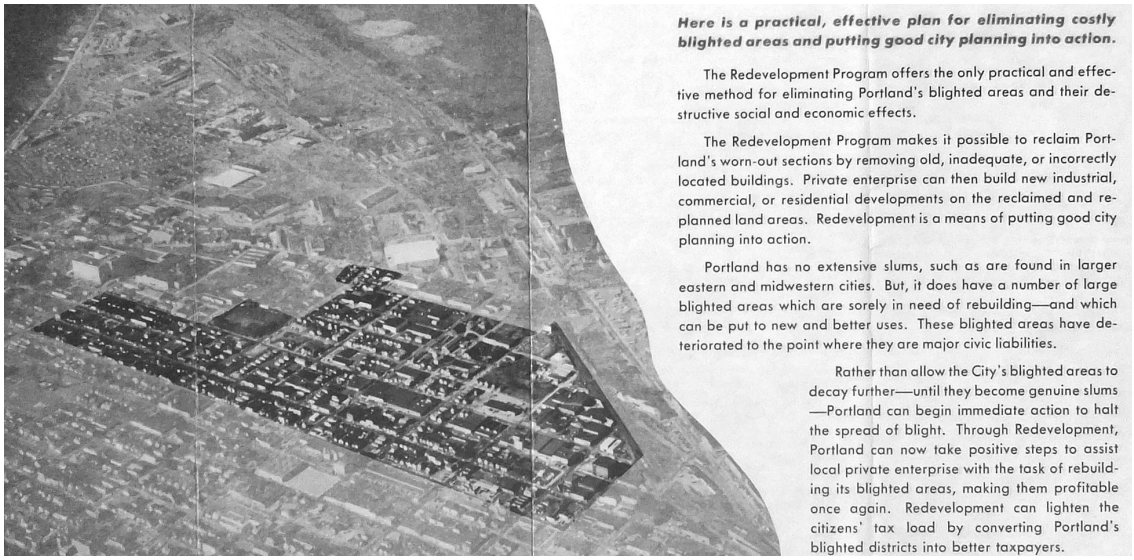


FIGURE 4-6: This modified aerial photograph highlights the Vaughn Street Area proposed redevelopment area. This was one of three areas chosen by the Portland Planning Commission in 1951 for redevelopment, and was characterized as a space that would be converted from housing to industrial uses. Housing Authority of Portland, "Portland's Redevelopment Program," (brochure), c. 1952. Portland Archives (no accession number).

& Loan Association.[44] To support their efforts, over the course of the summer, HAP staff gathered existing data about property sales in the potential redevelopment areas, as well as creating a "tentative project" for each area, for the purpose of comparative evaluation.[45]

The advisory board began meeting on August 2, and by early September, friction began to break out between it and the HAP board, as the latter felt that they were being deliberately excluded from redevelopment planning. Francis Staten was particularly vocal about the issue, insisting that "it should be mandatory that the staff of the Urban Redevelopment Division report periodically to the Local Board so that the Commissioners will be fully informed at all times."[46] The consensus of the HAP board was with Staten, and a joint meeting between the advisory board and HAP leadership was arranged for September 19. The progress outlined at that meeting must have dissatisfied Staten, for at the HAP board meeting the next day, he again criticized HAP staff for excluding the authority's board, arguing that the urban redevelopment staff and the advisory board should include HAP leadership at regular intervals, even to the point of sharing information with the

latter as materials became available. Jane Rasmussen, HAP board chair, deflected Staten's complaint.

> *From the inception of the Advisory Board, they were given the understanding that they would be permitted to work more or less in an autonomous manner, because Mr. Jacques had preferred that kind of an arrangement. Therefore... [HAP] Board participation at this particular time should be discouraged....*[47]

Thus Rasmussen, supported a complete transfer of authority for selecting and planning Portland's first urban redevelopment program to the hands of the advisory board, with its predominantly real estate industry perspective.

The result of the advisory board's work in its first month was a general consensus: The first redevelopment project should be Area 3, the so-called "Northwest Area" or, more colloquially, "Vaughn Street" (Figure 4-6). At the September 20 HAP meeting, the board was asked to endorse this decision. With the absence of Father Tobin, only George Friede had any objections, for as Friede noted, in the Vaughn Street Area "less social improvements are going to be derived... despite the reported juvenile delinquency." Friede set aside these objections, however, on the understanding that the Vaughn Street Area would not be the authority's sole urban redevelopment project, but merely its first, anticipating that later projects would be of a nature more attuned to the mission of HAP.[48]

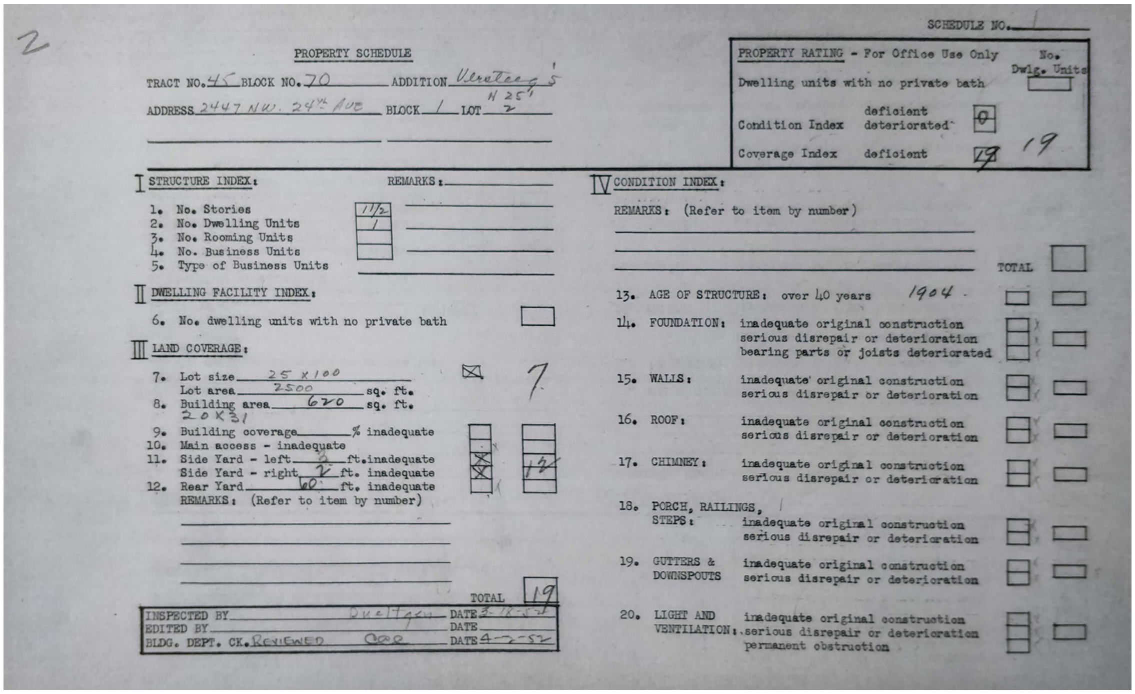
Friede's stated reservations were a clue to the advisory board's selection criteria, not released publicly until a February 1952 document titled "A Guide to the Portland Redevelopment Program." The underlying premise of Vaughn Street was not to use federal funds to reform the area's housing, but to wholly eliminate it, pushing the area's residents into the preexisting housing stock of the city. As the report revealed, "the most important" reason that the Redevelopment Advisory Board, and the HAP board it reported to, had selected Vaughn Street was "that the rebuilding of this old residential section would be for industrial purpose." The report paraphrased Chester Sterrett and the Portland Chamber of Commerce as issuing a "warning" that "industrial development sites must be found soon if the city is to be prepared for continued expansion."[49] The language throughout this justification reads like a pamphlet penned by Sterrett himself—and given that Sterrett served on the Redevelopment Advisory Board, perhaps it was:

> *It is a commonly accepted fact that any city's existence and continued growth and expansion is dependent upon industry. Industry is the backbone of any progressive community. Industry furnishes the basic payrolls which enable families to pay rents and taxes, purchase food and clothing and pay for other local community services.*[50]

As for housing? The report lays out seven reasons why Vaughn Street made sense as the city's first redevelopment area, but only one criteria mentions housing, criteria five:

> *Industrial redevelopment of the area would eliminate the blighted residential section and its poor living environment and bad social conditions. Present growth trends have already firmly established industry in the northwest part of the city. The gradual encroachment of industry into the bordering residential section has made the Vaughn Street Area wholly undesirable as a residential district.* [51]

In calling the residential uses in the Vaughn Area "blighted," HAP justified the use of federal funds, as well as its proposal to clear away those homes and



2

SCHEDULE NO. 1

PROPERTY SCHEDULE

TRACT NO. 45 BLOCK NO. 70 ADDITION Verstees's

N 25'

ADDRESS 2447 NW. 24th AVE BLOCK 1 LOT 2

PROPERTY RATING - For Office Use Only — No. Dwlg. Units

Dwelling units with no private bath

Condition Index — deficient / deteriorated — 0

Coverage Index — deficient — 19 — 19

I STRUCTURE INDEX: — REMARKS:

1. No. Stories — 1½
2. No. Dwelling Units — 1
3. No. Rooming Units
4. No. Business Units
5. Type of Business Units

II DWELLING FACILITY INDEX:

6. No. dwelling units with no private bath

III LAND COVERAGE:

7. Lot size 25 x 100 — 7
   Lot area 2500 sq. ft.
8. Building area 620 sq. ft.
   20 x 31
9. Building coverage ____ % inadequate
10. Main access - inadequate
11. Side Yard - left 3 ft. inadequate
    Side Yard - right 2 ft. inadequate — 12
12. Rear Yard 60 ft. inadequate
    REMARKS: (Refer to item by number)

TOTAL 19

INSPECTED BY Dueltgen DATE 3-18-52
EDITED BY DATE
BLDG. DEPT. CK. REVIEWED DATE 4-2-52

IV CONDITION INDEX:

REMARKS: (Refer to item by number)

TOTAL

13. AGE OF STRUCTURE: over 40 years 1904.
14. FOUNDATION: inadequate original construction / serious disrepair or deterioration / bearing parts or joists deteriorated
15. WALLS: inadequate original construction / serious disrepair or deterioration
16. ROOF: inadequate original construction / serious disrepair or deterioration
17. CHIMNEY: inadequate original construction / serious disrepair or deterioration
18. PORCH, RAILINGS, STEPS: inadequate original construction / serious disrepair or deterioration
19. GUTTERS & DOWNSPOUTS: inadequate original construction / serious disrepair or deterioration
20. LIGHT AND VENTILATION: inadequate original construction / serious disrepair or deterioration / permanent obstruction

FIGURE 4-7: Although HAP's 1952 planning documents for the Vaughn Area indicate that no fieldwork was made, the files for the redevelopment project contain twenty sheets of "property schedules" for units around the intersection of NW 23rd Place and NW Reed Street. It's unclear to what extent this project was undertaken throughout the proposed redevelopment area. These forms are filed within the HAP Vaughn Area files at Portland Archives, and date to March 1952. Housing Authority of Portland, "Vaughn Street: Property Survey Forms," Portland Archives and Records Center, AF/170041 A2011-015.

replace them with industrial lots.

To support HAP's claims that Vaughn was blighted, the authority's redevelopment planning staff relied on existing data, culled primarily from the 1950 U.S. Census, and "no new or elaborate surveys... necessary."[52] Despite this, HAP subsequently determined that the data from the census was inadequate to justifying the existence of "blight," and so the authority turned to the city's building department to develop a field survey, focusing almost exclusively on building conditions, (see Figure 4-7).[53] It is unclear to what extent fieldwork of this type was carried out throughout the Vaughn Area. An April 1952 letter to HAP from W.A. Benard, the city's building inspections director, states that the surveys were deployed throughout the project area, using HAP redevelopment staff, and checked by building department personnel for accuracy.[54] A map of the results was included

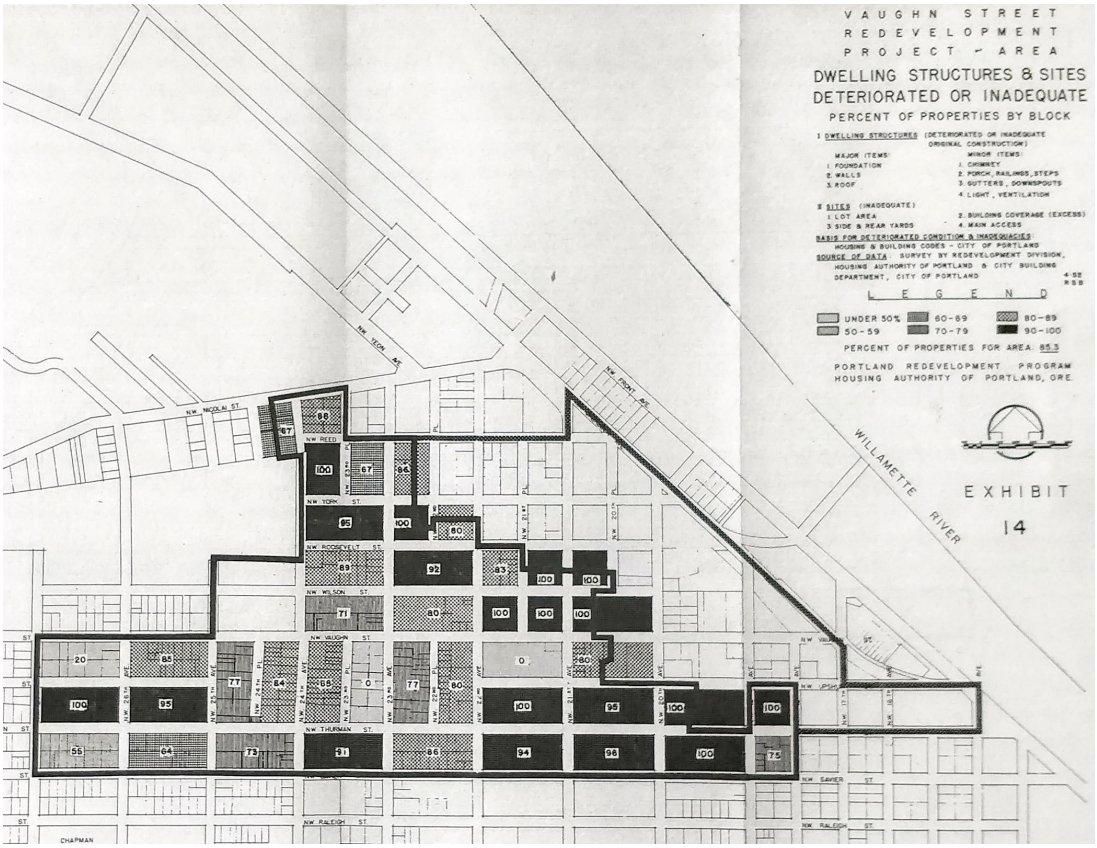


FIGURE 4-8: A map of the Vaughn Area, showing the results of the Spring 1952 survey of properties conducted by the redevelopment staff of HAP, under guidance of the city's building department. Raw survey data, or tabulations of that data, are not included in HAP's reports and do not exist in the surviving files at the Portland Archives and Record Center. Housing Authority of Portland, A Report: Delineation of the Vaughn Street Redevelopment Project Area. April 1952, Exhibit 14.

in the April HAP report (Figure 4-8), but no tabulated breakdown of this data was presented, only a cumulative score of 85.3 percent of dwellings in the area as "structurally inadequate, deteriorated, or land areas occupied by the buildings are insufficient."[55] As the report went on to note, this bundle of deficiencies, as measured against the city's building code standards, "demonstrates that the Vaughn Street Project Area is blighted." It was this survey data, not the census data used prior to identify Vaughn, that served as HAP's most definitive claim of blight.

It is difficult to assess the accuracy of the 1952 property survey made by HAP staff. At least one of the surviving property schedules lists the wrong address for a dwelling unit, an error corrected by building department staff. Benard, at the building department, endorsed the accuracy of HAP staff fieldwork, noting that "we are satisfied as to the accuracy of enumer-

ation and the general quality of the job in the field." Benard would *not*, however, go so far as endorsing HAP redevelopment staff using of this data as a measurement of blight:

> *In so relating the quality of structural condition and land usage in the area, we have applied local concepts and standards to the determination of blight which differ considerably from standards used in other surveys with which we are familiar; therefore, we can not draw comparisons between data obtained from the survey we have just completed and data or results from other surveys. The survey you have made, with our assistance, is the only one to my knowledge by which conditions in the area have been measured by the yardstick of local standards.*[56]

Further sowing doubt, an occupancy study conducted by Dan E. Clark & Associates for HAP in April 1952 noted that, when compared to the rest of Portland, the Vaughn Area was not particularly congested, residents were not inordinately poor, and they paid, if anything, higher than average rents.

HAP and its redevelopment staff also considered what it called "social blight." HAP staff phrased this section of their argument delicately, noting that a substantial population in the neighborhood consisted of multiple generations of "immigrant Croatian people" who were responsible for "an exemplary pattern of conduct eliminating them from an uncomplimentary measurement of social deterioration."[57] Yet there was a second group present in the neighborhood, primarily renters, described as "heterogeneous," "transient," and "artisans." (The latter two categories likely carried different connotations in 1952 than they do today, and probably "transient" meant that there was high turnover in the population, while I surmise that "artisans" meant skilled crafts such as plumbers, bricklayers, carpenters, machinists and the like. The report and other documents relating to it provide no additional context.) Among this second population, HAP's staff noted that there were higher rates of juvenile delinquency and related crime than in the rest of the city. The report argued that this "is undoubtedly the product of social and environmental causes relating directly to the geographic area," yet provided no additional evidence of such a link. Overall, HAP's attempt to paint Vaughn as a site of "social blight" reads as relatively half-hearted, especially when compared to the exhaustive statistical analysis carried out in other cities, such as in Oakland. No systemic measurement of social blight was developed by HAP redevelopment planners, much less implemented.[58]

HAP staff also made arguments about the economic viability of the area, especially in relation to its ability to generate property tax income to the city, in opposition to its costs to the city's services. A greater than average number of fire department calls, for example, was weighed against the low tax revenues. "The large majority of residential property…" the report noted, "has reached the age of minimum tax return."[59] Here we come full circle back to the conditions of residential properties in the neighborhood, and claims of decline. As *Delineation of Vaughn Street* notes, the property survey carried out in March 1952 was a result of the inadequacy of other forms of existing data—or, for that matter, arguments about delinquency or demographics. For HAP to be certain about "delineating the conditions of blight,"

> *…it was concluded that current available data regarding structural conditions and dwelling facilities in the Project Area did not constitute a true appraisal of blight. This data did not reflect the degree of deterioration and inadequate construction*

> *of buildings, and the misuse of land in terms of local standards and concepts [emphasis added].*[60]

In 1952, it was these "local standards" that were at the heart of finding blight in the city. It was the property survey that, in HAP's arguments, of the greatest importance to declaring that blight existed in Northwest Portland. Yet HAP redevelopment staff did not include in its reports any of its raw data, or even summaries of the data collected. There was only one map (Figure 4-6, previously mentioned) and a single testimony of accuracy from the city's building department.

This may be because the actual condition of the housing units in the Vaughn Area was, ultimately, beside the point. The lack of transparency with HAP's *Delineation of Vaughn Street* methods of finding blight, and its vague discussion of the results of such methods, is evidence of a bad faith process. The property survey was political cover, an ex-post-facto justification of the back-room 1950 declaration by the Planning Commission and HAP that Vaughn was one of three blighted areas of the city. It did not matter what the methods or findings were. Their conclusion was forgone, the decisions already made, and *not* finding blight at Vaughn street had never been an option for HAP's redevelopment staff. Viewed in this light, the pains taken by W.A. Benard to distance the city's building department from HAP's blight measuring methodologies appear logical, an act of smart political insulation in case of disaster.

If HAP's staff indeed knew that the characterization of Vaughn as blighted was more politics than social science or good city planning, they did have an idea of the real, tangible tasks that redevelopment was to address. As redevelopment staff noted with candor in *Delineation of Vaughn Street*, the core problems in the area were *not* related to building maintenance, but to "the philosophy of much of the population," long-time residents who displayed "vindicative [sic] resistance towards the encroachment of industry:"

> *In most cases, this resistance takes the form of a contest between the industrialist, attempting to buy at his price, and the present property owner, willing to sell only at his conception of value. Issues growing out of this contrast too often result in no sales being consummated. This difficulty is multiplied when land assembly for industrial purposes involves more than one seller.*[61]

Perhaps those Croatian homeowners were upstanding citizens, but their three generations of residence in the neighborhood were an impediment to the enforcement of the zoning code and, perhaps more importantly, the expansion of the city's urban industries. During the HAP survey of the Vaughn Area, one staff member encountered the owner of a property who was confrontational. "OWNER: 'Going to have to pay for the house, to get it'" the HAP staffer wrote on the margins of the property schedule.[62]

Put plainly, Portland's industrial-bent real estate industry—many members of which served on HAP's Redevelopment Advisory Board—had a history of difficulty trying to buy property in the Vaughn Area for industrial development. Whatever the actual conditions of the residential units in Northwest Portland, these houses were in the way of industrial expansion, and the owners and residents themselves were the blight that, through redevelopment, those same civic leaders hoped to resolve (see Figures 4-9 and 4-10). As 1952 unfolded, those industrial and real estate interests had succeeded in forcing the city's housing authority to endorse a program whose sole purpose was the elimination of housing units, on

FIGURE 4-9: The Vaughn Area at midcentury was a mixture of uses, with homes dating to the 19th century interspersed with industrial uses that dated to the 20th century. The result was that when new industry was built in this area, it was butted up against home uses, but also was restricted in its overall size based upon available lots sized originally for houses, not factories. The Planning Commission, in selecting the Vaughn area for redevelopment, hoped to clear these homes from the urban landscape entirely, in order to assemble larger lots for the location of larger, more modern industrial uses. Here, then, the Housing Act of 1949 was being deployed to eliminate housing, and Portland's political leadership was directly implying that housing of any condition, when in the way of non-housing uses, could be defined as blighted. Figure 4-7 was included as Exhibit 7C in Housing Authority of Portland, *A Report: Delineation of the Vaughn Street Redevelopment Project Area.* April 1952. Photographer unknown, *NW Thurman St at 21st Ave, looking West*, 1951, Housing Authority of Portland. Portland Archives and Records Center, A2001-025.78.

FIGURE 4-10: The is an example of the kind of land use that HAP's redevelopment board considered to be blight. The arch-truss building in the background was a supplementary warehouse for Montgomery Wards, whose main facility was located that 27th and Wilson, five blocks west and marking the westernmost border of the Vaughn Street Redevelopment Area. Expansions of industrial uses into the project zone had long been hampered by property owners who refused to sell at prices that developers of Portland's industrial real estate felt were reasonable. Photographer unknown, *NW 22nd Ave at Vaughn St, looking North*, 1951, (Building in background is the Montgomery Ward warehouse and garage.) Housing Authority of Portland. Portland Archives and Records Center, A2001-025.80.

the justification that they stood in the way of non-housing land uses. As planning engineer Margaret Fritche stated to the HAP Board on May 27, industrial buildings in the area, numbering twenty-four in total, "would not be acquired because they are substantial structures," but, perhaps more crucially, because they "conform in their use." By adhering to the desired zoning for the Vaughn Area, industrial structures were, by definition, *not* blighted, while housing, by being noncompliant with zoning, was.

HAP's perspective—that houses in the Vaughn area were, in any condition, impediments to industrial expansion had been in part a creation of the city's real estate industry, both in terms of how the authority's planners thought about housing in the area, but also in the actual conditions of those buildings. Where poor structural conditions were extant, HAP argued that this was a form of "economic deterioration" that made for "an ever-narrowing circle that hastens economic decline." Because the financiers of the local real estate industry thought that the area should "transition" to industrial uses, they had tightened the availability of credit to those home owners and residential landlords.[63] As evidence, *Delineation of Vaughn Street* included letters from four of the city's leading mortgage lenders, as well as the state office of the Federal Housing Administration, as Exhibit 16. Each letter was in response to a HAP inquiry about the availability of credit in the Vaughn area, and each dates to the first half of April, 1952. The four letters from private lenders all bear a striking resemblance to each other, almost as if cribbed from the same set of talking points, yet each offers slight variations. G.M. Cartwell, vice-president of the First National Bank of Portland, notes that it is "a matter of policy" that the bank would not issue mortgages to residential areas zoned as industrial or commercial, and only rarely on structures more than 40 years in age. Portland-founded lender and broker Norris Beggs & Simpson replied that "due to the age of the residences [and] the trend of the property to become industrial we would not be able to consider any residential loans in the area...." Portland Federal Savings & Loan president Guy E. Jacques—who was also the head of the HAP Redevelopment Advisory Board—noted that residences in the project area were "old," now mixed in with industrial uses, and Vaughn "is not considered a residence district for mortgage loan purposes." Jacques closed by stating that "Our Association would not be interested in making any residence loans in this district." A fourth letter, from insurance firm Commonwealth, expressed similar reasons for a lack of interest in lending on residential properties in the proposed project area, adding that such activities would not be "justified."[64]

For homeowners and landlords in the proposed project area, the credit crunch described in these letters was a significant limitation on their ability to pay for routine maintenance and repairs, exacerbating any physical decay already in existence. In essence, Portland's mortgage banking community had worsened the physical conditions of residents in Vaughn by restricting loans to the area, thus helping to cause the very decay that HAP claimed as a reason for condemning and clearing away those homes.[65] To the city's banking elite, industrial use was the only logical future for Vaughn, and restricting credit for properties that did not conform to this land use was axiomatic. That their refusal to issue these residential mortgages had worsened the conditions of the neighborhood—and possibly hastened its transition to industrial uses—remained unsaid. Any action that helped to construct an argument that Vaughn was blighted was in the interest of industrial developers who were, after all, fellow members of the real estate industry.

Vaughn Street and the election campaign of 1952

By summer 1952, there seemed to be a moment of consensus, both on HAP's board, and between the board and other vested interests, notably the city's Planning Commission and the local real estate industry. Despite the intended goal of eliminating all residences in the project area, despite the fact that the plans called for the construction of no new residential units to absorb residents displaced by clearance, the housing authority board accepted the terms of *Delineation of Vaughn Street,* and on June 19, the board passed a resolution confirming that the project area was blighted.[66] With millions in federal funds awaiting claim, the future of the project seemed bright. To secure the money, however, the 1949 Act required that Portland provide a local match. HAP staff estimated that, in the case of the Vaughn Street project, this would come to one third of the cost, $2 million.[67] To raise the local match money, HAP crafted public bond measure, to be backed by citywide property tax revenue, and placed it on the Fall ballot.

This decision moved the fate of Portland's first urban redevelopment project firmly out of policy and back-room influence and into the realm of official politics. For advocates of the project, this created an awkward scenario. State law required that public money could not be spent on election campaigns, even if those campaigns were public bond issuances put forth by a governmental entity. To get around this, proponents of the Vaughn Street project took a two-track approach. First, HAP began a "Public Information Program" to prepare a wide array of "educational material" that gave additional information about the authority's plans, but carefully avoided persuasive statements.[68] To take a more overt and active role in advocacy, by late August several local stakeholders incorporated an independent non-profit named the Citizen's Committee for Portland Industrial Redevelopment (hereafter the "Citizen's Committee").

This separation was frequently tenuous. The Citizen's Committee was headed up by the advisory board's chairman, savings and loan executive Guy E. Jacques. HAP staff, meanwhile, included in its remit outreach to community organizations for the purpose of soliciting endorsements for the bond measure.[69] A little over a month into the campaign, and HAP redevelopment director Harlan Nelson complained that "it is increasingly difficult to report on the Public Information Program to keep it separate from the purely promotional program on the part of the Citizens Committee."[70] Between HAP and the Citizen's Committee, there was a speaker's bureau that addressed more than thirty community groups, booths at community events, sixty-four radio advertisements on eight different stations, "throwaways" (flyers and handbills), and inserts distributed to labor union members. HAP staff created a model of the redevelopment project, and moved it around the city. At one point, the model was on display in the lobby of Guy Jacques' Portland Savings and Loan Association, followed by a turn in the window of Powers Furniture, and still later in a shop window at Fourth and Morrison, all prime downtown locations. Last but not least, newspaper ads appeared in the two major dailies plus several specialty and neighborhood papers.[71] These advertisements, paid for by the Citizen's Committee, depicted the Vaughn project as a "vote for progress" that would "add 3000 more families spending an additional $10,000,000 annually in payrolls," as well as "the erection of new modern buildings that will add to the city's wealth." The extant neighborhood, meanwhile, was "run down" (Figure 4-11).[72] The *Oregonian*, in turn, recommended that its readers approve the bond measure, noting that the

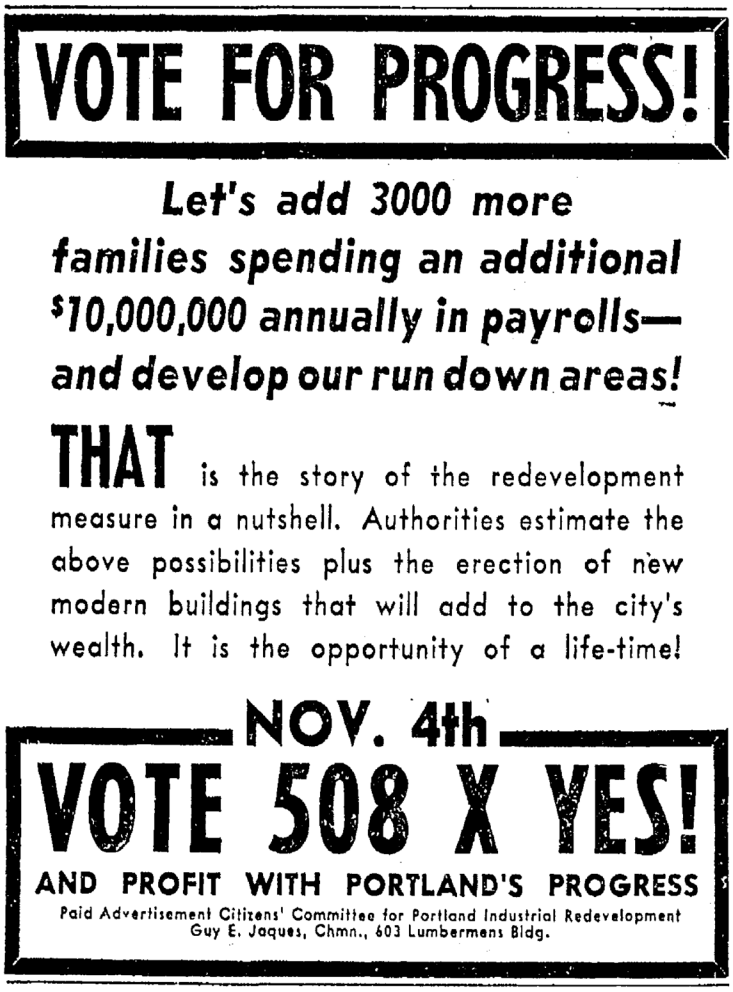
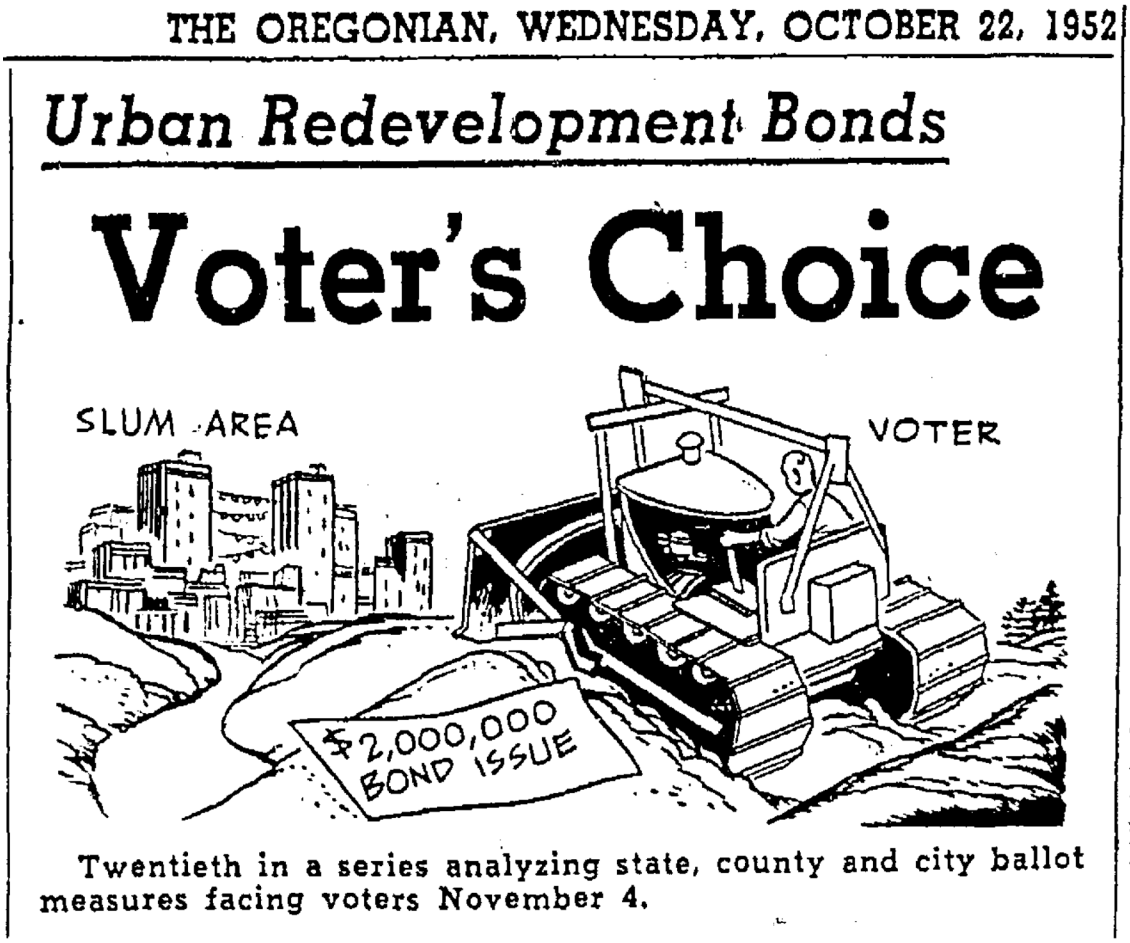


FIGURE 4-11: One of the two-column wide advertisements in favor of the bond measure, placed in the *Oregonian* by the Citizen's Committee for Portland Industrial Redevelopment. Note the language connects increased economic activity—at one point described as "profit"—and notions of progress. The words "bond" or "tax" do not appear in the advertisement at all, despite the fact that the measure would authorize the issuance of $2 million in tax-backed bonds and a short-term tax raising $400,000. "Vote for progress," (Advertisement), *The Oregonian,* November 3, 1952, 13.

project would "pay good returns in new business and increased tax assessment," and in the process echoed the link made by Citizen's Committee advertisements between the Vaughn project, economic health, and community progress (Figure 4-12). [73]

Perhaps the most remarkable result of the campaign was the range of endorsements gathered. The Vaughn Street bond measure received support from both the Chamber of Commerce and three major unions; from the Multnomah County Democratic Central Committee as well as the Multnomah Young Republican Club; from the American Institute of Architects to the American Veteran's Committee.[74] The political spectrum of endorsements was so wide that it is tempting to read it as evidence of ideological consensus, yet the political landscape of Portland was far from harmonious, as bond measure proponents knew.

The first obstacle was the real estate industry itself, which in Portland was never as unified as its elite members might have hoped. For many brokers, agents, financiers, and landlords, the idea of government intervention into the urban fabric—even if guided by the city's promi-


THE OREGONIAN, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 1952

Urban Redevelopment Bonds

Voter's Choice

Twentieth in a series analyzing state, county and city ballot measures facing voters November 4.

nent real estate executives—was an anathema, a fact that HAP and the Citizen's Committee well knew. In 1949, three years prior to the Vaughn Street bond measure, HAP received a copy of a widely- circulated and incendiary white paper, purporting to represent the viewpoints of small home owners but seemingly produced by members of the real estate industry itself. This document, titled "Public Housing for Portland, Oregon," had only an organizational author, the "Portland Home Owners Council." This organization was an apparent front, invented for the report, with no track record in the community and no known members. As but one example,

FIGURE 4-12: The *Oregonian* endorsement of the Vaughn Street bond measure echoed the campaign message repeated by the Citizen's Committee for Portland Industrial Redevelopment, linking urban clearance with notions of progress. In the paper's coverage of the measure, the words "slum" and "blight" were frequently used as if interchangeable. The choice of depicting Vaughn as consisting of tall tenement-style buildings with lines of laundry spanning between them is an odd one, as most of Vaughn's residences were freestanding houses and two or three story tall wooden multifamily structures that more closely resembled houses. One wonders if the *Oregonian's* leadership was actually familiar with the area, or if they merely believed that their readers were not. Illustrator unknown, editorial cartoon appearing with "A final look at election measures," *The Oregonian,* November 2, 1952, 41.

the *Oregonian,* upon receiving a copy in December 1949, claimed no knowledge of who the council was.[75] The only clue is an address on the document, 405 Title & Trust Building on Fourth Avenue in downtown, a building whose primary office tenants have been (and continue to be) property brokers, developers, title insurers, architects, and other members of the real estate industry.[76]

The report laid out two cases against HAP's involvement in shaping the city, one pragmatic, one ideological. On the pragmatic side, it argues that private industry of the city was already providing more than enough housing to meet demand. Relying on vague statistics pulled from the Bureau of the Census, the report added that "persons in the lower income bracket... cannot afford NOT to buy a home," adding that while private enterprise cannot build homes for $10,000 per family, "private enterprise will furnish every family with shelter commensurate with their ability to pay for it."[77] On the ideological side, the report spoke about the specter of nationalization, and made a moral case that subsidies were unequivocally corrupting. If public housing became reality, it warned, then it was only a matter of time for "government to throw off all limits and take over the construction and ownership of all housing."[78] To further develop this argument, the homeowners council relied on the same biological and pathological metaphors as underlay the concept of blight:

> *A little government housing in an economy is exactly like a little cancer in a human body. Neither can be controlled. Once either takes root, complete and speedy removal is the only possible preventative against a spread that soon snuffs the life out of the body in which it is embedded. Irrefutable evidence precludes any argument about how cancer develops, spreads, and kills. Equally irrefutable, but unfortunately less publicized, evidence exists to support the contention that government housing develops, spreads, and kills in the same way.*

"This is not the American way of getting things done," the report concluded, adding that the city had the "opportunity" to "fight against government paternalism" by opposing public housing.[79]

For redevelopment advocates, "Public Housing for Portland, Oregon" should have been adequate warning about potential opposition to Vaughn Street. To some degree, it may in fact have influenced the nature of the proposed project, given that Vaughn was to include no housing of any kind, much less subsidized HAP units. Yet the very nature of the project itself, the nature of public monies being used to reshape the city fabric, remained open to attack on ideological grounds. Moreover, the homeowners council was ample evidence that the real estate industry itself contained elements that might work in opposition to the interests of elite members of that same industry, as small brokers and apartment house owners had done in Oakland two years prior. In Portland, this opposition went from potential to actual during the fall of 1952. On October 22, the *Oregonian* claimed that "no group appears to question the basic soundness" of redevelopment at Vaughn. A week later, and the Portland Realty Board changed this. At a director's meeting, held to set election endorsements, the *Oregonian* reported that the "most controversial proposal for the realtors was that authorizing bonds and taxes for the Vaughn street clearing and redevelopment project." The fundamental issue, according to the board's legislation and taxation committee, was that the total project cost of $4.5 million, even if mostly paid for from federal funds, was "out of all proportion to the benefits gained." This was not merely a statement of fiscal conservatism,

but a questioning of the underlying premise of the entire project. A member of the real estate board's legislation committee argued that the former site of the wartime Vanport housing project, then an empty brownfield thanks to the 1948 flood, was a cheaper solution to industrial land needs. [80] The establishment real estate industry who served on the Redevelopment Advisory Board were unable to count on their smaller-scale colleagues in either the campaign or at the polls.

Another source of opposition came from the residents of Vaughn Street itself, who mounted a small but vocal campaign. On October 21st—the day before the *Oregonian* pronounced the bond measure as virtually unopposed—Multnomah County commissioner Frank Shull got into a public verbal sparring match with Guy Jacques. The setting was a campaign informational meeting at the Chapman School, one block away from the project area boundary, attended by about 150 neighborhood residents. According to the *Oregonian*, Shull had been a resident of Overton Street, a block south of the project, for 45 years, and did not approve of the city's plans. One of his complaints: That federal money was to be used for what ought to be "a local job." In response, Jacques accused the commissioner of hypocrisy, noting that his office regularly administered federal roads and welfare monies.[81]

FIGURE 4-13: One of the opposition advertisements placed by Vaughn residents in the *Oregonian.* George Christ, chairman of the opposition group, lived near the corner of NW Vaughn and NW 22nd Place. This location, well inside the proposed redevelopment project, no longer exists, having been paved over by an off-ramp from the cancelled I-305 freeway during the 1970s. "Save our homes," (Advertisement), *The Oregonian*, November 2, 1952, 11.

The heart of Shull's argument, however, was the issue of blight itself. As the *Oregonian* paraphrased, it was Shull's view that the Vaughn area was "far from a slum, and far from blighted."[82] For opponents who saw a healthy neighborhood that had been unfairly denigrated by HAP, the essence of government involvement in Vaughn was illegitimate. An opposition campaign calling itself the "Vaughn Area People," and headquartered in a home inside the project boundaries, ran small, one-column wide newspaper advertisements in *The Oregonian* during the last weeks of the 1952 election season. Their message, no doubt constrained by a limited budget, was nevertheless powerful, and directly confronted the subjectivity of blight: "SAVE OUR HOMES, OR YOURS MAY BE NEXT" (Figure 4-13). If Vaughn could be called blighted, the ads implied, then anywhere could be so called, and no home was safe from the desires of the powerful.[83]

Postmortem struggles: Vaughn, blight, and the future of public housing in Portland

On election day, the Vaughn Street bond measure failed. In the aftermath of defeat, as I will show, politicians, policy-makers, planners, and members of the local real estate industry struggled to salvage the project, and while these efforts ultimately failed, these struggles illustrate how actions taken at a local level had a profound effect on the application of federal policies to the American city in general, and to Portland in specific. It was through the words and deeds of local actors that a federal program originally meant to improve the living conditions of the poor was converted into a conduit for financing the pet projects of the real estate industry. It was here, in the metropolitan political realm, where what is popularly called "urban renewal" was born. Crucial to its birth was the notion of blight, a term that seemed quantitative and rational, but was actually qualitative and subjective.

The story of Vaughn's post-mortem gives us a rare and explicit glimpse into this midcentury struggle. While organized opposition in Portland never reached the heights of activism achieved two years prior in Oakland, nevertheless it had a decisive impact on the Vaughn project, contributing to the failure of the bond measure on November 4th. Nearly 75,000 voters came out in favor, while just over 90,000 came out against.[84] Further, the measure had received relatively low interest from voters, with only 85 percent of all cast ballots including a response of any kind on the measure.[85] As the National Association of Housing Officials noted in its late December 1952 newsletter, support for the Vaughn bond measure had been strongest in neighborhoods "adjoining or close to" the proposed project, "and the heaviest opposition was in districts far removed from the area."[86] Put plainly, the more suburban the neighborhood, the less support for paying for redevelopment. To some degree, this is axiomatic—voters distant from the problems of Vaughn—whatever and however serious those might have been—were unlikely to see the benefit of the combination of bonds and taxes meant to pay for the project, a case of reduced direct benefits resulting in reduced support. There is also, however, a possibility of voter perspective intersecting with the built environment that came into play. Portland is typical of U.S. cities, with its multifamily and rental properties clustered towards its center, and periphery neighborhoods mostly composed of owner-occupied single-family homes. For voters in the latter, the appeal put forth by fellow home-owners in the Vaughn Area People advertisements—"SAVE OUR HOMES, OR YOURS MAY BE NEXT"—may have held greater resonance. Opposition from voters in peripheral neighborhoods may have gone beyond conventional issues of benefit and costs, to include a sense that there was something deeply illegitimate about describing someone's home in a denigrating way and then using that description as a basis for taking that home away. If in Portland's bungalow belts, the homeowner was king, then HAP's attempt to clear Vaughn was an attack on the idea of the sovereignty of homeownership itself.

The bond measure had also had relatively few civic coat-tails to ride. For many, the civic-spirited reform moment of Dorothy McCullough Lee's election in 1948 had passed. Lee had proved a better figurehead of reform than a mayor of a city, and even as that figurehead, she had worn thin. Her personal sartorial style—neutral colored women's suits and, when outdoors, hats in various degrees of formality—became a shorthand for her administrative style: old-fashioned, overly restrained, earnest, pompous, and dour.[87] In the Spring 1952 mayoral election, Lee

faced several competitors, and came in second to commissioner Fred Peterson, thus forcing her to face Peterson a second time in a runoff in November. The same election that handed down defeat to Vaughn Street also handed out a defeat to Lee, installing Peterson as the city's new mayor. Peterson had run his campaign on the slogan "Portland needs a businessman," and with his election, Lee's campaign of civic reform came to a close.[88]

In the immediate wake of the November 1952 election, however, many observers credited the defeat of the Vaughn bond measure to more neutral and mechanistic reasons. Prime among these were the number of revenue measures on the November ballot. In addition to the Vaughn Street funds, the city had asked for bonds to pay for improved sewage services, another issuance for a new zoo, and another to establish a transit and parking authority to create downtown public parking garages and coordinate bus services. Asked for so many funding measures, voters approved only the sewer bond.[89] Another factor had, perhaps, been the relative shortness of the Vaughn campaign. The formal campaign had not begun until the formation of the Citizen's Committee in August. NAHO observed that Portland "did a good job" with its campaign, but added that "no locality can expect to produce results in two months." It was these basic electoral factors that the NAHO ascribed as the primary reasons of the measure's failure. In their words, "too little time and too much company... were the primary reasons for the defeat...."[90]

The NAHO's assessment mirrors internal discussions at HAP, and their insights had likely originated at the authority. On November 14, the HAP board held a dinner meeting to go over the defeat, and determine the next steps in the project. Based on the results of a poll, made by redevelopment staff using telephones, HAP believed that the primary reason for the failure had been a lack of education about the project, due in part to the short campaign. What was less clear, however, was what the vote results had meant. The defeat of the bond measure had left HAP in a financial hole, with little money to continue the project and no local source of matching funds. Yet was the defeat only a measure of financial difficulties ahead? Or had the vote against the Vaughn bonds also meant that the public had expressed its opposition to the project itself? Father Tobin, ever a lukewarm proponent of the industrial-focused project, expressed concern that HAP reach out to community organizations and determine whether there was still support for the project, or not. After a great deal of discussion, HAP's board extended the redevelopment staff's mandate another two months while it continued to consider its longer-term position.[91]

On January 16, 1953, after a period of calm during the holiday season, a party of officials toured the Vaughn project area, then held an informal discussion in the Campbell Court Hotel, in downtown. Attending were several HAP board members, members of the Redevelopment Advisory Board, three city commissioners, and two journalists.[92] Guy Jacques, leading the meeting, asked if there was a future in the Vaughn project. If clarity had been the goal, the meeting was a failure. The HAP board and the Redevelopment Advisory Board wanted the City Council to be responsible for the decision to continue, while the council, in turn, wanted HAP to make the choice.[93]

A war of policy and values then broke out within the HAP board, and between HAP and the Redevelopment Advisory Board. At stake was not only the fate of the Vaughn project, but also the future of HAP, and the purpose of federal urban intervention monies. The opening

shots came at the January 22 HAP board meeting, when board member Francis Staten argued that the authority should continue the project, but only commit to funding a housing component in Vaughn. Despite published documents and statements made to the contrary by HAP representatives the previous year, Staten argued that Vaughn would displace at least 100 families that would be unable to afford market rate rents. Further, HAP's stock of wartime low income units were not up to code, with many in the process of decommissioning, and far higher demand than supply. HAP might need to rehouse as many as 1,300 additional families. Staten thus proposed a motion to plan and build "low-rent housing as a part of a balanced program of urban redevelopment." Immediately, board member (and apartment house owner) Herbert J. Dahlke objected, noting that he and several other representatives of HAP had gone on record claiming that no housing would be needed or built in Vaughn. Father Tobin, meanwhile, endorsed Staten's proposal, noting that he did not "want anything to do with any program that wasn't an 'over-all' program," and that HAP had "an obligation to the people in the community who have worked hard and earnestly for a public-housing program." Staten's proposal passed 3-1, with Dahlke the sole vote against. In its wake, the board passed a resolution committing HAP to further funding of the Vaughn project.[94]

A flurry of letters and meetings followed, as the ramifications of HAP's actions set in. The Redevelopment Advisory Board, informed by a letter from HAP chair Rasmussen to Guy Jacques, held an impromptu meeting at which its members vented frustration and anger over, in Jacques' words, HAP having "not kept faith with us." After a rambling and sometimes emotionally charged meeting, the advisory board, through Jacques, sent a letter to the City Council expressing surprise at HAP's actions, and pleading for the council to take no action until the advisory board could persuade HAP to reconsider.[95] On the 12th, Jacques penned another letter to HAP, requesting that they reconsider their actions.[96] This led to a pair of remarkable letters, in which both Jacques and Rasmussen attempted to paper over the differences between their respective organizations, in part through tedious explanation, and in part through diplomacy. On February 17, Rasmussen laid out in tiring detail the exact actions that HAP had taken, parsing every decision and explicitly laying out the extent and limits of each. Included with this, however, was the following statement:

> *Even though appearances might have it that the Vaughn Street Project was linked to the public housing question, it was plainly not their [Staten and Tobin] intention to package the Vaughn Street Project with the public housing matter. Therein, it seems to me, lies the source of misunderstanding that seemingly has grown out of our action on January 22.*[97]

This was tact and diplomacy taken to the level of untruth. Staten and Tobin had called for a "balanced" redevelopment program, and as there was only one such project under HAP's authority, this meant housing at Vaughn Street, precisely what the real estate industry had worked so hard to avoid throughout 1951 and 1952.[98]

The tone of Rasmussen's letter is entirely conciliatory, which is remarkable given that it was a communication to a group that was subsidiary to her authority and whose *de jure* power was advisory only. It stands as testament to the real terrain of political power. Rasmussen's tone is one of supplication because political influence, and therefore power, rested with Jacques and the advisory board, whose February 3 meeting had taken place behind the

closed doors of the U.S. Bank headquarters conference room. HAP's assertion of its own power, in acting to link housing with Vaughn, was within the authority's legal reach, but was outside of the political machine crafted and controlled by the bankers, insurers, developers, and brokers who made up the city's real estate industry. HAP had crossed a line, and Rasmussen's lie was an attempt to undo the damage.

The reply came in Jacques' letter to Rasmussen on February 18. It is short, and a bit high-handed, expressing thanks for Rasmussen's detailed account, and sorrow about "all of the misunderstandings [that] have come about." Of public housing, Jacques added:

> *I had no intention in my previous letter to you, or the newspaper publicity of giving the impression that the Advisory Board was opposed to public housing. As I stated in my last letter, certain members of the Advisory Board are very definitely in favor of public housing. We discussed redevelopment and public housing, and then the committee decided that we were not meeting to discuss public housing and that our consideration should be of the Vaughn Street Redevelopment project.*[99]

This, too, was a tightly-stretched statement, although more truthful than Rasmussen's from the previous day. On a factual basis, Jacques' description is accurate.

Minutes of the advisory board's meeting, however, show a clear bias against public housing. Regardless of the differing positions of those on the advisory board—and there were members who favored public housing in a general sense, such as architect Roi L. Morin and Jess A. Bell from the Congress of Industrial Organizations—the consensus of the board was to keep public housing out of Vaughn. One unnamed member suggested that the entire advisory board resign in protest of the inclusion of housing. Two members suggested that adding housing had conspiratorial implications, either as a back-door political maneuver to take control of the project, or as a means of sabotaging it. The turn away from discussing housing and towards a consideration only of the fate of Vaughn Street, described by Jacques to Rasmussen in his February 18 letter, did not occur. Yet, by late February, Jacques (like Rasmussen) apparently felt it necessary to pantomime greater alignment between the advisory board and HAP, for while political influence was concentrated in the former, action on redevelopment was impossible without the state-granted *de jure* powers of the latter.

Further easing of tensions came the next day, February 19, when HAP board member George Friede (who was liaison to the Redevelopment Advisory Board, and had been absent in January) moved to rescind the motion supporting housing at Vaughn Street. His reasoning was twofold: First, that HAP's actions had led to "misunderstandings" with the advisory board, and second, that HAP could ill afford to take on the Vaughn project on its own. As Friede pointed out, constructing even 200 units of housing in the project would cost so much that their construction would likely require HAP to sell many of its wartime housing projects in order to raise funds, thus also resulting in the eviction of over a thousand families, and undermining HAP's very purpose. Argument over the precise wording, combined with parliamentary procedures, delayed a vote on Friede's motion to rescind until the February 26 HAP board meeting, where it passed 4-2.[100] Immediately afterwards, Father Tobin moved to rescind HAP's Resolution 10, which had approved the use of authority funds for local match at Vaughn, and this also passed 4-2.[101] In both cases, the dissenting votes have come from Herbert J. Dahlke and Theodore A.

Asbahr, both solid real estate men.[102]

Portland's coalition between housers and the real estate industry, never secure to begin with, had broken irretrievably. On March 4, HAP's leadership met with the Redevelopment Advisory Board, to attempt reconciliation. The result was HAP Resolution 11, promising a fixed $1 million in authority's funds for Vaughn, passed on March 5th.[103] Commissioners Dahlke and Asbahr, however, voted against it, arguing that the commitment was "too weak."[104] The result was more pressure, from at least one member of the Redevelopment Advisory Board, as well as from Dahlke and Asbahr, resulting in a recension of Resolution 11 just five weeks later.[105] In its place, Dahlke proposed Resolution 13, committing HAP to pay all of the local match for the project, which in this case amounted to one third of the total project costs.[106] This was open warfare on the part of the real estate men. Commissioner Friede objected, noting correctly that Resolution 13

> *would be an outright subsidy to industry and would mean voting away the Authority's entire assets, accumulated originally from public housing, for a redevelopment program, leaving nothing left for low-income housing to assist the underprivileged, a responsibility... assumed by every Commissioner at the time of appointment to that office.*

Chair Rasmussen also stated her opposition. The resolution was "morally indefensible because of its cynical disregard for the Board's responsibility, under law, to provide what housing we can for families not now being served by private industry...." Father Tobin, the most solid houser on the HAP board, was unable to support his two colleagues, as he had resigned for unclear reasons sometime prior to April 16, but even if he had remained, there were not enough votes to defend housing. When the roll-call came, the vote was 4-2 in favor of Resolution 13.[107]

While the real estate industry had won, that victory was ultimately Pyrrhic. HAP had now pledged all of its resources to pay for Vaughn, but it was unclear that their budget would be enough to do the job. The voters, meanwhile, had voted down the project the previous Fall, and it was unclear if that opposition had been financial, or substantive, or both. During the February 4 meeting of the Redevelopment Advisory Board, Planning Commissioner Harry Sroufe had warned his colleagues that "if you are going to be realistic about getting this program you can't ask the City Council. They won't stick their necks out." The prediction had been apt. The HAP board, with Dahlke's urging, held an informal dinner meeting with the City Council on May 12, and out of that grew a proposal for a public council hearing of Vaughn on May 26.[108] Politically, this was not the positive advancement it might at first have seemed. As with HAP and the Redevelopment Advisory Board, the council had reservations about whether the November bond measure defeat had been a referendum on the project itself, or only on one funding mechanism. To send the project to a hearing without first having reached an informal consensus amounted to an act of political temperature taking.

The results were a cold room. Vaughn area residents banded together to present a highly organized bit of political theater, orchestrated and represented by attorney Nick Granet. Granet was an inspired choice, a young lawyer known for his fiery eloquence and determination. Granet was also a Democratic operative with a long history of vocal advocacy on social issues, and a track record of very public battles with city hall. He was a favorite punching bag of gossip and editorial columns in the Republican-leaning *Orego-*

nian, a man who mayor Fred L. Peterson described as "one of the greatest tear jerkers in the city.... a man who expresses himself thoroughly."[109] Granet was a civil rights advocate and a bona-fide houser, having served as the chairman of a group seeking housing for veterans.[110] While Granet's political party was not very strong in the state—one nationally-syndicated columnist described midcentury Oregon as the most Republican state in the nation, "more Republican than Maine or Vermont"—nevertheless he wielded many influential connections.[111] Within the local Democratic party, he was an ally of sheriff Terry Schrunk, a rising political star who later went on to serve a staggering sixteen years as Portland's first 20th century Democrat mayor (1957-1972).[112] Further Granet had common political ground with Mayor Peterson, as both had vocally opposed former mayor Dorothy McCulllough Lee's attempts to restrict gambling and gaming in the city.[113]

After a discussion of the project by the city commissioners, Granet was invited to begin the testimony in opposition to the project. Granet laid out some opening remarks, then set about acting as a master of ceremonies for the opposition, inviting individuals up, introducing them to the council, then yielding time to them, before repeating the process. Granet facilitated ten testimonies this way. Those speaking were either residents of the Vaughn project area, or those who conducted businesses there. Included were George Christ, who had headed up the opposition to the bond measure in 1952. The testimonies they delivered appear unforced, natural, conversational, but the content was consistent. Almost every person opposed claimed a superior knowledge that came from daily presence in the neighborhood. Building on this, many questioned the accuracy and legitimacy of HAP's descriptions of neighborhood. Many noted the length of their connection to the area—including one who claimed 70 years of residence, and another who claimed to be a third-generation neighbor—while businessmen argued that the place was not filled with "a slum people," and emphasized their own status as upright, tax-paying, law-abiding citizens.[114] Helping them all along the way was freshman city commissioner Stanley Earl. Throughout the hearing, Earl expressed his impatience with the process and desire to bring the matter to a vote as soon as possible, and indicating clearly that he intended to vote against the program:

> *Having lived in that area for a number or years, in fact, all my life until I went to Korea, I know the people there and quite a few of our very good citizens come from that area, and certainly, to my knowledge, my two children were raised there, and I think they grew up O.K., and I know those kids who attended Chapman liked their neighborhood and are entitled to the same rights, same benefits, and same privileges as the kids on the Heights, Eastmoreland, Westmoreland, or whatever part of town they live.*

At the close of this statement, the audience applauded.[115]

All of this contributed to Granet's strategy of attacking the specificity, accuracy, and authority of HAP's project rhetoric. Earlier in his testimony Granet had argued about the proper name for the project area, thanking Mayor Peterson when he referred to it not as the Vaughn Street Area (or some other variation of HAP's project names), but as the "Baseball Park area," after the minor league Portland Beavers stadium at 24th and Vaughn.[116]

The semantic attacks expanded to include blight itself in Granet's closing remarks. The testimony of the neighborhood stakeholders, in Granet's view,

amounted to proof that "...there isn't any emergency... there is no slum condition or blighted area involved." Moreover, there was danger to the city in trying to claim otherwise:

> *...the only question is expanding our industrial area in that particular part of the city.... We should permit the market–the real estate market–price, and let the law of supply and demand determine the value of the properties. Why put these people at the mercy of juries and lawsuits? [The courts] can't agree with both sides, and some times [sic] they agree with the wrong side. All you are doing is creating fees for attorneys, which I can't object to, but at the same time, there's no reason to go through all that.*[117]

What Granet was arguing is that blight was a form of property appraisal. Declaring it would require proof that would withstand court challenges, not against the power of HAP to make such a determination, but on the basis of whether such a determination was provable against established norms of appraisal.[118] This was legally untested. It had the potential to tie HAP and the city government up in legal battles, and the evidence was already, in Granet's view, on the side of the Vaughn residents, for the very industrial infiltration into the neighborhood that HAP planners had argued was a cause of blight was, itself, the result of an unregulated market. If those earlier developers had managed to buy property and build warehouses and factories, what really was hindering others from similar purchases, except for a negotiation of a fair market price? Granet followed these remarks with words praising Mayor Peterson for his leadership of the city so far, and then uncomfortably reminding the council once more of the bond measure defeat the previous year.[119]

After Ganet and his ten fellow opponents, there were only three names signed up to speak in favor, though one was a mistake and actually testified *against* the project. This left only two to carry the banner of Vaughn Street before the council. The first of these was HAP chair Jane Rasmussen, who was by then only a reluctant advocate. Rasmussen confined her testimony to defending the honor of HAP's planning staff, adding that those testifying before her had been misleading when they described Vaughn as "the so-called slum area:"

> *Our comment, we do not refer to the redevelopment area as a slum area. The area is a blighted residential district, and it has come about, I might add, by the encroachment of industry, not by the people. The blight is determined by an actual structural survey made by the redevelopment agency. Records show that 85% of the dwellings do not meet the minimum city code requirements for structural and land use.*

Other than this sort of line-by-line response to previous testimony, Rasmussen made no attempt to advance the project itself, no appeals on behalf of the project's merits or stated goals.[120]

Following Rasmussen there was no additional formal testimony in favor of the project, although Guy Jacques was invited to speak and advocated for the council making a final decision as to whether it supported continuing the redevelopment program, and avoid delaying the decision to a later date. Conspicuously, there were no representatives of any of the organizations who had endorsed the project during the Fall 1952 election. Impatient for action, Commissioner Earl asked: "will somebody make a motion" to approve the project, adding "and I will second it, and then I will vote against it." After some parliamentary wrangling, Commissioner Earl

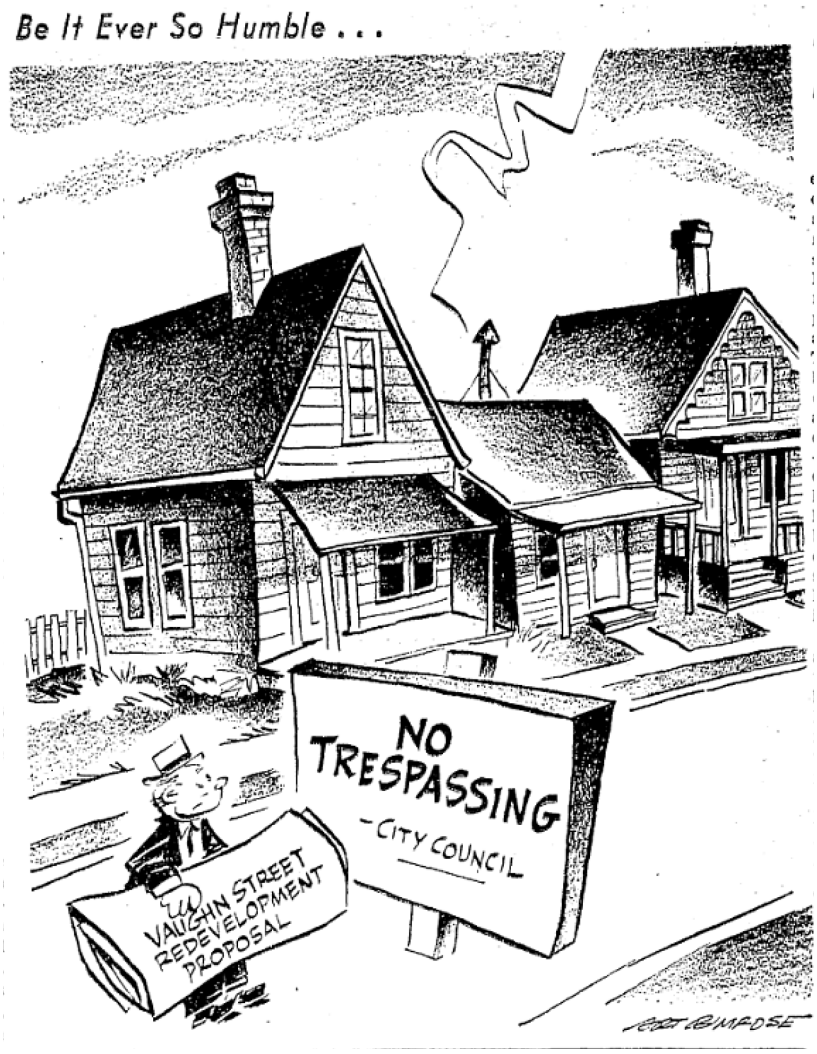


FIGURE 4-14: An editorial cartoon accompanying the *Oregonian's* complaint that the City Commission had capitulated to the desires of northwest Portland residents and merchants and become obstructionist. "We think it fair to ask the city fathers," the editorial opined, "are they against all public expenditure for slum-clearance type projects? Or are they opposed only to such a project on the soil sacred to the 'Slabtown gang'?" "Council reverses itself," *The Oregonian,* May 28, 1953, 14.

got his wish, and the motion to authorize HAP to proceed with the Vaughn project failed at a 2-2 vote.[121] Joining Earl in opposition was Mayor Peterson. After the roll call, Peterson made a lengthy speech, in which he voiced his interpretation of the bond measure defeat as a general referendum on public support for the redevelopment itself. "I am sorry that this project has to go down to defeat on this particular basis," Peterson explained, "but I must also call your attention to the fact that people have voted."[122]

The zombie-like second life of the Vaughn project was over. Two days after defeat, the *Oregonian's* editorial board—not once mentioning the 1952 bond measure defeat—accused the commission of having "strangled its baby," and somewhat unbelievably claimed that the decision had been "a surprise," as well as a political concession to a group of neighbors that the newspaper came just shy of calling rabble.[123] A cartoon accompanying the editorial accused the council of obstructionism (see Figure 4-14). Meanwhile, the Committee Against Vaughn Street Redevelopment—whose members included several of Granet's witnesses at the May 26 hearing—sent a letter to the city on June 1, thanking the commission for their "fair

handling of this very controversial issue," adding that "the people of this area hope and trust that the decision reached will be final," noting that it was "gratifying" that the commission had "upheld the wishes of the voters."[124] In July, Chester Sterrett at the Chamber of Commerce tried to resuscitate the project, but the momentum was gone.[125] The following month, HAP started laying off redevelopment staff.[126] In October, HAP's board finally rescinded Resolution 13, formally abandoning Portland's first attempt at an urban redevelopment project.[127]

Blight to what purpose? The political ramifications of Vaughn Street

Overall, Portland's first attempt at federally funded redevelopment is a remarkable example of the flexibility of the concept of blight. It was on the basis of this condition, new to federal housing legislation via its inclusion in the Housing Act of 1949, that Portland's planners were able to find a redevelopment site and seek to engage in clearance. The definitions that planners in Portland wrote were nothing if not creative. Among the several, often contradictory reasons that HAP planners argued that the Vaughn area had been blighted, the most important was not a matter of decline in the real physical conditions of buildings, but of transitioning land uses that had actually stemmed from zoning changes made by the city itself. The logic is stupendous, for if the argument had held, it would mean that a city could change the zoning in any given location, wait for private development to affect some actual land use transitions, and then declare the resulting mixture of incompatible uses in and of themselves as blight, justifying the condemnation and clearance of anything remaining that did not fit the city's desired zoning. This would have created a radical zoning power for Portland. It was also a definition of blight that would have been entirely alien to those involved with the creation of the American Public Health Association standards for housing less than a decade prior, for Portland's definition completely ignored any consideration of public welfare. Indeed, for local housers both inside and outside of HAP, the Vaughn project represented, at the very least, an uncomfortable politically-driven adventure that was a distraction from the authority's core mission, and at worst, as commissioners Friede and Rasmussen so eloquently but impotently argued in Spring of 1953, an existential danger to the very existence of public housing in Portland.

In retrospect, the Vaughn project failed primarily due to the election of November 1952, going the same way as Dorothy McCullough Lee and her reform-minded administration. The events that followed the bond measure defeat are a story of rapid declension, of furtive and futile attempts to fight against political momentum. Yet studying the afterlife of this failed project gives us access to the conflicts that, prior to November 1952, had remained submerged beneath the political surfaces of the city. It was the struggle over the dying project that made legible the inverted power dynamics between HAP and the Redevelopment Advisory Board—wherein the latter's makeup of powerful real-estate industry members held more political influence, despite officially being subservient to the former's *de-jure* powers.

Through it all, blight, with its simultaneous appearance of scientific authority and its lack of empirical specificity, was the concept that gave legitimacy to projects such as Vaughn. Opponents such as Nick Granet were well aware of this fact, and based their rhetorical attacks on Vaughn in undermining perceptions of the conditions in the project area—by undermining claims of what blight com-

prised and where it could be found. Blight had offered opportunity to those in the real estate industry who could wield the concept skillfully, a representational strategy capable of delegitimizing urban areas, justify publicly-funded clearance activities, and make room for new private investments. Yet blight's slipperiness—its existence as argument not measurement—also made it subject to challenge. Moreover, in many cities, the only institutions with the *de jure* power to deploy blight were housing authorities, necessitating that the real estate industry build real or at least pretended coalitions with housers, coalitions that could snap if, as in Portland, they were stretched too far.

Finally, in a broader sense, Portland's experience with Vaughn Street shows how "blight" was caught up in the power that came from defining problems to fit solutions. At the very start of the redevelopment process, access to money via the declaration of slums or blight then drove those declarations. Actual urban conditions did not cause Portland's leaders—not its officials, not its housers, not its real estate industry members—to then go seek federal money. Rather, the possibility of available money drove the search for urban problems, so much so that the first (and, perhaps, most important) measurement of blight had been a back-room debate between those leaders, using outdated data. This was politics, not a social science. When HAP planners then had to create a technical defense of why Vaughn was to be the city's first redevelopment project, they turned to the city's building department to craft a property survey, yet the reality was that those planners had no option than to justify a decision that had already been made. A political decision had to be justified by a survey method, again not a case of legitimate social science. In a larger way, the entire project, serving the real estate industry's needs for new industrial lots, drove every piece of rhetoric and measurement of urban conditions at Vaughn. There was never an honest appraisal of blight in Portland's first redevelopment program. If planners had been charged with finding slums rather than blight, matters might have proved different, but it was the duality of blight—its scientific clothing over a humanistic subjectivity—that had allowed private investors such free reign to subvert the purposes of public housing.

NOTES to CHAPTER 4

1. Unger added to this an offer of a $150 honorarium plus coverage of travel and lodging expenses. Nell A. Unger to Mrs. William Wurster, February 22, 1944. A second invitation from the Portland Art Museum, on behalf of an arts educators group, added another $50 honorarium for a second speech while Bauer was to be in the city. Robert Tyler Davis to Miss Catherine Bauer, March 9, 1944, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

2. Catherine Bauer, "Speech on social aspects of city planning" (speech, Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon, April 27, 1944), 7-8, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

3. *Ibid.*, 8-9

4. The city's 1930 population stood at 301,815 people. Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Population, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1931), 904. The 1940 population was estimated at 305,394. Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940, Population, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1941), 886.

5. Carl Abbott, *Portland in three centuries: The place and the people.* (Corvallis, Oregon: Oregon State University Press, 2011, especially Chapter Three: "Growing up and settling down," 49-70, and "The fair and the city," 71-93.

6. One exception was City Commisisoner Ormond Bean, who saw the 1937 Act as an opportunity to fund meaningful housing reform and solve several deficiencies in the city's rental housing stock. Bean found himself the sole voice for this cause, however. See E. Kimbark MacColl, *Growth of a City*, (Portland: Georgian Press, 1979), 532-534. Throughout his career on the City Commission, Bean proved a consistent voice of support for redevelopment, and he was a strong supporter of the city's first forays into what later scholars have described as "urban renewal."

7. Portland's civic governance structure then (and now) is a commission form. In colloquial speech, commissioners are sometimes referred to as "councilors" and the commission as the "city council," but officially the titles are "commissioner" and "city commission." The commission form of government was instituted in 1913, as a civic reform meant to curb the power of the mayor, by ensuring that different city departments are directly lead (on a day to day basis) by different commissioners. E. Kimbark MacColl with Harvey Stein, *Merchants, money and power: The Portland establishment, 1843-1913,* (Portland: Georgian Press, 1988), 445-450.

8. For a more complete accounting, see MacColl, *Growth of a City*, 530-535. MacColl notes that several supporters of the 1939 public housing measure were profiled by the Portland Police Bureau in their "red files" on suspected Communists, while the local real estate industry portrayed local housers as feminine, renters, or socialists, implying that any of these three meant disqualification from serious civic leadership. *Ibid.*, 534-535.

9. Jewell Lansing, *Portland: People, politics, and power, 1851-2001.* (Corvallis, Oregon: Oregon State University Press, 2003), 339-341.

10. *Ibid.*

11. As MacColl notes, "Mayor Earl Riley appointed the initial five members [of HAP's board], including prominent realtor Chester A. Moores who had vociferously opposed the creation of just such an agency during peacetime. Although Moores was not named chairman until September 1944, his presence dominated the HAP for four years. In fact, the agency itself was dominated by the real estate, apartment and mortgage banking interests throughout much of its early history." MacColl, *Growth of a City*, 575.

12. The characterization of Vanport's size comes from a period guide to the site, reproduced *Ibid.*, 579. According to a table reproduced in MacColl, by February 1944 HAP had constructed 18,394 dwelling units, as compared to New York City's 13,173, and far above Los Angeles (10,703) or Seattle (7,289). The Bay Area's Richmond and

Vallejo projects combined to a higher total, at 20,456 units, however when the Portland metropolitan region is considered as a whole and the projects constructed in Vancouver, Washington are added in the Portland metro region had more than 30,000 public housing units. Ironically, this means that the Portland metro area once had the highest number of public housing units of any west coast metro area. *Ibid*., 578.

13. *Ibid*. 575-584.

14. As but one very personal example, my parents' home is a 1937-built two-bedroom cottage located ten miles from the center of Portland, Oregon. Over the years, several former wartime residents have dropped by to visit, and talk about their time living in the house. According to these former residents, during the war its three attic-level rooms were rented out, sometimes with more than one person per room, giving a house built for a couple and 1-2 children a population of about eight adults. Such stories abound in Portland, which was a major shipbuilding center for Kaiser.

15. MacColl, *Growth of a City,* 593-594; Edgar Kaiser's attempts to keep Vanport are mentioned in passing on 583.

16. *Ibid*., 599-602.

17. *Ibid*., 647-652, and Lansing, *Portland,* 342-360, as well as Meryl Lipman, "Dorothy McCullough Lee (1902-1981)," *The Oregon Encyclopedia,* n.d. Retrieved September 16, 2019, from https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/lee_dorothy_mccullough_1902_1981_

18. "Religious, civic leader Monsignor Tobin dies," *The Oregonian,* November 8, 1978, G3.

19. Lansing, *Portland*, 352-354.

20. The board list is given as it appeared in the September 7, 1950 minutes of HAP. "Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Housing Authority of Portland," September 7, 1950, 1.

21. Jane S. Rasmussen rarely used her first name in civic affairs, preferring to be noted as "Mrs. Ralph W. Rasmussen." One exception can be found, a letter to the editor of the *Oregonian* from 1944 criticizing Japanese internment and the practice of the American Legion to remove the names of Nisei (Japanese-American) veterans from its memorials. Janes S. Rasmussen to The Oregonian, "Dual citizens not rare," *The Oregonian,* December 10, 1944, 19.

22. In fact, Staten had been a thorn in the side of Earl Riley, when Riley had sought to expedite HAP's acquisition and subsequent liquidation of Vanport in 1946. That Staten had been effective in frustrating Riley for quite some time had likely endeared him to the new mayor, Lee. "Riley leads red tape fight against Guilds Lake delay," *The Oregonian,* March 28, 1946, 13.

23. Dahlke was the owner of several apartment buildings, as well as serving on the executive committee of the Oregon Apartment House Association alongside Chester A. Moores, former HAP chairman and prewar public housing opponent. MacColl, *Growth of a City,* 578. Detloff had been vice president of the Oregon State Federation of Labor at the end of the war. *Ibid*., 594. For Eichenlaub, see "Mayor fills housing post," *The Oregonian,* April 18, 1950, 15.

24. "Friede to fill vacancy in PHA," *The Oregonian,* February 23, 1951, 10. Corbett's ancestor, Henry W. Corbett, was one of the leading citizens of Portland from his arrival in 1851 at age 24, bearing $25,000 of goods he secured with family money. Out of this first trading fodder, Corbett eventually built a career as a banker, newspaper owner, transportation magnate, and from 1867-1873, United States Senator. Alfred Corbett was thus from the social stratosphere of the city's elite. MacColl and Stein, *Merchants, money and power,* 28-30, as well as G. Thomas Edwards, "Henry W. Corbett (1827-1903)," *The Oregon Encyclopedia*, retrieved December 20, 2019, from https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/corbett_henry_w_1827_1903_/

25. Eichenlaub, a Lee appointee, a retired engineer from the metals industry and who was also a long-time member and leader within the Oregon Building Congress, as well as several other public institutions, appointed in April 1950 to replace contractor Charles Camplan, who had resigned. See "Mayor fills housing post," *The Oregonian,* April 18, 1950, 15, as well as "Builders back 1-way grid," *The Oregonian,* September 23, 1949, 11.

26. The young lawyer was a member of the most

connected institutions, such as the Multnomah Athletic Club, the Mazamas, and the reform-minded City Club. His political career, however, leaned leftwards, as he worked in both the Truman and Johnson administrations, served several terms in the state legislature where he advocated for civil rights, and finally began a legal aid service for the poor in Washington, D.C. Dave Hogan, "Alfred Corbett, 85, key player in legal services for poor, dies." *The Oregonian,* November 16, 2000, B08.

27. "Mrs. Ralph W. Rasmussen elected by women voters," *The Oregonian*, April 24, 1941, 22. Also serving with Rasmussen was Mrs. Henry Corbett as director of the state organization, while Mrs. Elliot Corbett was a director of the national organization. See also "2 Oregonians attend meet," *The Oregonian,* January 8, 1942, 16, and "Voters group fills office," *The Oregonian,* September 16, 1945, 42.

28. "Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Housing Authority of Portland," September 7, 1950, 2-3.

29. "Extracts from the Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Housing Authority of Portland," October 5, 1950, 1.

30. National Register of Historic Places, University Club, Portland, Oregon, National Register #79002144

31. Portland Planning Commission, Planning Commission Minutes, November 9, 1950, 23-25.

32. Numbers calculated via the Westegg Inflation Calculator, https://westegg.com/inflation/

33. Portland Planning Commission, Planning Commission Minutes, November 9, 1950, 23-25. Note that the 1940 Census numbers would not have reflected any of the additional stresses placed upon the city's housing stock by the overcrowding of the war years. Further, as Catherine Bauer noted in a 1944 speech, the Census numbers themselves were already "crude standards of measurement," a questionable source with which to judge Portland. Catherine Bauer, "Speech on social aspects of city planning" (speech, Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon, April 27, 1944), 13, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

34. The issue of whether or not public housing was compatible with the goals of Portland's real estate industry was most prominently raised by David Simpson, who had been the Chairman of the Portland Area Postwar Development Committee five years before. Portland Planning Commission, Planning Commission Minutes, December 6, 1950, 49-50.

35. Portland City Planning Commission, *Techniques for Measuring Blight,* 13.

36. Portland Planning Commission, Planning Commission Minutes, February 8, 1951, 9-10.

37. "Minutes of a regular meeting of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," January 4, 1951, 1-2.

38. MacColl, *Growth of a City,* 584.

39. The board included members of the old Portland social establishment such as C.C. Chapman and Harry Corbett; leading businessmen such as Meier & Frank department store head Aaron Frank, and electric utility executive Gordon Steele; the architect E.B. MacNaughton; and Harry Banfield from the Oregon Highway Commission. David B. Simpson to Mayor Earl Riley, April 6, 1945. Correspondence, Civic Center Industrial Expansion and Urban Redevelopment, Portland Archives A 2010-019-0275-01.

40. "A Bill for an Act determining and declaring the existence in cities of Oregon having populations of 5000 or more, of deteriorated, blighted and or neglected areas…", n.d. Correspondence, Civic Center Industrial Expansion and Urban Redevelopment, Portland Archives A 2010-019-0275-01.

41. Industrial Expansion and Urban Redevelopment Act (memo), n.d., Correspondence, Civic Center Industrial Expansion and Urban Redevelopment, Portland Archives A 2010-019-0275-01.

42. "Minutes of a regular meeting of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," January 4, 1951, 1-2.

43. "Minutes of a regular meeting of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," May 3, 1951, 1-2.

44. The board was formed after HAP board action

on May 3, 1951. "Minutes of a regular meeting of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," May 3, 1951, 1-2. After the real estate industry, the next largest group represented on the advisory board were public employees and public officials at eight seats, and labor organizations with three seats. Housers are represented only by two seats, one belonging to an FHA representative, and the other to local architect Roi L. Morin, who was president of the Portland Housing and Planning Association. If we lump together as housers others in the architectural profession—Mrs. Nelson A. Hodges with the YWCA, whose husband was an architect, and John K. Dukehart, vice president of the Oregon Chapter, American Institute of Architects, then we bring the total houser count up to four, but this is a large stretch and there is no way to be certain that Dukehart or Hodges, merely by being architects, shared Morin's pro-housing stance. The full list of members for the advisory board is as follows:

Guy E. Jacques, President, Portland Federal Savings & Loan Association
Harold Ager, Coordinator of Sites and Buildings, School District #1
J. Guy Arrington, State Director, Federal Housing Administration
George M. Baldwin, Secretary, Tax Supervising & Cons. Comm., Multnomah County
Jess A. Bell, Secretary, Portland Industrial Union Council, Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America
Edwin C. Berry, Executive secretary, Urban League of Portland
R.R. Bullivant, Member, City Planning Commission
Marshall Dana, Assistant to the President, U.S. National Bank of Portland
Phil Dreye, American Veteran's Committee
John K. Dukehart, Vice President, Oregon Chapter, American Institute of Architects
Wilbur J. Falloon, President, Portland Chapter, American Institute of Real Estate Appraisers; Trust Dept., First National Bank of Portland
Albert V. Fonder, Northern School Supply Company
Fred E. Fowler, Traffic Engineer, City of Portland
Milton Goldsmith, Executive Director, Federated Jewish Societies
James W. Goodsell, Editor, Oregon Labor Press
Paul F. Gronnert, Portland Home Builders
Mrs. Cynthia Hannum, City Planning Commission (also: League of Women Voters)
Mrs. Nelson A. Hodges, YWCA
L.H. Hoffman, Contractor
Hilbert S. Johnson, President, Professional Engineers of Oregon
H.R. Kibler, Building Contractor
Graham Killam, Portland Realty Board
Mrs. C. Hunt Lewis, Jr., Junior League of Oregon
Fred Manash, Secretary, Building and Construction Trades Council
Lester Martin, Federated Community Clubs
J.P. McInnis, Vice Chairman, General Committee, Brotherhood of Railroad Trainment
Dr. Thomas L. Mador, Health officer, City of Portland
Leslie W. Meigs, East Side Commercial Club
Roi L. Morin, President, Portland Housing and Planning Association
Dr. Gordon V. Pefley, American Legion
J.C. Plankinton, Council of Churches
Luke Roberts, Education and Agricutlural Director, KOIN (radio)
R.M. Robson, Oregon Building Conference (also a contractor)
Edgar Smith, President, Portland Chamber of Commerce
Chester K. Sterrett, Manager, Industries Department, Portland Chamber of Commerce
J.H. Sroufe, President, City Planning Commission

Housing Authority of Portland, *Portland Redevelopment Program*, February 1952, i. Information on Mr. Hodge's occupation comes from Polk's Portland City Directory, 1953-1954, p 493.

45. "Regular meeting of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," July 5, 1951, 1.

46. "Minutes of a regular meeting of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," June 21, 1951, 1; "Minutes of a regular meeting of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," September 6, 1951, 1-2.

47. "Minutes of a regular meeting of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," September 20, 1951, 1.

48. *Ibid.* Friede had been appointed by mayor Lee as the attorney member of the HAP board in February 1951, replacing Alfred H. Corbett, who was bound for a position in the Truman administration in D.C. "Friede to fill vacancy in PHA," *The Oregonian,* February 23, 1951, 10.

49. Housing Authority of Portland, *Portland Redevelopment Program*, February 1952, 11.

50. *Ibid.*, 12.

51. *Ibid.*, 12.

52. *Ibid.*, 14

53. The survey consisted of a single-sided form given the very census-like title of "property schedule." Given their low but round number, it may be reasonable to surmise that these were spot checks of building conditions in the Vaughn Area, rather than part of a large and comprehensive survey.

54. Housing Authority of Portland, *A Report: Delineation of the Vaughn Street Redevelopment Project Area.* April 1952, Exhibit 13. A report produced by HAP staffer Margaret Fritche makes a similar claim, yet a file note attached to Fritche's report states that this "does not represent what was actually done in the Vaughn St. Survey." What this means is unclear, as Fritche's description agrees with that in Benard's letter, as well as the body text of *Delineation of Vaughn Street.* Margaret Fritche, "Review of factors used in conducting survey of land coverage and structural conditions of dwelling structures in the Vaughn Street Project by the Housing Authrotiy of Portland in 1952," n.d. The cover note adds, further, that Fritche was "formerly of the Housing Authority." It is unclear when she left the authority, but she was still on the staff in late May 1952, when she briefed the HAP board. "Minutes of a special dinner meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authroity of Portland and the Redevelopment Staff," May 27, 1952. One round quantity of twenty property schedules survive, all located in the four blocks surrounding the intersection of NW 23rd Place and NW Reed Street.

55. Housing Authority of Portland, *A Report: Delineation of the Vaughn Street Redevelopment Project Area.* April 1952, exhibit 14, quoted text from page 21.

56. *Ibid.*, Exhibit 13.

57. *Ibid.*, 25. What is not entirely clear is how anyone can be labelled both among the "second or third generations living in the area" yet also be "immigrant." Possibly this is a reflection of establishment attitudes about white ethnicity on the part of HAP staff and the Redevelopment Advisory Board.

58. *Ibid.*, 25-28. HAP was so reticent about its "social blight" claims that it even contradicted itself, noting that there was a high correlation between juvenile crimes and "broken homes" Nobody at HAP attempted to argue that this higher divorce rate was caused by the geography or built environment of the neighborhood.

59. *Ibid.,* 22-24, 28-29, quote from 29. Only one other substantive and material factor was weighed in *Delineation of Vaughn Street:* The relative lack of off-street parking for both local residences (most of which dated to an era before the automobile and, consequently, before the garage), and for the industrial plants that had infiltrated the neighborhood for the prior four decades. *Ibid.*, 16-18.

60. *Ibid.*, 19.

61. *Ibid.*, 4.

62. The property was 2336 NW 24th Avenue. Housing Authority of Portland, "Vaughn Street: Property Survey Forms," Portland Archives and Records Center, AF/170041 A2011-015. This site is today occupied by a complex of small concrete warehouses.

63. Housing Authority of Portland, *Delineation of the Vaughn Street*, 22.

64. *Ibid.*, Exhibit 16. Only the FHA, represented by state director J. Guy Arrington, issued a lengthy and guarded response. Arrington noted that it was "difficult" to make a general statement about the willingness of the FHA to insure mortgages in the Vaughn area given that "each application received by this office for mortgage insurance is considered on its own merits." Further, Arrington noted that the FHA already was an insurer of mortgages on one residential property in the proposed

project, and two more in the immediate vicinity, each "multifamily rental housing." The FHA would not, however, issue mortgage insurance to properties inside the proposed boundaries of the redevelopment project "as it now exists" because properties in the area were not zoned residential, and Arrington notes that in the case of one of the adjacent properties they did insure, the FHA had required a zoning change prior to issuance. *Ibid.*

65. *Ibid.*, 22.

66. This was "Resolution No. 7," titled "Resolution relating to a blighted area in the city of Portland known as the Vaughn Street redevelopment project area." "Minutes of a regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," June 19, 1952, 1.

67. "Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland," June 3, 1952, 2. While it was possible for certain civic investments to be counted as "in-kind" contributions—items such as street improvements, new sewer lines, and the like—there were relatively few proposed for this first project. With no residential units to be built, and all extant ones to be removed, there would be no need of new big-ticket items such as parks or schools. One new road was anticipated—a widening of Thurman Street and an extension linking the west end of the same to Nicolai and 31st—but otherwise the goal was to clear and assemble property for industrial development. Housing Authority of Portland, *Delineation of the Vaughn Street*, Exhibit 4.

68. "Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland," August 20, 1952, 1, as well as "Regular Meeting of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," (Minutes), October 2, 1952, 1.

69. "Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland," August 20, 1952, 1.

70. "Regular Meeting of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," (Minutes), October 2, 1952, 1.

71. "Special Meeting of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," (Minutes), October 23, 1952, 1.

72. "Vote for progress," (Advertisement), *The Oregonian,* November 3, 1952, 13.

73. "A final look at election measures," *The Oregonian,* November 2, 1952, 41.

74. *Ibid.* The full list, as of October 23, just a few weeks before the election, was as follows:

Portland Chamber of Commerce
East Side Commercial Club
Buildings and Construction Trades Council
League of Women Voters
Metal Trades Council
American Institute of Architects
Multnomah County Democratic Central Committee
Central Labor Council
American Veterans Committee
Oregon Building Congress
Multnomah Young Republican Club
Federated Community Clubs

75. "Subsidizing housing," editorial, *The Oregonian,* December 25, 1949, 12.

76. Indeed, the entire report reads less like an appeal on behalf of homeowners than on the part of home-builders. It never makes claims about the possible negative impacts of public housing on existing neighborhoods, or even on the resale value of already built homes. Its concerns lay entirely in the issue of home production, not demand, and its few forays into discussing the conditions of homes in Portland are rooted in abstractions such as the percentages of ownership, the quantity of units, or the cost of construction, but rarely if ever about the quality of sanitation, light, or space. Welfare is mentioned only in the context of programs of financial subsidy, and are painted as a poor use of money at best, and a step towards socialism at worst. Portland Home Owners Council, "Public Housing for Portland, Oregon," 7-8. So far, I have been unable to ascertain who occupied the office at 405 Title & Trust Building, 321 S.W. Fourth Avenue, in 1949, but searches through newspapers and city directories from the 1940s and 1950s consistently turns up tenants such as Stan Wiley Realtors (starting in the mid 1950s) and, until 1946, the offices of Western Homes, a developer of suburban homes. The building itself takes its name from its original builder and tenant, the Title & Trust Company, a title insurer.

77. "In spite of the strain placed upon the construction industry by the curtailment of house building during the war," the report noted with some gall, "the American people generally, and specifically the residents of the City of Portland, are better housed and have more housing today than in 1940, and probably more than at any time in their history." The origin of the figures used in the report is not always clear—some are citied to Census data obtained in 1947, while others are attributed no source at all. The report claimed that the ratio of available housing to residents in Portland was higher in 1949 than in 1940, and that home ownership had increased since that year from 53% to 63%. "This is private enterprise housing," the report noted. "It creates a city of home owners and it houses the people in single family residences." Portland Home Owners Council, "Public Housing for Portland, Oregon," 8-10.

78. *Ibid.*

79. *Ibid.*

80. "Real estate board acts on ballot measures," *The Oregonian,* October 30, 1952, 26.

81. "Vaughn Street stirs dispute: Shull, Jacques mix over ballot issue," *The Oregonian,* October 22, 1952, 16.

82. *Ibid.*

83. "Save our homes," (Advertisement), *The Oregonian*, November 2, 1952, 11.

84. The initial numbers were 62,974 in favor, and 79,960 opposed. "How Multnomah County voters cast ballots," *The Oregonian,* November 6, 1952, 17. A postmortem meeting held by HAP a little over a week later put the numbers at 74,931 in favor, and 93,215 opposed. "Special meeting of the board of commissioner of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," November 14, 1952, 2.

85. National Association of Housing Officials, "Portland Oregon bond measure issue election summary," *Redevelopment Information Service Newsletter* 4, 24, December 31, 1952, 1-2, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

86. *Ibid.*

87. MacColl noted that Lee's intransigent attempts at fighting the city's long-standing vice industry, combined with a high-handed attitude towards the use of power, resulted in a constant opposition campaign against her made by those with a vested interest in continuing vice operations, the central pillar of which was to characterize Lee as "ridiculous." MacColl, *Growth of a City,* 649-652.

88. Lansing, *Portland,* 364.

89. *Ibid.,* 362.

90. "Portland Oregon bond measure issue election summary," 1-2, , Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

91. "Special meeting of the board of commissioner of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," November 14, 1952, 2-3.

92. The full roster is not available, but a report to the HAP board on January 22 included mention of: HAP board chair Jane Rasmussen; HAP board members Staten, Dahlke, and Riggs; HAP staff members Floyd Ratchford, Marc Bowman, and Harlan Nelson; Chester Sterrett from the Chamber of Commerce, *Oregonian* editorial board writer Malcolm Bauer, reporter Fred Taylor, and Guy Jacques. "Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," January 22, 1953, 1.

93. *Ibid.*

94. *Ibid*, 2-4, as well as Housing Authority of Portland, "Resolution No. 10," January 22, 1953.

95. "Portland Redevelopment Advisory Board, Minutes of a Meeting," February 2, 1953. See also Guy E. Jacques to Mayor Fred L. Peterson, February 3, 1953.

96. Guy E. Jacques to Mrs. R. W. Rasmussen, February 12, 1953.

97. Mrs. Ralph W. Rasmussen to Guy E. Jacques, February 17, 1953.

98. "Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of

Portland, Oregon," January 22, 1953, 3-5.

99. Guy E. Jacques to Mrs. R.W. Rasmussen, February 18, 1953.

100. "Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," February 19, 1953, 5-9. For the final passage of Friede's motion, see "Minutes of a Recessed Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," February 26, 1953, 1-2.

101. "Minutes of a Recessed Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," February 26, 1953, 2-3.

102. Asbahr was partner in the Asbahr Realty Company, a developer who built both residential and commercial properties in the postwar era. *Polk's Portland City Directory, 1953-1954* (Seattle, Washington: R.L. Polk & Company, 1953), 56. See also City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, "East Portland Historical Overview & Historic Preservation Study," March 2009, 39.

103. "Minutes of an informal meeting of the board of commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland," March 4, 1953, 1-2, as well as "Joint meeting of Portland Redevelopment Advisory Board and Housing Authority of Portland Commissioners," (Minutes), March 4, 1953, 1-2.

104 "Minutes of a regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland," March 5, 1953, 1-2.

105. On April 2nd, Fred Manash, secretary for the Portland Building Trades Council and a member of the Redevelopment Advisory Board, testified before HAP that he had talked with "various members of the City Council" and determined that unless HAP's financial commitment was increased from a fixed $1 million to a floating one-third cost of the Vaughn program, the City Council would kill the entire project. He therefore asked for HAP to once more rescind a resolution relating to Vaughn, this time a resolution in *favor* of the Vaughn project on the grounds that it was insufficient. "Minutes of a regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland," April 2, 1953, 1-3. The motion to rescind was proposed by Dahlke at the April 2 meeting, and then acted on at the April 22 meeting. "Minutes of a regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland," April 16, 1953, 1-2.

106. "Resolution relating to the provision of cash grants-in-aid for the Vaughn Street redevelopment project (project no 1)," Resolution 13, Housing Authority of Portland, April 23, 1953.

107. "Minutes of a recessed meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland," April 23, 1953, 1-3.

108. "Minutes of a regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland," May 7, 1953, 2, and "Minutes of a regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland," May 21, 1953, 1.

109. Granet, born Lee Nicholas Granoff, was a second-generation American who came into politics via prewar involvement with labor unions. He rose to be chair, during the late 1940s, of the Multnomah County Democratic Committee, but was ousted after controversial and divisive leadership that rankled old-time Democrats. For a brief biographical sketch, see Granet's self-description in B. Mike, "Behind the Mike," *The Oregonian*, November 27, 1952, 26. See also Paul Hauser, "Multnomah County Democrats to elect chairman Monday," *The Oregonian,* July 11, 1948, 14, and "Granet seeks seat in House, Attorney favors pensions at 60," *The Oregonian,* May 16, 1948, 14. Granet changed his name from Granoff to Granet in Spring 1948 in order to run for state legislature, remarking that "if you want to run for office in this state it doesn't pay to have a foreign-sounding name." "Drive to sign labor vote planned, Democrats told," *The Oregonian,* March 5, 1948, 12.

110. "Granet seeks seat in House." In the wake of the Vanport flood, he had been a vocal advocate for displaced HAP residents, going so far as to telegram the governor, the entire state's Congressional delegation, and President Truman requesting immediate and substantial aid beyond "emergency relief." "New housing to be studied," *The Oregonian,* June 1, 1948, 4.

111. Marquis Childs, "Oregon called tightest GOP

state by visiting columnist," *The Oregonian,* August 24, 1948, 22.

112. See Mervin Shoemaker, "Oregon's 12 delegates turn homeward, some pleased, but others disappointed," *The Oregonian,* July 27, 1952, 13, as well as "Schrunk, Granet get home, feeling 'babes in woods'," *The Oregonian,* July 29, 1952, 13. For an overview of Schrunk's career, see Phillip Cogswell, "Terry Schrunk (1913-1975)," *The Oregon Encyclopedia,* retrieved November 3, 2019, from https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/schrunk_terry_1913_1975_/

113. "Mayor ties punchboards to syndicates as several speakers take sharp issue," *The Oregonian,* August 11, 1949, 19. Peterson had made opposition to Lee's anti-gambling activities a cornerstone of his 1952 campaign. Cogswell, "Terry Shrunk."

114. "A recessed meeting of the council of the city of Portland, Oregon," (minutes), May 26, 1953, 320-326.

115. *Ibid.*, 328.

116. Granet also attacked the validity of using photographs of the project area as a means of establishing conditions, supplying his own "recent snapshot" that depicted the area in a different light. Unfortunately, the photographs that he exhibited to the council do not survive in the Portland Archives collections, so it is difficult to pin down exactly which images and locations he was referencing. *Ibid.*, 320.

117. *Ibid.*, 326.

118. Granet had, in fact, presented the council with a copy of an independent appraisal for a lot in the project area, the appraiser arguing that the sample property, a duplex built in 1909 and last refurbished in 1943, was in fact the "highest and best use" of the land. The implication appears to be that Granet could easily assemble appraisals by reputable appraisers that would paint a very different picture of the Vaughn project area. *Ibid.*, 320. The power of HAP to condemn properties—even properties in good shape—as part of a clearance program *had* been tested in state courts, to the benefit of HAP, in Spring 1953, in *H.J. Foeller and Margaret Foeller v. Housing Authority of Portland and the City of Portland.* (The case began in advance of the fall 1952 bond vote, but had taken until early 1953 to work through the courts.) However, the question of how blight itself was defined had not been established in the case, only the power *to* define it, and then clear for it. National Association of Housing Officials, "Oregon redevelopment law held constitutional," *Redevelopment Information Service Newsletter* 5, 10, May 31, 1953, 1-2, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

119. "A recessed meeting," May 26, 1953, 326.

120. *Ibid.,* 326-327.

121. Council rules at the time required at least 3 votes for passage; Commissioner William A. Bowes was absent on May 26. *Ibid.*, 332.

122. *Ibid.*

123. More specifically, the editorial board asked if the commission was "opposed only to such a project on the soil sacred to the 'Slabtown gang'?" "Council reverses itself," *The Oregonian,* May 28, 1953, 14. "Slabtown" is a long-established nickname for large stretches of the extreme northwest section of the city, and has class connotations. The name originated because residents of this area made use of cheap lumber mill waste—scrap "slabs"—as a heating source. Mike Ryerson, *Portland's Slabtown.* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2013), 9.

124. William G. Kottering to the Honorable Mayor Fred L. Peterson, June 1, 1953.

125. "Minutes of a regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland," July 2, 1953, 1.

126. "Minutes of a regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland," August 6, 1953, 1

127. "Minutes of a postponed regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of Portland," October 22, 1953, 6-7.

CHAPTER 5
Conclusion:
"Blight" never-ending

In 1937, with the passage of the Wagner Steagall bill, the United States had a federally funded public housing program. Twelve years later, with the reauthorization of Wagner-Steagall with the Taft-Ellender-Wagner bill, adopted as the American Housing Act of 1949, the nation no longer had a public housing program. Instead, it had a redevelopment program that sometimes funded public housing. While there were many changes between the 1937 and 1949 housing legislation, it is my contention that the most important change was the inclusion of blight, alongside slum, as the urban condition authorizing the expenditure of federal funds. To understand the history of the word blight as a planning term, the story of its inclusion of in the 1949 Act, and the subsequent consequences of that inclusion, is to understand how federal programs originally meant to care for the residential welfare of the poor and working poor became a tool for redevelopment, a process that has since been colloquially referred to as "urban renewal."

Because this change originated in federal legislation, it had impacts nationwide, yet the best way to see this shift is through younger cities, communities that had no history of residential factory slums like those of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, or other larger and order cities of the Eastern Seaboard. Indeed, blight had special resonance for the younger cities—communities founded in the middle 19th century, mostly in the West, and frequently on the Pacific Coast. While the term "slum" was neither empirical nor scientific, its generally accepted definition as the nadir of physical conditions made it relatively stable to identify and, as a result, difficult to locate in the younger city.[1] Without a term such as blight, it would have been difficult if not impossible for younger cities to have participated in federally funded urban intervention.

This dissertation thus examined case studies located in two West Coast cities: Oakland, California and Portland, Oregon. The goal of these examples, however, is not to establish that somehow these cities were profoundly different in how the federal urban renewal program played out. Rather, the value of these young city examples is that, stripped of slum conditions, the function and importance of the planning rhetoric of blight is more easily exposed. Similar activities doubtless riddled the larger and more industrial cities of the Eastern Seaboard and the Midwest as well, but in the younger city they are stripped of the blankets of slum politics, and laid naked. By extension, I believe it is then possible to see more clearly how the inclusion of blight in the 1949 Act was central to the redirection of the federal public housing program into a program for redevelopment and urban renewal.

A necessity for blight?

For those who sought to redirect federal funding from public housing to redevelopment, blight was the most powerful rhetorical tool available, and its inclusion in federal legislation in the late 1940s was potent. Yet, it is critical at this stage to limit the claims of this dissertation, or

risk arguing that the use of "blight" in the 1949 Act was unavoidable and inevitable. On the contrary, it is entirely conceivable that those seeking this diversion of federal funds may have tried a different word (or set of words) to achieve their goals. As Daniel Abramson has noted, the word "obsolescence," as but one example, had a similar rise in use throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Further, in the same period as this dissertation's case studies, Boston-based planners theorized obsolescence as parallel to, and sometimes synonymous with, the idea of blight.[2] More technocratic approaches might have justified federally-funded redevelopment, such as characterizing the need for intervention through the language of zoning non-compliance and zoning enforcement, or even through broader arguments about the need for rational urban planning, defined along the predominate planning practices at midcentury. To these, we might add many more paths that were not taken. Motivated by wartime uncertainties about the postwar world, the real estate industry in particular had reason enough to find a way to affect a change in federal priorities regarding the funding of urban intervention.

It is worth looking specifically at blight, though, for three reasons. First, the term "blight" rose to prominence through more than a decade of argument between housers, planners, politicians, and the real estate industry in the interwar era. It was these struggles that gave blight its character as a planning term, and thus legitimized it as a potential tool for reshaping the American city. Put more bluntly, "blight" was *not* a direct synonym for "obsolescence," nor for decline, decay, transition, or any other urban process or urban state of being. The word had been forged with its own qualities that figured into its utility and appeal among those who, in the "long" 1940s, attempted to create a different future for urbanity in the United States. Second, while there were doubtless other options, blight *was* the rhetorical path chosen by redevelopment advocates, primarily in the real estate industry and its allies, but also sometimes by housers and other planning advocates. It must, then, have held some appeal that other options had not. We might think of these as the *intentions* of rhetoric, the purpose to which planning terms were put and the hoped-four outcomes that might flow from those terms. Third, and more subtly, there were specific consequences to the words that were chosen for describing one of the key problems of the postwar American city as blight, consequences that were not always conscious. This is the issue of problem formation, in which the rhetoric of planning implied a correlative set of responses.

In the interwar years, as related in chapters 1 and 2, there were many ways to define blight. What is most crucial, however, is how various parties reshaped this loanword from botanical sciences from a loose metaphor about the city into planning terminology. The apogee of these struggles were the actions of the American Public Health Association, who by the 1940s, had linked the word blight to a fixed, repeatable, empirical method of measuring urban conditions. Their work might have been the end of blight's story, the final word on what it was and how it was to be measured. Events proved otherwise. When Congress finally enshrined blight as one of two conditions, alongside slum, qualifying for intervention through federal funding, it did not adopt the APHA's definition. Yet, even though the APHA definition was rarely used, the association's efforts to create an empirical character for the planning term helped to legitimize "blight." The APHA had, through its efforts, reinforced the idea that "blight" was something *worth* study. They had, in essence, endorsed the term, even if they had not convinced many to adopt their ways of defining it. Further, as

an organization that advocated for empiricism and scientific method, the APHA, through its actions, had only underscored the notion that blight was a scientific term, rather than a literary or poetic one.

In the postwar years, the definition of blight that became prevalent in the United States became not the APHA's, but that of Congress, which was all the more ironic because Congress had declined to provide any definition of blight at all. Thus "blight" emerged as a key to federal funding, whose specific definitions were apparently scientific and empirical, but were in fact flexible and metaphorical. As Bruno Latour has remarked, for most of the past two centuries or more, "scientific texts were assumed to be nothing more than supports for information, whose only virtue was transparency, and whose only defect was obscurity."[3] As Latour goes on to note, legal terms—and blight, through the Housing Act of 1949, had become such—were a case of "reduction of the world to paper," an act that:

> *...seeks to constitute a domain of unquestionable fact as quickly as possible (which means only that there should be no submission from the defence [sic] contesting those facts), so that it can then subsume the facts into a rule of law (which is in practice a text) in order to produce a judgement.*

Through such actions, the judge "will no longer have to learn anything more" and thus "allow him to transport an unquestionable decision."[4] In the case of blight, the judge becomes the decision-maker(s) of a redevelopment authority, and the "unquestionable decision" becomes the irrevocable one: The dispossession of residents, and the seizure of homes, shops, stores—of entire neighborhoods. Or, to put it into the succinct language of urban planning, condemnation and clearance.

It is as a metaphor that blight thus became a potent tool for the channeling of municipal power and federal monies. As linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson suggest, such metaphorical concepts "structure (at least in part) what we do and how we understand what we are doing.... *The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*" (emphasis original).[5] As the botanist L.F. Henderson noted in his seminal paper on fire blight, when a tree in an orchard was struck, the infected limbs—with both good and bad wood, both afflicted leaves and healthy green ones—"the only remedy thus far found has been and is the careful and continuous use of the saw and the pruning knife." Moreover, in order to save the remainder of the tree, the pruned materials were then burned, as biological safety came only through certain and total destruction of the diseased parts.[6] So, too, blight in the city justified drastic intervention that removed "good" and "bad" buildings together wherever planners claimed that the condition existed. Blight, as a term of planning, was thus not merely a case of the cynical use of language and power. Yes, parties who would profit from clearance—typically members of the real estate industry, but sometimes too municipal governments whose tax base would increase, or public housing authorities who would gain land upon which to build—had the opportunity to use the term blight as a way to manipulate politicians, community leaders, and the public at large to support clearance. Consider, however, that audience, who might in turn take claims of blight's existence as true, and who might then have approved of clearance as the best and most logical response. Among those with something to gain, "blight" might sometimes have been a shared fiction, but the power of the shared fiction was that some audiences might believe in it and take it as fact.

They might also, however, object. Blight could indeed attract the testimony-like responses of what Latour might call "the defence [sic]," as it did in both Oakland and Portland.[7] And while blight had, through a decades-long history of discourse among planners, the semblance of an empirical science, the lack of fixed definition by Congress also weakened it. At midcentury, to speak of a place as blighted was to wield the implied authority of objective method, but this authority was only powerful so long as *all* major parties in the struggle over urban space *respected* it. Actual empirical science was on relatively firm ground. It was and remains plausible, for example, to take samples of air or water, and through laboratory examination, determine how toxic they might be to human life. It was, and remains plausible, to inspect a building for mold, mildew, and rot, and determine how long it might stand without endangering the public. There is still room for argument even here—what constitutes a legitimate sample of water? Whose human characteristics define healthy, and thus the level of toxicity? What level of rot is a danger to building collapse, and what merely minor decay? Yet these remain orders of magnitude more objective than measurements of blight, which in actual methods were so loose as to be more akin to literary description than to empirical measurement. Because of this, those who lived in proposed redevelopment projects, or who had cause to believe that redevelopment would be against their interests, were sometimes able to attack the logic of blight, to undermine the arguments of redevelopment authorities and members of the real estate industry who hoped to profit by their projects.

Blight, as a term of planning actually deployed in American cities, was thus a wholly political term. While it was possible for planners to construct locally-derived definitions of blight that placed issues of human welfare, residential housing conditions, and the public good as central—as I believe the case of John G. Marr's *Redevelopment in Oakland* stands as a prime example—such definitions were the result of a conscious choice, and *not* the self-evident result of the application of a scientific method. Marr and his staff chose to take blight seriously, as a real condition of concern, not as an excuse for supporting specific pet projects of the real estate industry. By contrast, in Portland, political leaders and the real estate industry—often the same people—chose to "cash in" on federal funding, and then cynically engineered definitions of blight that fit their desires. Yet both approaches—so different from one another in method and motive—were legally justified under the terms of the 1949 Act. Both were, in the eyes of Congress and the Housing and Home Finance Administration, legitimate applications of the logic of blight. But if the cornerstone of science is repeatability—the notion that a measurement can be taken again and again, and an experiment repeated over and over with the same result—then blight as it was actually found under the terms of the 1949 Act was never a science, and always a political act.

Blight's failures as paths to later success

Both case studies within this dissertation—Oakland's citywide blight measurement program of 1949, and Portland's first redevelopment project of Vaughn Street in 1950-1953—were failures. In Oakland, the city's blight measurement program was outright rejected by the City Council in January 1950, while in Portland, Vaughn Street was officially terminated by council action in mid 1953.[8] In both cases, projects that began by conversations with planning professionals were terminated through official political processes. "Blight," then, may have been a convenient term in forming local urban

policies intended to be funded through federal monies, but in these two examples the term proved ill-suited to democratic processes.

Indeed, in both Oakland and Portland, political opposition to potential local housing and redevelopment programs centered on blight itself. One characteristic united these opponents: Blight seemed empirically based, but they knew that it was not. This, in fact, was the danger, and often the heart of their opposition. For residents of a proposed project area, to have ones' home and neighborhood labelled "blight" was to cast an aspersion with almost moral dimensions, an accusation of neglect, of too-low standards, of not fitting in with the urban norm. Insult of this sort bred, in turn, indignation and resistance. For small-time real estate industry members within project boundaries—apartment house investors, landlords—blight might justify clearance, and clearance would mean the loss of reliable income properties. To those who had maximized their returns through minimal maintenance investments against maximum plausible rent rates, this must have seemed like a punishment for being too profitable, an attack on the very basis of capitalist enterprise that went beyond the rhetoric of political ideology, an abstract made tangible. For those of this class who owned rental housing outside of proposed project areas, there remained two threats. First, there was nothing to prevent a municipal authority from creating new projects that might encompass their investments at some future date. Second, if that authority then constructed new, modern, and low-cost rental units—in other words, public housing—that meant new competition. In all of these cases, the fundamental issue was where and how a local authority could declare blight. Federal funds were only available if a local authority was able to locate either slums or blight. It was in the interests of all of these opponents to prevent such a thing from occurring, and it was thus the idea of blight itself that both Oakland and Portland opponents attacked.

The ultimate failure of both the Oakland and Portland cases should not be taken as evidence that blight was a weak term, one quickly relegated to the scrapheap of American planning history. On the contrary, in the decades that followed these two midcentury projects, planners in Oakland and Portland—and, for that matter, in cities across the nation—applied the logic of blight again and again, often with great success.

In the case of Oakland, redevelopment efforts stalled for several years, before being revived by the local Chamber of Commerce and several members of the real estate industry. Rather than pursue a city-wide declaration of blight, Oakland's leadership echoed Portland's choices, picking a single project area. Unlike in Portland, they managed to keep their project unencumbered by the political issues surrounding public housing, by appointing an oversight board consisting primarily of the local real estate industry and keeping the program firmly away from the Oakland Housing Authority.[9]

The result was Clinton Park, the city's first redevelopment project (Figure 5-1). Located on the eastern shores of Lake Merritt, Clinton Park was a remarkably conservative program, and doubtless further opposition was stymied by a near complete avoidance of clearance. After declaring the area blighted, city planners tore down only one block, and only for the construction of a modern elementary school. There were, in addition, improvements to the public realm—lighting, sidewalks, traffic-calming devices such as diverters that prevented through-traffic on several streets. Taken individually, such activities hardly resemble redevelopment,

but in temporally packaging them together, the city claimed them as redevelopment even while avoiding the appearance of authoritarian planning. The heart of the Clinton project, though, was a "rehabilitation program," a conservative philosophy of urban redevelopment long advocated for by the National Association of Real Estate Boards.[10] Under rehabilitation, funding was offered to local property owners for modernizing buildings. In some cases, this meant bringing structures up to code. In other cases, this meant stylistic remodels that stripped Gilded Age buildings of their ornate millwork and replaced it with plain, modern stucco and swapped wooden windows for aluminum ones (see Figures 5-2 and 5-3). More remarkably, the funding for rehabilitation in Clinton Park did not come from the city, nor the federal government, but through private loans from local lenders, often secured only after prominent members of Oakland's establishment made personal pressure calls

FIGURE 5-1: Oakland's planners and urban elites had long speculated about the potential for redevelopment in the Clinton Park neighborhood. This map is from the city's 1949 survey of blight conditions, and shows what planners then were calling the "East of the Lake Neighborhood," an area considered ripe for urban renewal activities. I have superimposed over this map a highlighted area, showing the boundaries of the Clinton Park urban renewal project of the late 1950s. Source: City Planning Commission, City of Oakland. *Redevelopment in Oakland.* (Oakland, California: City of Oakland, June 1949), unpaginated, between pages 36 and 37. with Clinton Park urban renewal boundaries superimposed in Photoshop by Alexander Benjamin Craghead.

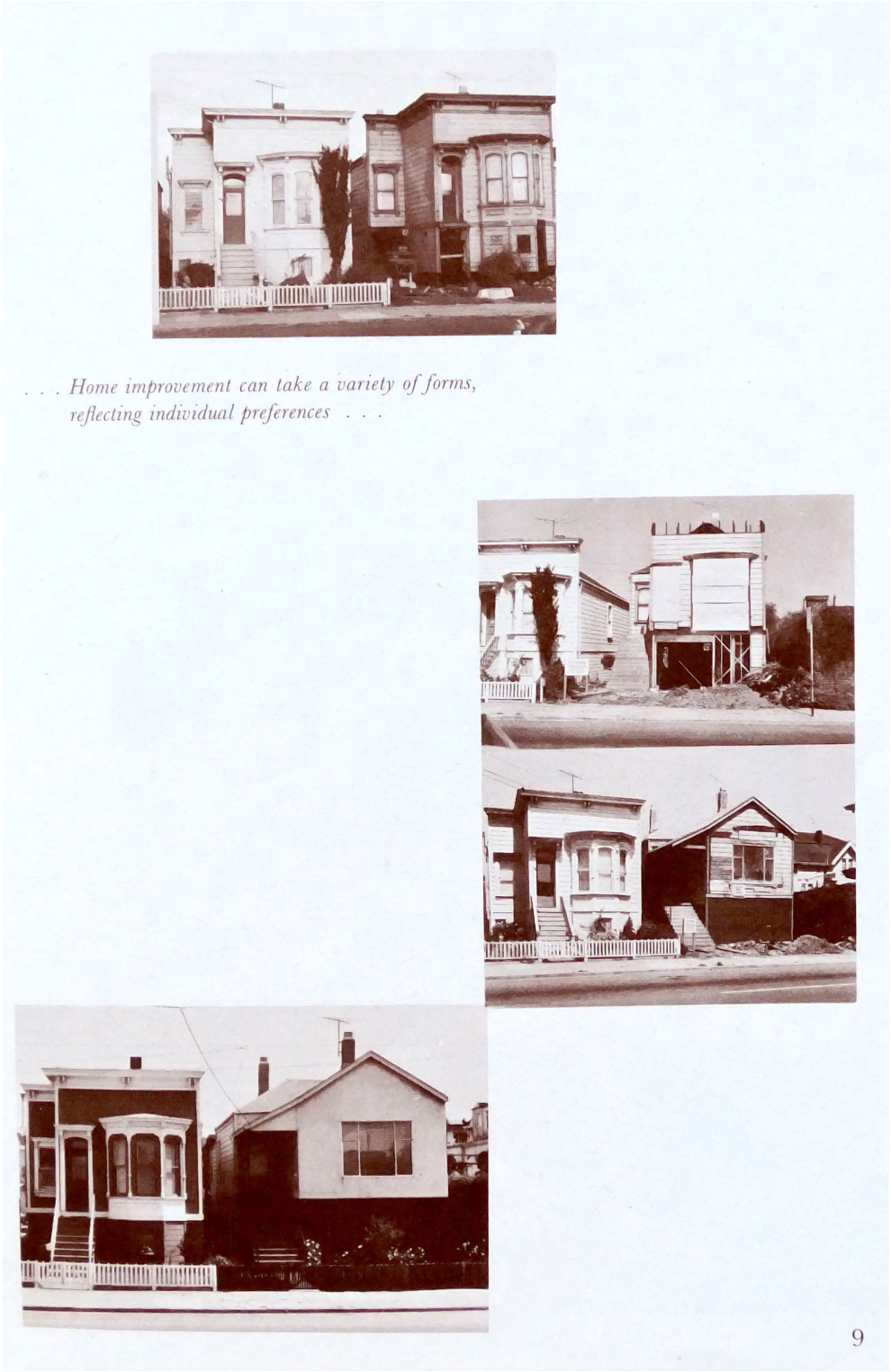
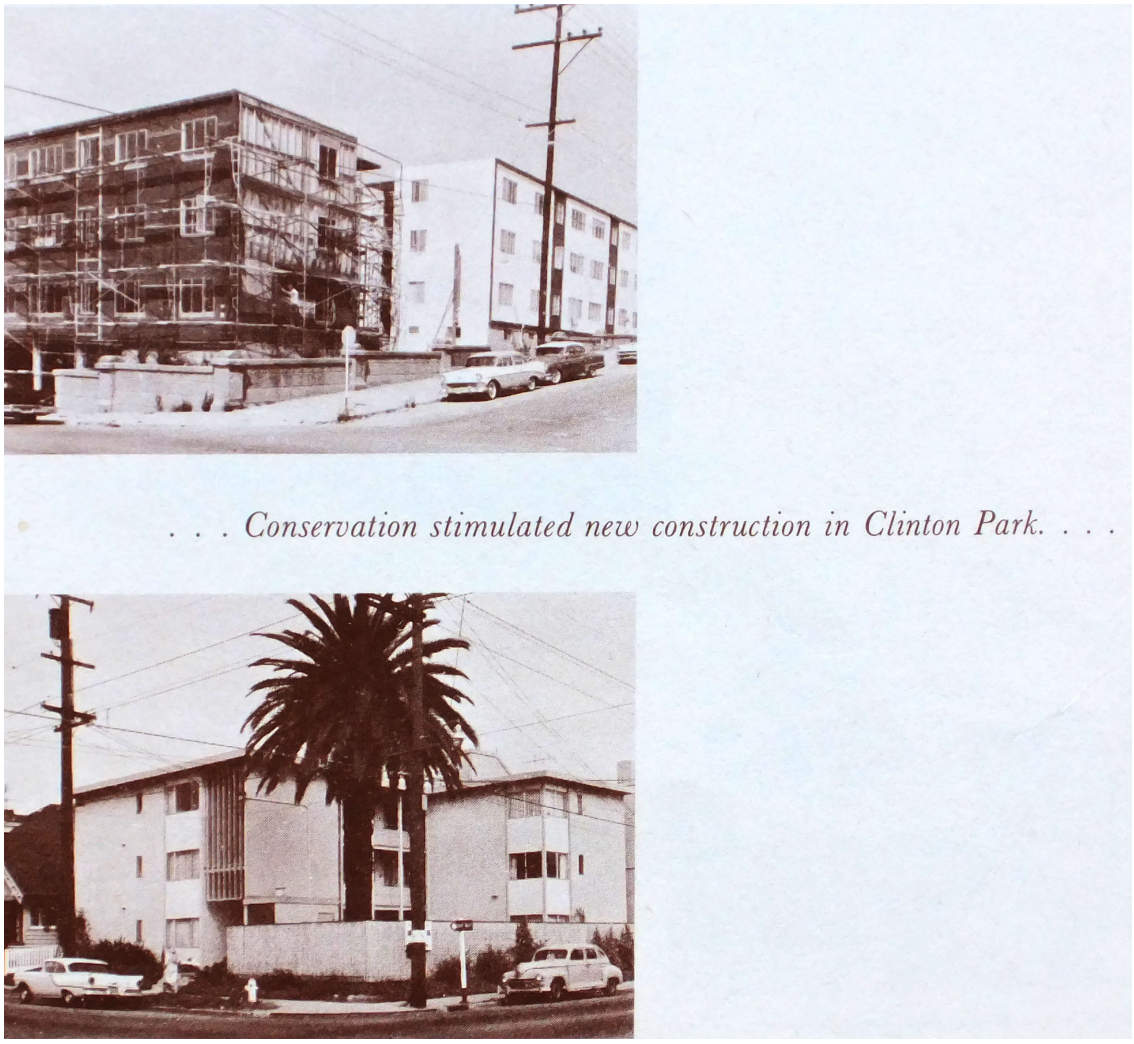


FIGURE 5-2: A page from Oakland mobilizes for urban renewal shows how rehabilitation in Clinton Park was said to "take a variety of forms reflecting individual preferences." In practice, however, rehabilitation meant the example on the right, with the Gilded Age ornamentation removed. Source: Housing and Home Finance Agency. Oakland mobilizes for urban renewal. Bulletin 1, Urban Renewal Service. (Washington, D.C.: Housing and Home Finance Agency, September 1960), 9.



to mortgage bankers. Major activities were confined to the years between 1957 and 1962, but in the wake of these activities, many in the real estate industry purchased lots in the neighborhood and constructed new, mid-rise apartment structures, dramatically changing the scale and use of Clinton Park. While federal funding was thus not a central component of this, Oakland's first redevelopment program, nevertheless blight remained the operative justification for municipally organized intervention.[11] In the wake of this project, the city engaged in several more urban renewal projects, and while many were surrounded in political controversy, at least

FIGURE 5-3: While several structures in Oakland's Clinton Park were "rehabilitated" with local financing, there were no structures that received federal support for such changes and improvements. However, 54 new structures were built in the project area, many of them three-and-four story apartment structures like these. This resulted in a dramatic shift to the visual character of Clinton Park, one that supplanted the architectural symbolism and aesthetics of the Gilded Age with a middle-brow Modernism. "Conservation," writ large as the entire neighborhood rather than rehabilitation of discrete buildings, was credited with the success. Source: Housing and Home Finance Agency. Oakland mobilizes for urban renewal. Bulletin 1, Urban Renewal Service. (Washington, D.C.: Housing and Home Finance Agency, September 1960), 10.

FIGURE 5-4: The vision held by the Housing Authority of Portland for South Auditorium was one rooted in the development of public housing, stretching no more than three or four stories tall. It is very reminiscent of the illustration used in Oakland for the cover of their 1949 report, *Redevelopment in Oakland.* Housing Authority of Portland, City of Portland composite photograph, c. 1957, Portland Development Commission collection, Portland Archives (no accession number).

three (ACORN, Oak Center, and City Center, all begun between 1959 and the mid-1960s) made it into the development stage. An emphasis on discrete projects rather than citywide policies, combined with carefully orchestrated policy control, ultimately made for greater success.[12]

In Portland, the failure of Vaughn was in turn followed by the successful launch and completion of three redevelopment projects. The first of these was South Auditorium, located in the South Portland project area first identified in a closed-door meeting of elites in Spring 1951. At first, the project was once more placed under the auspices of the Housing Authority of Portland. HAP, perhaps remembering the debacle of Vaughn Street, proposed a low-rise public housing project (Figure 5-4). In less than two months, the City Council removed the project from HAP's purview, and placed it under the auspices of a new authority known as the Portland Development Commission (PDC). PDC leadership, in turn, was drawn heavily from the private real estate industry. With the potential controversies of public housing removed from the table, the PDC proceeded to plan a redevelopment scheme for South Auditorium that concentrated on offices, luxury

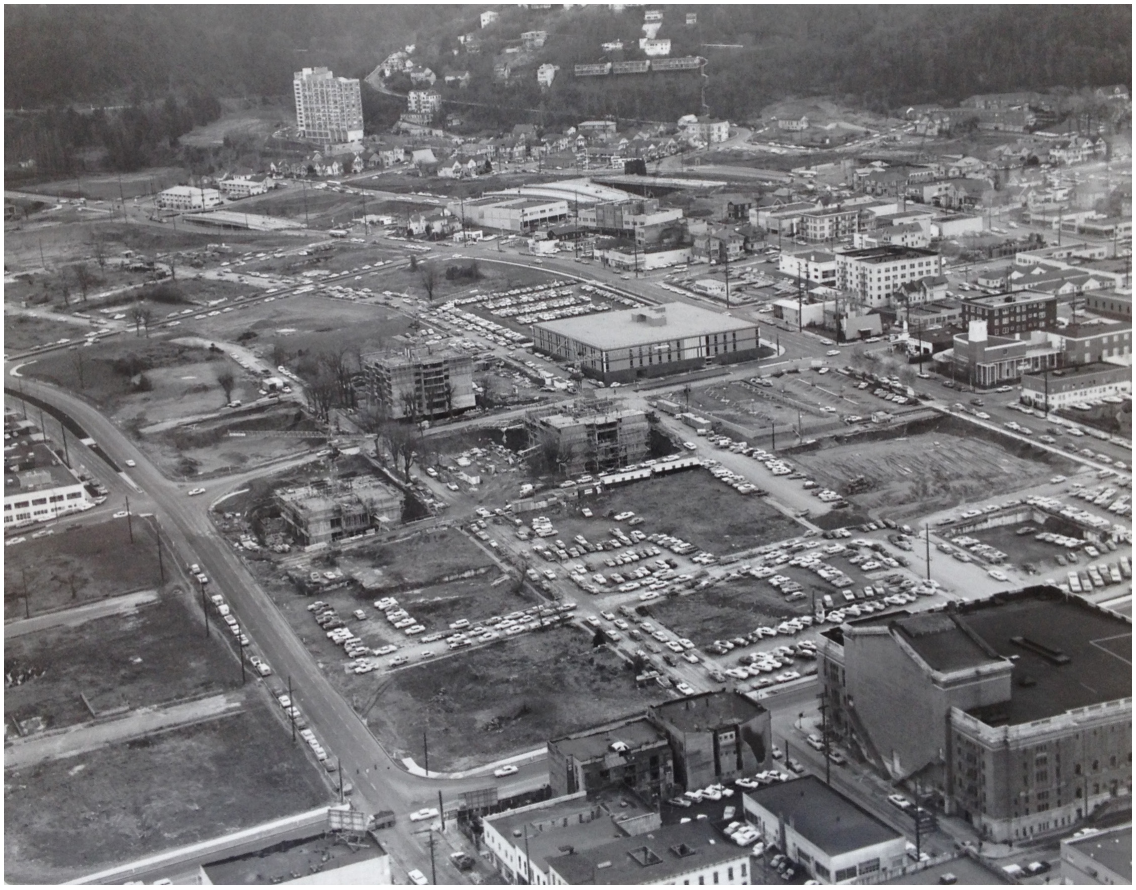


FIGURE 5-5: In Portland, "blight" was understood as synonymous with, rather than an intermediary step towards, "slum" conditions. This allowed the city to justify the drastic step of total clearance. Here, the South Auditorium Urban Renewal Area has been cleared, three new structures have been completed (far left, and at center), and the bases of the high-rise apartment towers of Portland Center (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill) are under construction. At lower right can be seen the Civic Auditorium, for which the urban renewal area had been named. City of Portland photograph, c. 1962, Portland Development Commission collection, Portland Archives (no accession number).

apartments, parks, and a modernization of an existing performance hall. To further insulate the project, the PDC secured its local match monies through a new revenue tool, tax-increment financing, which allowed the authority to avoid any interaction with the city's electorate.[13] The results were remarkable. PDC cleared more than 84 acres of the city and, over the course of about fifteen years, constructed dense downtown development, peaking with the 546 foot tall First Interstate Tower, opened in 1971, then the tallest structure in the Pacific Northwest (Figures 5-5 and 5-6).[14] In the process, PDC became a powerful and persisting public institution, its unelected leadership appointed by the City Council. Rebranded as "Prosper Portland" in 2017, the authority has been instrumental in shaping much of the city's dense urban redevelopment, including the Pearl District, South Waterfront, and the Central Eastside Industrial District.[15]

FIGURE 5-6. A 1968 rendering of the Charles Luckman & Associates design for the First National Bank building. At left is the base of the 546-foot tall tower that, when completed in 1972, became the tallest structure in the Pacific Northwest. Forty-three years later, it remains the tallest building in the city of Portland. At right, connected by a sky bridge, is a second building that looms over the street ominously, and was built to contain additional offices and the bank's bulky, mainframe computer system. The monumental yet almost aviation sleek aesthetic of both structures is a stark contrast to the messy vernacular urban disorder that preceded them. Portland Archives and Records Center A2010-003.

Indeed the majority of the city's center is still encompassed in one of Prosper Portland's 11 extant urban renewal districts, each of which exists only through the declaration of the existence of blight.[16]

The use of blight was in no way confined to either Oakland or Portland. In 1951, the City of Los Angeles declared the improvised housing of Mexican-Americans in Chavez Ravine blight. At first, the city used this declaration to justify clearance for the purpose of public housing, which might at least have better served the populations displaced through clearance. The city quickly reneged on its promise, and instead used the cleared space to build a baseball stadium.[17] In the 1960s San Francisco, city planners labelled the single-room-occupancy hotel district south of Market Street as blighted. The result of this was clearance and the launch of a development program that brought high dollar office, apartment, and condomini-

um towers, a program still being pursued to this day.[18] In St. Louis, blight was used as a justification to clear large portions of downtown and make way for an entertainment landscape of malls, theaters, and sports facilities.[19] In New York, Robert Moses used the logic of blight as a frequent cudgel against any neighborhood that stood in the way of his redevelopment schemes for the city, including tactics such as selective photography to establish the existence of such conditions.[20] To some extent, every city that engaged in federally-funded redevelopment activities from 1949 through to the end of the federal program in 1973 deployed the concept of blight as a rhetorical tool to justify seizing properties and reshaping them into new urban forms, typically to the detriment of those who resided in those places, and typically to the benefit of the most powerful members of those cities' real estate industries. Where the APHA had hoped to make the word blight into an empirically based concept with honest utility in the planning and management of urban housing, in practice the concept became a convenient straw man in the service of the real estate industry, a fictional problem best solved by redevelopment projects that rarely included public housing.

Back in the mid 1930s, when housers, planners, politicians, and other struggled to create the country's first national public housing program, addressing blight had largely been excluded from those plans. Indeed, housers such as Catherine Bauer had worked hard to try and prevent public housing from being linked in any way to programs that focused on fixing extant American cities. Bauer saw the struggle clearly even in 1934. "If the purpose of a national housing policy is to build good dwellings quickly and cheaply," she wrote, then slum clearance was "not to promote good housing, but to subsidize the most exploitive and speculative branches of the real-estate interest." The same was all-the-more true of the "blighted area," a condition that Bauer defined as a "dejected area" rather than the nadir of the slum.[21]

Bauer's worry ultimately became fact. When Congress passed its first postwar housing act in 1949, "blight" had made it into the language of federal legislation, alongside slum. This change to the federal housing program, more than any other, explains how the real estate industry (at both the national and local level) were able to coopt the housing program and turn it into a vehicle for redevelopment that only sometimes engaged in public housing. Viewed from the national level, the story reads as a political and ideological struggle, one whose winners and losers might map onto partisan lines, or at least along splits in values such as conservative versus liberal, or reactionary versus progressive. Viewed from the local level, however, we can see the tangible results of national struggles, and (more critically) how those struggles were given further shape through the deeds of local actors. Federal policy was not a case of dictation from on high, but of local agents within a federally defined field of action.

There were, then, tangible winners and losers, people for whom the costs of this struggle were measured not in bills passed or tabled, not in elections won or lost, but in houses preserved or destroyed, investments secured or devalued, profits realized or denied. Through including blight in the Housing Act of 1949, housers almost invariably lost. Every redevelopment project that was built without public housing represented a redirection of limited federal housing funds away from the construction of public housing. The 1949 Act thus represented not a continuation or reinforcement of the earlier 1937 Act, but a gutting of it, and a meaningful reduction in available project funds for extant housing authorities. A negative

burden was also felt by those who lived in redevelopment project areas, whose houses were taken from them on the grounds of being blighted. Homeowners were compensated for these takings—although the level to which such compensation actually secured comparable new homes is debatable, much less the intangible psychological burden of losing a home. For renters, the situation was worse, for they were entitled to relatively little in the way of compensation for their eviction. For those who needed the clean safe, affordable homes that might have been built under the auspices of public housing, the outcomes were no better. [22]

It should be noted that among those who lost in this struggle, the labor movement and its allies rank high. Labor unions, most prominently the American Federation of Labor (AFL), were among the strongest supporters of the 1937 Act. Indeed, Catherine Bauer's involvement with that legislation arose from her leadership of the Labor Housing Committee, itself an affiliate of the AFL.[23] During the war years, other labor organizations, such as the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and the United Auto Workers, added their voices to the fight for public housing.[24] Labor organizations' New Deal dreams of federally-funded public housing were, in the postwar world, undermined by new legislation. It is a trajectory that mirrors the larger political losses of the labor movement, whose prewar gains under the National Labor Relations Act of 1935—another bill championed by Senator Robert Wagner—were weakened by the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947.[25] Such losses reflect the changes in the larger political climate. As noted in chapter two, beginning in the late years of the war, the real estate industry had begun a concerted campaign against government involvement in housing.[26] These attacks placed the tension between collective and private, regulated and laissez-faire, within an ideological framework, in which the former categories were, as one group of Portland real estate advocates put it in 1949, "not the American way of getting things done."[27] Within the budding Cold War culture of the country, the fortunes of collective efforts such as labor organizations and the public housing movement often mirrored each other in a trajectory of ideological loss.

Yet, the decline of public housing in the postwar era cannot be explained away as a simple response to growing paranoia over what some critics had called "government paternalism."[28] It is important to note that the 1949 Act did not do away with federal subsidy, but rather redirected it. Blight's inclusion in the 1949 Act had thus created subsidized winners: The top echelon of the nation's real estate industry. Every area cleared under the justification of blight was an opportunity for demolition firms, general contractors, construction unions, building materials suppliers, developers, leasing agents, mortgage bankers, property insurance firms, and so on, and so forth. While smaller members of the real estate industry—generally apartment house owners and landlords—might have bristled along both ideological and practical lines at the reach of municipal and federal government into the urban fabric, those at the top of the field were more than content to use public means towards private ends. In this sense, by including "blight" in the 1949 Act, federal housing programs became more like the federal funding of the transcontinental railroad, or the postwar military-industrial-educational complex, a case of federal power subsidizing capitalist profits. Like those other examples, the public benefit derived from such subsidy remains a point of debate and contention.[29]

Never-ending blight: From urban renewal to gentrification

The federal urban renewal programs came to an end when the Nixon administration, in 1973 reorganized the Department of Housing and Urban Development and terminated HUD's funding for redevelopment projects.[30] This did not, however, end the relevancy of the term blight. Even after the end of the federal program, urban renewal continued as a process under the auspices of state law in many places, including both California and Oregon. The California Community Redevelopment Act stood until 2012, when Governor Jerry Brown eliminated all redevelopment agencies in the state as part of a rebalancing of the state budget.[31] Oregon's program still stands, and Prosper Portland (formerly the PDC) today administers eleven urban renewal areas in the city.[32] In the legal statutes of California (until 2012) and Oregon (ongoing) and many other states, the idea of "blight" survived in various forms as a key to securing state funding, establishing redevelopment agencies, creating special taxation districts, or some combination of all of the above.

More recently, some designers and urban thinkers have returned to the concept of blight as a framework for understanding informal settlements in the Global South and the problems of rapid urban growth in Asia (Figure 5-7). Blight also fits into contemporary discourses around U.S. cities ravaged by natural and economic disasters. The damage from 2005's Hurricane Katrina was described in *Planning* (the official journal of the American Planning Association) as "tens of thousands of newly blighted properties," and related (in the headline) how "New Orleans attacks blight through code enforcement."[33] As but one example, a recent academic investigation of Detroit's post-2008 foreclosure crisis notes that "disinvestment and blight have become major features of many cities across the Midwest and Northeast as well as others such as New Orleans," then goes on to relate how widespread foreclosures had reshaped the urban landscape of these places:

> *For many cities, major challenges became addressing widespread neighborhood blight, containing blight to preserve intact areas, demolishing derelict structures, and managing large amounts of vacant land. This constituted "urban renewal without the renewal," a New York Times reporter declared in 2002.*[34]

Now, as at midcentury, the use of blight carries with it an implied set of solutions, almost as a system of thinking. "Blight" is still an "idealized adversary," to use a term coined by linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson.[35] It continues to be used by those who wish to justify urban intervention, usually of a radical nature, just as blight in an orchard justified pruning and burning away branches, the good alongside the bad.

When a planner of the 20th century chose to use the word "slum," he or she invoked a long and storied set of associations that called to mind the worst of physical residences, places with little or no air, little or no clean water, homes that lacked the most basic of safety and sanitation facilities. To clear a slum was to remove such unsanitary of living conditions from the urban landscape. It was entirely possible for planners, politicians, or the general public to unfairly label a place a slum, but the implication even in such circumstances was that a genuine danger to life and limb for residents of those areas did exist, and the first question at stake then was whether that characterization of slum could be supported by physical inspection.

"Blight" was different, for by being subjective while seeming to be objective,

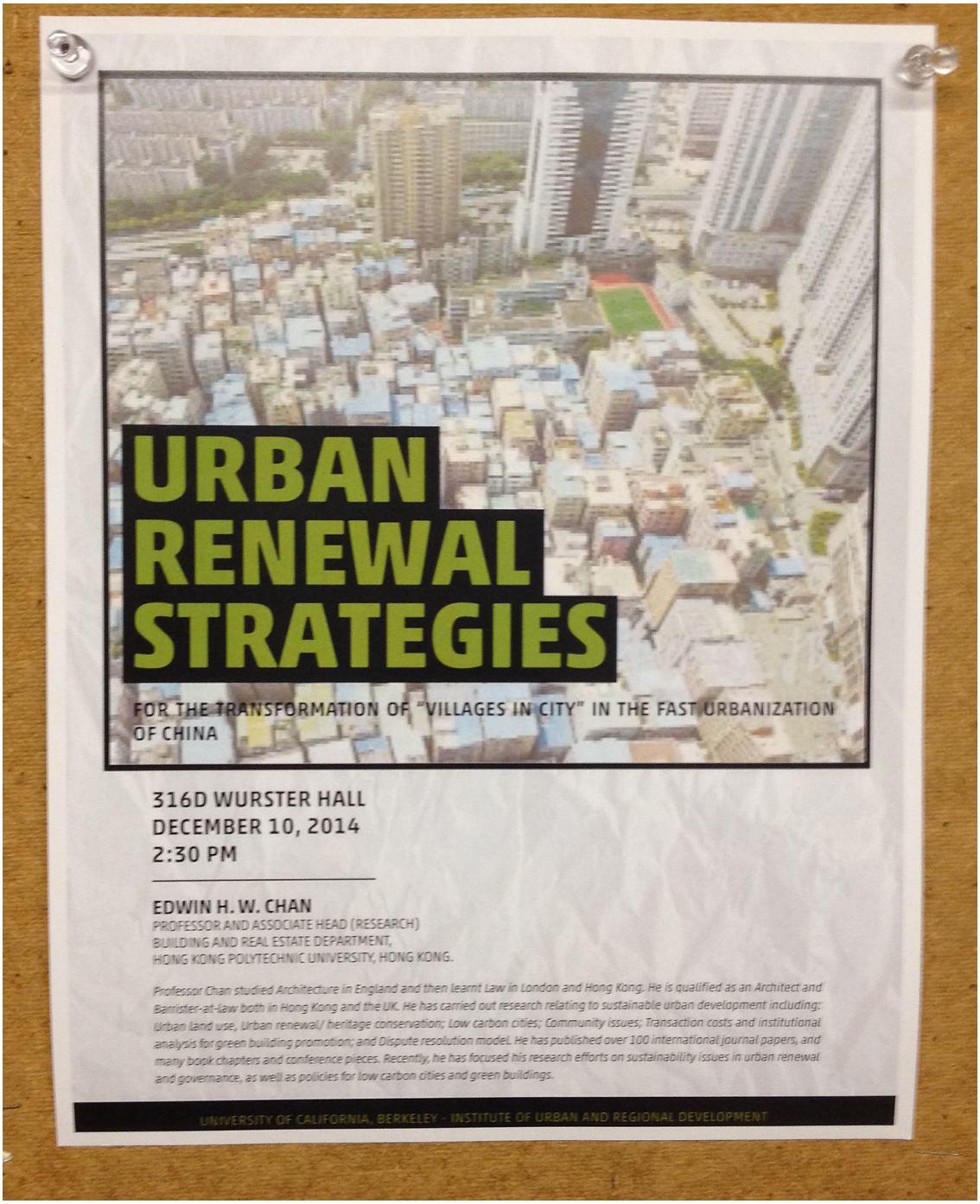


FIGURE 5-7: "Urban renewal strategies: For the transformation of 'villages in city' in the fast urbanization of China." The design discourse of blight, despite the end of the U.S. federal urban renewal program in 1973, is far from dead. Architects, urban planners, and other spatial thinkers have kept it alive, and it sometimes emerges in discussions on urban conditions in the Global South, Asia, and economically struggling U.S. metropolitan areas. This poster advertised a lecture by a real estate professor from Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Photo by Alexander Benjamin Craghead.

it was inherently a case of misconstruction that bordered on fraud. There had been a time when this was not so—from the 1920s through the mid 1940s, many parties, mostly in the planning profession, had struggled to identify blight as a truly scientific term, able to be located in the urban landscape with reliable and repeatable accuracy. The efforts of the American Public Health Association stand out as the most rigorous of these attempts, and had its definition of blight been adopted by the federal government and subsequently applied throughout the nation's cities, then the way that we use the word "blight" in the United States would have a far more legitimate basis. However, this did not come to pass. If we examine the way that "blight" was applied to actual U.S. cities, we can see its genuine definitions at last, the only true meaning this planning term will ever have. Blight, as implemented under the terms of the 1949 Act, was a term so flexible, so slippery that it was applicable to almost any actual condition within urban space, and once applied, supported the condemnation of land, the subsequent clearance of that land, and the construction of just about any sort of project, whether it included housing for those displaced by that taking, or not. In this sense, "blight," as defined by its usage after 1949, was a kind of antecedent of gentrification, a way for those in power, through the actions of planners, to bring a neighborhood that housed the poor and working poor, and turn it into one for the middle class, the upper middle class, and the rich. But it was not *only* this, for as the Vaughn example in Portland shows, it was possible to eliminate housing entirely under the authority that was granted by "blight." This, then, is how a federal agency known as the Housing and Home Finance Administration could, and did, justify the funding of projects that *eliminated* housing units. Putting "blight" alongside "slum" into the Housing Act of 1949 thus benefitted those in the real estate industry who stood to build on the cleared neighborhood lands within a project's boundaries.

Yet the slipperiness of blight was also its weakness. If it could be applied to nearly anything, anywhere—as those who fought blight in both Oakland and Portland vocally argued—then it was a profound new power granted to municipal governments and their undemocratically-led redevelopment authorities. Further, if blight had no commonly agreed upon definition, much less a genuine scientific basis, then any declaration of its existence was troubled. Legally, to declare "blight" was to assume a certain authority over the control of the urban landscape. Politically, however, claims of "blight" could be argued against, and the concept of "blight" itself was a potential battleground for control of the city. In midcentury Oakland and Portland both, those battles occurred, and those who attacked the validity of "blight," at least in that first encounter, won. The slipperiness of the term "blight," however, only guaranteed that any win, by any side, was at best a temporary one. The Congressional "punt" of 1949 only pushed struggles to define—and therefore control—the rhetoric of "blight" into the local level, and there it remained well through the 20th century, and there it exists in some places still.

NOTES to CHAPTER 5

1. This was the point Catherine Bauer expressed to Nathan Strauss in early 1940, when she attempted to use the concept of "blight" as a means for opening up land to public housing in Western cities such as San Francisco and Oakland. That proposal represented a brief flirtation with the legitimacy of blight as a means to create housing, an idea she had earlier rejected in her 1934 book. Catherine Bauer, "Memorandum to the Administrator," February 22, 1940, 8, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

2. Daniel Abramson, *Obsolescence: An architectural history.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 17-45, especially 43.

3. Bruno Latour, "Scientific objects and legal objectivity," translated by Alain Pottage, in Alain Pottage and Martha Mondy, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 99.

4. *Ibid.*, 103-104

5. Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, 5.

6. L.F. Henderson, "Fire Blight: A Bacterial Disease of the Pear and the Apple." *Wisconsin State Horticultural Society Bulletin No. 5.*, May 1905, 7.

7. Latour, "Scientific objects," 103.

8. Oakland City Council, resolution 24123, passed January 17, 1949; "A recessed meeting of the council of the city of Portland, Oregon," (minutes), May 26, 1953, 320-326.

9. The project was organized as the "Oakland Renewal Foundation," a private entity operating with the recognition and approval of the Oakland City Council. It was led by a 12-member board of trustees, including bankers, newspaper publishers, and local businessmen. Illustrative is the 1961 board:

Norris Nash (president), vice-president of the Oakland-based Kaiser Industries Corporation
Stacy Dobrzensky (secretary), Attorney at Law
Kenneth Thompson (treasurer), a Certified Public Accountant
Stuart Davis (trustee), chairman of the First Savings and Loan Association
Elvyn C. Evers (trustee), vice president & manager, Crocker-Anglo National Bank
Rear Admiral T. Earle Hipp (trustee), USN (Ret.
Harry Jackson (trustee), president, Jackson Furniture Company
J.R. Knowland (trustee), publisher of the Oakland Tribune
Bauer E. Kramer (trustee), Attorney at Law
Sherwood Swan (trustee), president, Swan's Department Store
Julian Unruh (trustee), vice president, Wells Fargo Bank American Trust Company
Samuel H. Wagener (trustee), Attorney at Law.

Oakland Renewal Foundation. "Oakland Renewal Foundation, Inc." *Final Report of the Oakland Renewal Foundation on Clinton Park Project, Oakland, California: The Nation's First Federally Assisted Rehabilitation Project.* (Oakland, California: Oakland Renewal Foundation, November 1961), no page number.

10. NAREB literally referred to rehabilitation as a "neighborhood conservation" approach. The legislative agenda of NAREB was outlined in a 1956 partial color booklet, *Blueprint for Neighborhood Conservation.* This publication never mentions the earlier urban renewal idea of publicly developed low-rent housing, nor the postwar trend of urban renewal as large-scale urban redevelopment led by the public sector. Instead, it focuses on bread-and-butter city actions such as code enforcement. When redevelopment is mentioned, it is within the context of *private* redevelopment. Neighborhood conservation is constructed within the conspicuous absence of mainstream trends in urban renewal; was it being advanced as a more conservative alternative to slum clearance and public redevelopment? The pamphlet closes with a proposed bill for adoption by state legislatures that would authorize the creation of "conservation authorities" charged with fighting blight through voluntary or sometimes conscripted acts of reparation and maintenance. These conservation authorities might be seen as an alternative to redevelopment authorities of the

same era. On another note, although Oakland is never mentioned in this slim but handsome promotional booklet, its production was fully paid for by the Oakland-based Henry J. Kaiser Companies. National Association of Real Estate Boards. *Blueprint for Neighborhood Conservation...* (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Real Estate Boards, 1956) 1, 36-38, and back cover.

11. For a fuller description of the Clinton Park project, see Alexander Benjamin Craghead, *Blight and the younger city: Unraveling the motives and methods of redevelopment* (master's thesis), UC Berkeley, April 2015, 45-56.

12. Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), 141-151. Note, although Oakland was able to launch several redevelopment projects under the justification of eliminating blight, in several cases these projects encountered other political difficulties, sometimes as a result of intersection with federal public housing programs, as with the ACORN project in West Oakland. Another project, City Center, resulted in the clearance of 15 blocks of downtown commercial and residential buildings to make way for a mall. These plans then stalled in the 1970s, resulting in an empty field in the middle of downtown that lasted for more than ten years. See also Mitchell Schwarzer, "Oakland City Center: The Plan to Reposition Downtown within the Bay Region," *Journal of Planning History 14,* 2, 2015, 88-111.

13. For a fuller description of the South Auditorium project and its role in the birth of the PDC, Craghead, *Blight and the younger city*, 64-69.

14. "Redevelopers: South Auditorium Project, Portland, Oregon." (Portland, Oregon: Portland Development Commission, November 1971), 8.

15. "Portland Development Commission Announces New Name Reflecting Strategic Shift in Direction," (press release), Portland Development Commission/Prosper Portland, May 10, 2017. Retrieved November 19, 2019, from https://prosperportland.us/portland-development-commission-announces-new-direction/

16. "Urban Renewal," Portland Development Commission (web site). Retrieved April 7, 2015, from http://www.pdc.us/our-work/urban-renewal-areas.aspx.

17. Eric Avila, *Popular culture in the age of white flight: Fear and fantasy in suburban Los Angeles.* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2004), 156-161.

18. In 1984, an AIA committee studying the South of Market Area, or SOMA, placed the impetus behind this project on two things: The development of several modern office towers in what is now the Financial District, just to the north of Market Street, and the installation of high capacity transit (BART and the MUNI Metro) underneath Market. These "suggested to many that urban renewal was necessary to produce private investment South of Market." Note that urban renewal, by law, required the declaration of either slum or blight conditions, and further that the logic the AIA suggested for the implementation of redevelopment in SOMA—the logic, by implication, for calling the area blighted—was its proximity to other high-dollar investments and the area's lack of growth as defined along economistic lines. This was not the existence of a poor residential condition that needed resolution through public intervention, this was a desire by the unstated "many" to create additional property value. San Francisco Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team, *South of Market Analysis*. (San Francisco: American Institute of Architects San Francisco Chapter, 1984), 5.

19. David Laslo, Claude Louishomme, Donald Phares, and Dennis R. Judd, "Building the infrastructure of urban tourism: The case of St. Louis," in Dennis R. Judd, ed., *The Infrastructure of Play: Building the Tourist City.* (London: Routledge, 2002), 77-103.

20. Themis Chronopoulos, "Robert Moses and the Visual Dimension of Physical Disorder," *Journal of Planning History* 13, 3, 207-233.

21. Bauer, *Modern Housing,* 244-245.

22. The PDC, for example, offered limited assistance with rehousing displaced residents. In the case of the South Auditorium, this took the form of providing information to project residents about available rental properties elsewhere in the city.

23. Gail Radford, *Modern housing for America: Policy struggles in the New Deal era*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 185-186.

24. UAW-CIO, "Must our heroes...," 1944, Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

25. In 1952, *Challenge,* a leading magazine of economics, noted that Taft-Hartley was "the most bitterly contested law in twenty years," noting that leaders within the labor movement had branded it "'a slave labor law' calculated to break unions." "That Taft-Hartley wrangle," *Challenge 1,* 6, March 1953, 16.

26. See Milton Friedman and George J. Stigler, *Roofs or Ceilings? The Current Housing Problem*. (Washington: The National Association of Real Estate Boards, 1946), as well as Samuel Livingston Long, *Housing for Everybody in Thirty Days: By Adopting the Long Housing Plan.* (pamphlet), October 10, 1946, both from the Catherine Bauer Wurster papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

27. Portland Home Owners Council, "Public Housing for Portland, Oregon," 7-8.

28. *Ibid.*

29. See especially Richard White, *Railroaded: The transcontinentals and the making of modern America.* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), xxiv-xxvii.

30. Eugene J. Morris, "The Nixon housing program," *Real Property, Probate and Trust Journal 9,* 1, Spring 1974, 2-3.

31. Casey Blount, Wendy Ip, Ikuo Nakano, and Elaine Ng. "Redevelopment agencies in California: History, benefits, excesses, and closure," (working paper). (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, January 2014), 1.

32. "Urban Renewal," Portland Development Commission (web site).

33. Andrew Holbein, "Building a recovery department: New Orleans attacks blight through code enforcement." *Planning,* February 2009, 36-37.

34. Jodi Wilgoren, quoted in Margaret Dewar, Eric Seymour, and Oana Druta. "Disinvesting in the City: The Role of Tax Foreclosure in Detroit." *Urban Affairs Review,* 2014, 1-29.

35. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 88.

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N.B. For the Oakland case study, no single archive held sufficient material. According to conversations with Betty Marvin, historic preservation planner at the Bureau of Planning, City of Oakland, many of the city's records were destroyed in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. In the wake of that disaster, some of the city offices were declared unsafe, and many records were tossed into dumpsters alongside building debris, and lost. Some, however, were salvaged from dumpsters before the materials were removed, and thus retained. (It's probable that the 1936 WPA/RPS cards survived because they were housed in a sturdy metal cabinet.) As a result, most archival records relating to Oakland were pulled from a variety of sources, the most important being the general library collection of the Environmental Design Library, College of Environmental Design, UC Berkeley, which held in its circulating stacks several reports and plans from the 1930s through the 1970s. Contrast this with the Portland case study, where many archival collections survived, and all housed and cared for by the Portland Archives and Records Center, a part of the Office of the City Auditor.

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