Descriptive Summary

Title: Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles Photograph Collection

Dates: 1940s-1950s

Collection number: P-004

Creator: Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles

Collection Size: 2.5 linear feet (6 document boxes; 1 flat box) 200 online items

Repository: Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research

Los Angeles, CA 90044

Abstract: The Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles Photograph Collection is comprised of 225 black and white photographs, which were produced by the Los Angeles Housing Authority during the 1940s and 1950s. These photographs depict images of public housing projects such as Elysian Park Heights (Chavez Ravine), Rose Hill Courts, Pueblo del Rio, Aliso Village, Hacienda Village, William Mead Homes, Estrada Courts, Ramona Gardens, Basilone Homes and Rodger Young Village. Also included in the collection are photographs of public housing officials Frank Wilkinson and Howard Holtzendorff, housing advocate Monsignor Thomas O’Dwyer, and municipal officials including Los Angeles Mayors Fletcher Bowron and Norris Poulson. Additionally represented here are powerful images of Los Angeles slum conditions during the 1940s.

Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access

The collection is available for research only at the Library’s facility in Los Angeles. The Library is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. Researchers are encouraged to call or email the Library indicating the nature of their research query prior to making a visit.

Publication Rights

Copyright has not been assigned to the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research. Researchers may make single copies of any portion of the collection, but publication from the collection will be allowed only with the express written permission of the Library's director. It is not necessary to obtain written permission to quote from a collection. When the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research gives permission for publication, it is as the owner of the physical items and is not intended to include or imply permission of the copyright holder, which must also be obtained by the reader.

Preferred Citation

Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles Photograph Collection. P-004. Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles, California.

Acquisition Information

Consult repository.

Project Information

The digitization of the Southern California Library’s Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles Photograph Collection was part of the California Local History Digital Resources Project (LHDRP), a multi-year program supported by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian. Leveraging the infrastructure of the California Digital Library, the LHDRP explores a model to aggregate, preserve, and provide permanent public access to local history materials maintained by California cultural heritage institutions via a single statewide online access point.

During the project year (2005-2006), the Southern California Library's entire collection of Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles photographs was digitized and placed online. Additional related materials held by the Library include the Charlotta Bass Papers, Civil Rights Congress Los Angeles Chapter Records, J. Walter Cobb Papers, South Central Los Angeles Documentation Project Collection, Frank Wilkinson Papers, and the California Eagle Photograph Collection.

Administrative History

During the Depression era, the City of Los Angeles was in the throes of a severe housing crisis. The need for affordable and decent housing was acute, as overcrowding was common, and deteriorated and substandard housing were widespread. Such urban conditions were not limited to Los Angeles, causing concern in cities across the nation.

In response to this crisis, the Roosevelt administration established the United States Housing Authority in 1937 to develop low-cost public housing which sought to alleviate overcrowding in inner cities and replace deteriorated housing in depressed areas. Soon thereafter in 1938, the City of Los Angeles established its own local program, the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA).

The outbreak of World War II boosted defense-related manufacturing in Southern California and drew a multitude of unemployed workers to the surrounding areas. This created a shift in Los Angeles housing needs from sheltering the poor to housing defense workers, military families and veterans. Permanent public war housing projects were constructed and managed by HACLA, including Channel Heights, Dana Strand Village, Normont Terrace, Portsmouth Homes, and Wilmington Hall Cottages. Many temporary public war housing projects were also established, such as Banning Homes, Corregidor Park, Imperial Courts, and Jordan Downs. Finally, projects like Basilone Homes, Keppler Grove and Rodger Young Village were constructed specifically to house war veterans.

Public housing construction continued post-war under the 1949 Federal Housing Act. In Los Angeles this meant the development of Mar Vista Gardens, Nickerson Gardens, San Fernando Gardens, and extensions to several previously existing housing projects.

However signs of discord between public housing advocates and members of the real estate industry were evident and growing stronger with the completion of each new project. In an effort to curtail the growth of public housing, public housing opponents painted it as ‘creeping socialism’ and ‘one step this side of Communism’ in local media and public meetings. During the McCarthy era, this strategy proved extremely effective. Several housing project developments, including Elysian Park Heights (Chavez Ravine), were canceled and employees of HACLA, such as Frank Wilkinson, were labeled as Communists, suspended and eventually fired.

With the decline of public housing in the 1950s, Los Angeles began a shift, and an eventual separation, of public housing from urban redevelopment. The City experienced a move from community development to corporate development, a move which has significantly shaped its urban landscape of today.

Scope and Content of Collection
The Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles Photograph Collection is comprised of 225 black and white photographs, which were produced by the Los Angeles Housing Authority during the 1940s and 1950s. These photographs depict images of public housing projects such as Elysian Park Heights (Chavez Ravine), Rose Hill Courts, Pueblo del Rio, Aliso Village, Hacienda Village, William Mead Homes, Estrada Courts, Ramona Gardens, Basilone Homes and Rodger Young Village. Also included in the collection are photographs of public housing officials Frank Wilkinson and Howard Holtzendorff, housing advocate Monsignor Thomas O’Dwyer, and municipal officials including Los Angeles Mayors Fletcher Bowron and Norris Poulson. Additionally represented here are powerful images of Los Angeles slum conditions during the 1940s.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection.

Names and Places
Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles
Wilkinson, Frank, 1914-2006
Holtzendorff, Howard
Bowron, Fletcher, 1887-1968
Poulson, Norris, 1895-1982
Los Angeles (Calif.)
Pacoima (Los Angeles, Calif.)
San Pedro (Los Angeles, Calif.)
Watts (Los Angeles, Calif.)

Topics
Housing
Housing developments
City planning
Community centers
Municipal services
Quonset huts
Veterans
Soldiers’ homes
Genres and Forms of Materials
Photographic prints