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# Robert Moses and the Visual Dimension of Physical Disorder: Efforts to Demonstrate Urban Blight in the Age of Slum Clearance

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Themis Chronopoulos, Associate Professor of American Studies, Swansea University, Wales, UK

Email: [T.Chronopoulos@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:T.Chronopoulos@swansea.ac.uk)

Website: <http://themis.slass.org>

## **Abstract**

In the 1950s, the Committee on Slum Clearance of the City of New York, headed by Robert Moses, published twenty-six site-specific slum clearance brochures. A major portion of each one of these brochures attempted to demonstrate the blighted conditions that prevailed in the area to be redeveloped. These sections included maps, statistics, descriptions, and photographs. Moses wanted to keep the texts in the brochures short and allow the photographs and the illustrations to demonstrate the shortcomings of the areas designated as slums. This article analyzes the photographs that appeared in the "Demonstration of Slum Conditions" (later renamed to "Demonstration of Blight") section of the brochures and raises a number of questions concerning the process and the paradigm under which Moses's slum clearance organization was operating. Both the process and the paradigm of slum clearance in New York City involved elected officials, planning commissioners, and even the judiciary.

## **Keywords**

Robert Moses, New York City, slum clearance, urban renewal, photography, physical disorder

During the 1950s in New York City, Robert Moses led the largest slum clearance program in the United States. Title I of the US Housing Act of 1949 provided subsidies for the clearance of areas designated as slums, so that private developers could rebuild them. As chairman of the Mayor's Committee on Slum Clearance between 1949 and 1960, Moses made New York City the capital of Title I by planning thirty-five urban renewal projects, completing seventeen, and receiving \$65.8 million in Title I funds.<sup>1</sup>

In order to justify and promote these urban renewal projects, the Committee on Slum Clearance published a brochure for each urban renewal site (see Appendix). These brochures were made of glossy paper and filled with statistics, graphics, charts, maps, photographs, schedules, appraisals, and other data. The brochures were submitted to the Board of Estimate of the City of New York and the City Planning Commission for public hearings and local authorizations; the Federal Administrator of Title I and the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency for federal government reviews and approvals; and to elected officials as well as the public in order to showcase the creation of a dynamic modern city.<sup>2</sup> According to Hilary Ballon, the brochures "constructed a powerful visual argument and demonstrated Moses's sophisticated use of images, charts, and other visual material to shape perceptions."<sup>3</sup> Moses instructed his staff that he did not want long texts in the slum clearance publications: "It's the

schedules themselves, the plans and pictures that count with the statement that we mean business, that the procedure will be entirely fair and orderly and that hardships will be, so far as humanely possible, avoided."<sup>4</sup>

Moses's instructions gave the impression that the brochure photographs captured objective slum conditions that could be universally understood and accepted; what actually occurred is more complicated. From a contemporary point of view, more than one-third of the 125 photographs that appear in the section that seeks to demonstrate blighted conditions in the brochures are not convincing. Most of these photographs represent attractive streetscapes with beautiful brownstones, solid apartment buildings, and vibrant commercial areas. Although this contemporary viewpoint is unfair and ahistorical, it opens questions about the inclusion of these photographs in the brochures during the 1950s. After all, the photographs portrayed areas that were considered discardable, and this portrayal called for their elimination.

What can explain the content of the photographs in the brochures is the paradigm under which Moses and his organization were operating. In his study of slums and slum clearance in Victorian London, geographer J. A. Yelling argues that a paradigm involves "a way of seeing a slum, of selecting and emphasizing some aspects and not others. It is a problem-selecting as well as a problem-solving device."<sup>5</sup> This means that if the main problem of an area is defined as defective infrastructure, for example, then the repair of the infrastructure of the area rather than its wholesale clearance exemplifies the appropriate solution. The paradigm that was highlighted in the brochures of the 1950s defined the problem as physical disorder in need of physical solutions.<sup>6</sup> Many of the photographs emphasized elements that made the built environment appear disorderly, obsolete, and beyond repair. Although this emphasis was derived from political-economic rather than scientific concerns, the principles of modernist architecture were dominant in the brochures. These principles favored the clearance of entire sites rather than the partial redevelopment of blighted spots, so did Title I of the US Housing Act of 1949. A final but important part of this paradigm was the promise of a desired outcome. As Samuel Zipp has summarized it, city powerholders believed that urban renewal "could deliver the proper cityscape of a world-class city, underwrite the city's status as an icon of global power, and make it . . . the capital of international modernity."<sup>7</sup> The brochures hinted toward this modernization project based on advances in modernist architecture, though the focus was always on what was disorderly, discardable, and subject to clearance.

This article interrogates the selection and presence of the "slum" photographs in the brochures by taking into account theoretical arguments about photography and physical disorder and by reading the intention and the interpretive outcome of these images. The representations of most of the photographs were influenced by the ordering principles in the fields of architecture and urban planning.<sup>8</sup> They branded the urban environment of working-class people as disorderly and thereby dispensable and ripe for redevelopment. Skeptical politicians, uncertain judges, and inquisitive federal officials accepted these photographs, not necessarily because they thought that these areas were slums, but because they were impressed by the slum clearance process and its paradigm.

## **Documentary Photography and Poverty**

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, representations of poor people and their neighborhoods were complemented with photographic images. This is the period when documentary photography was born, with photographers being able for the first time to forgo the studio and bring their significantly smaller cameras to parts of the world that had never been photographed before. The rise of documentary photography coincided with the heyday of the social reform movement; their combination developed a knowledge system that structured images of the slum and their interpretations in certain ways. This knowledge system was influenced from the idea that photographs could not lie and that cameras captured reality and presented subjects as they were. It dominated social reform and photography circles from the 1870s when Scottish photographer John Thomson captured "outcast London" and reformers viewed his photographs as the unquestionable truth. During this period, photographs were used as evidence in order to advance the specific ideological underpinnings of the reformist vision in the areas of housing, philanthropy, education, and public health.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the insistence that photographs represented objective conditions, by the late nineteenth century, photographers and social reformers found themselves working hard to establish the ideological meaning of slum photographs. Danish photographer Jacob Riis, who made a career out of exposing the conditions prevailing in the slums of New York City during the 1880s and the 1890s, represents a prime example of how ideology and photography interconnected. Riis never allowed his pictures to speak for themselves, knowing that there could be a number of conclusions that had nothing to do with his reformist intentions. In his presentations, he developed elaborate rhetorical frameworks that accompanied the photographs; he told anecdotes about himself and his subjects and advanced ideological narratives that included the people photographed as well as his audiences. The result was a combination of entertainment and morality with the photographs functioning as the mediated visual truth. Even when he did not lecture, Riis did not allow the photographs to function as evidence by themselves; in print, he presented them with captions and text, making sure that his interpretation was always present. What is more, Riis manipulated many of these photographs, so that the appearance of the poor could suit his narratives.<sup>10</sup>

Public policy makers discovered the same problem of photographic interpretation when they tried to represent areas as slums. In his study of photographs of the impoverished Quarry Hill area of Leeds in turn of the twentieth-century England, John Tagg articulated this photographic dilemma in public policy. Despite their meticulous work of selecting, arranging, captioning, and studying "slum" photographs, when they appeared before Parliamentary Select Committees, public policy officials realized that the use and acceptance of photographs "had to be negotiated, learnt, and officially established."<sup>11</sup> Although these slum clearance proponents were convinced that the photographs represented insanitary conditions, they still had to convince others because photographs did not speak for themselves.

The most comprehensive use of documentary photography in a national scale occurred during the New Deal by the US government. The Farm Security Administration (FSA) directed by Roy Stryker sought to legitimize many of its controversial programs such as the resettlement and financial assistance of landless farmers, the building of model towns, and the establishment of rural cooperatives through publicity. Stryker who wanted to construct a



specific point of view through the taking of photographs sent photoscripts to his photographers telling them what he wanted to see photographed and how. In his publications, he made thoughtful decisions over which photographs to include, how to arrange them, and what captions to write. Some of the best-known twentieth-century photographs were taken during this period by photographers such as Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Arthur Rothstein, Ben Shahn, and Russel Lee. All of them were employed by the FSA. According to Tim Cresswell:

FSA photography was an important propaganda tool that served to legitimate the New Deal, a paradigmatic example of high modernism in action, the nearest the United States has come to social engineering on a national scale . . . they [the photographs] were part of a national attempt to order society and nature through the application of rational scientific principles during a chronic depression . . . The images of migrants were a way of saying that things need to be made better for these people living disordered lives. They needed migrant camps—nicely ordered, geometric simulations of 'normal life', which the FSA also photographed.<sup>12</sup>

This means that besides efforts to counter conservative arguments that the FSA was a socialist experiment, the photographs also attempted to show how FSA's programs were successful in transforming disorder into order. These photographs were successful in the sense that government officials and elected representatives accepted them without many questions.<sup>13</sup>

The photographers that Moses's organization employed may not have been as prominent as those of the FSA; yet, it is unlikely that these photographers and their editors were not aware of the mediated photographic "authenticity" that by the 1950s had become the norm in many public policy and consumption circles. Tagg has written that in the late 1920s documentary photography "moved away from associations with factuality, scientific objectivity, natural observation, and information and came to center on the notion of a form of communication that would shape public opinion through emotional appeal and the recruitment of popular identification."<sup>14</sup> According to photographer Arthur Rothstein, the documentary photographer had "to become not only a cameraman but a scenarist, dramatist, and director as well," aiming at "not only the influencing of the subject before the camera, but also the influencing of the person looking at the finished print."<sup>15</sup> This idea that photographs had to be made in a way that exercised power over the people viewing them was not lost in advertising agencies that used photographs in order to promote products and services. Photographs were used in the brochures of the 1950s because Moses and his editors were confident that they would make the case for slum clearance. After all, the brochures were made to convince public officials and judges of a certain paradigm that necessitated site clearance. To be sure, the photographs were part of a package that included maps, statistics, descriptions, and affidavits. However, the photographs could not be too inconsistent with these other ways of seeing and defining the slum, because gross inconsistencies would raise too many questions and threaten the entire process.<sup>16</sup>

### ***The Incipient Slum***

After 1952, the "Demonstration of Slum Conditions" section of the brochures was renamed to

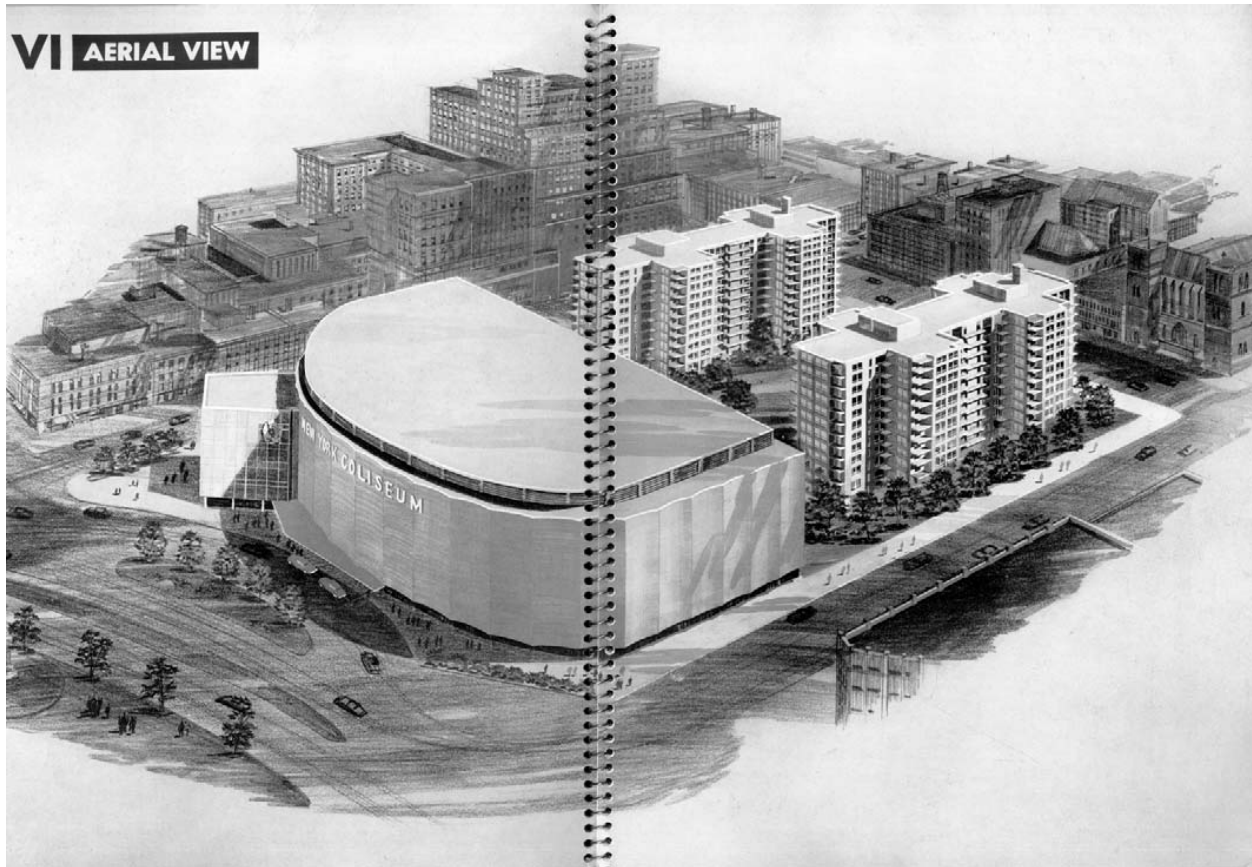
"Demonstration of Blight." This renaming could appear innocent enough, since in some circles the terms blight and slum were used interchangeably. However, these two terms did not usually have an identical meaning and the change of this section title was not accidental. Facing its first serious legal challenge, Moses's organization changed the title, because its staff members felt that it was more accurate to characterize the areas subject to clearance as blighted.<sup>17</sup>

It was in the 1930s that the term blight was elevated and joined the term slum. Both terms were used to explain urban decline and advocate various forms of rehabilitation.<sup>18</sup> Economist Mabel Walker defined a blighted area as "an area in which deteriorating forces have obviously reduced economic and social values to such a degree that widespread rehabilitation is necessary to forestall the development of an actual slum condition."<sup>19</sup> Walker used blight and obsolescence as synonymous terms with obsolescence having both a physical and an economic connotation, even though she followed a tradition that considered obsolescence and blight to be mainly economic problems. This economic aspect of urban blight, which usually ignored the people who lived in these areas and their problems, persisted; many public officials, social scientists, and businesspeople discussed urban blight in terms of depreciation, speculation, usefulness, taxation, and investment. If blight for Walker was something that eventually led to a slum, Harland Bartholomew attempted to identify the location of these blighted areas. He argued that blighted areas were sandwiched between the outlying affluent areas of a city and the slums that surrounded the downtown.<sup>20</sup> Although some people would disagree with Bartholomew's location of blight, most of them would agree with his insight that blighted areas were not as bad as slums. This did not mean that blighted areas were not subject to clearance. According to Robert M. Fogelson, the elevation of the concept of "blight" was useful because by the 1940s it provided "a rationale for razing the run-down residential neighborhoods near the central business district even though many of them were not slums."<sup>21</sup> This rationale was aided by the fact that improper and frequently illegal land use was considered one of the main causes of blight.

In the beginning of 1953, C. Clarence Kaskel, an owner of a pawnshop in the Columbus Circle clearance area, sued the City of New York; one of his arguments was that the site did not constitute a slum. Although the staff members of The Committee on Slum Clearance were confident that the city would prevail in court, the change of the name of the most important section of the brochures from "Demonstration of Slum Conditions" to "Demonstration of Blight" was significant. In case that this was required by the courts, Moses's slum clearance organization would no longer have to prove that an area was a slum; its staff members would simply claim that the area was blighted and on its way of becoming a slum. This did not mean that suddenly precision of definitions became an important aspect of slum clearance in New York City.<sup>22</sup> The change of the title meant that the burden of proof was lessened and that if the City of New York prevailed in this legal case, it would be impossible for any other entity to successfully challenge future designations of slum clearance sites.<sup>23</sup>

The change of the title of the most important section of the brochures signified a minor paradigm shift. On one hand, there were no significant changes in seeing and representing the clearance areas in the brochures after the renaming of the section. Moreover, the existing priorities of the paradigm were not reordered and no new political, economic, or technical

elements were introduced. On the other hand, the Committee on Slum Clearance tacitly accepted that the areas represented in the brochures were not slums. Whether they were actually blighted and what this meant was irrelevant. Moses's organization continued to represent blighted areas in the same way that it had represented slums. If the slum designation had worked, then the blighted designation would work as well. In some ways, one could argue that "Demonstration of Blight" was always the more appropriate heading.



**Figure 1.** Drawing of the proposed rebuilt Columbus Circle area in Midtown Manhattan. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, *Columbus Circle: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, December 1952), 16–17.

### Disorder and Obsolescence in Modernist Architecture

The characterization of areas as blighted by Moses's brochures can be better understood by looking at what was going to replace them. Each slum clearance brochure included an architectural drawing representing an aerial view of the rebuilt site. For example, the Columbus Circle brochure included an aerial view of two free-standing apartment buildings surrounded by gardens as well as the New York Coliseum (a convention center) with a parking lot (Figure 1).<sup>24</sup> The aerial view of the drawing was important because a bird's-eye view was the most suitable way to represent the physical order of this style of modernist architecture. In comparison, the site to be cleared was a hodgepodge of residential and commercial buildings

as well as parking lots that existed next to each other without amounting to an orderly whole (Figure 2). The existing built environment was the outcome of layers of unplanned growth and shrinkage with the parking lots taking the place of obsolete buildings that had been demolished.<sup>25</sup> The Pratt Institute Area brochure made a similar point. The aerial drawing of the redeveloped area included three superblocks that had replaced the traditional street-oriented gridiron site with its fourteen city blocks (Figure 3). The northern superblock comprised of four free-standing residential towers surrounded by gardens and parking lots as well as a playground and a small retail area. The southern superblock comprised of another four free-standing residential towers surrounded by gardens, parking lots, one garage, two retail areas, a couple of playgrounds, and one public school. The middle superblock was mostly devoted to facilities of Pratt Institute, a private arts and design institution of higher education. Although existing facilities of Pratt Institute, three factories, and one apartment building (all of them shaded in Figure 3) remained in the redeveloped site, the rest of the area was new with almost all of the buildings being demolished and all of the streets closed. This implied that Pratt Institute would be able to have its own continuous campus and that the new housing developments would occupy their own campus-like areas.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, a photograph of the area to be redeveloped showed an overcrowded and unplanned area with multifunction buildings of different heights and sizes (Figure 4). Despite the fact that the site appeared to be filled with buildings, it was unclear whether the space was used efficiently. What was clear is that the space exhibited a sense of visual disorder, which was even more obvious when juxtaposed to the modernist architectural design that was going to replace it.<sup>27</sup>

There have been many proponents of this kind of modernist rebuilding, though none of them has been as influential as Le Corbusier, the Swiss-born French architect; in his slum clearance projects, Moses appeared to be executing Le Corbusier's principles of architecture and planning.<sup>28</sup> Le Corbusier did not invent but combined many elements of architectural and planning theory that existed since the Renaissance to insist that visual order based on urban design was a major precondition of urban order. Architects have historically assumed a connection between order in architecture and order in society and have aimed to regulate and anticipate social relations through architectural design. Efforts to avoid chaos through the use of architecture were stimulated by the French Revolution. The events of 1789 confirmed the fears of political elites that society was essentially disorderly and unstable and that measures had to be taken so that it would not degenerate into chaos. Experiments that began in prisons following John Howard's architectural designs and Jeremy Bentham's panopticon were applied to buildings of all kinds of institutions that dealt with potentially dangerous people at the margins of society such as the poor, industrial workers, the young, the insane, and the sick. Thus, there was an emphasis on the architectural design of factories, asylums, schools, hospitals, and workhouses, so that social disorder could be anticipated, easily controlled, and minimized. Urban planners have also presumed that cities are inherently chaotic and that urban order can be achieved only through meticulous and rational planning that would include the careful arrangement of buildings, streets, and squares.<sup>29</sup> Baron Haussmann's modernization project of Paris in the 1860s, under which overcrowded neighborhoods with narrow streets were torn down and replaced by bourgeois housing and wide boulevards, represents an influential example of physical ordering.<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 2.** The Columbus Circle area before slum clearance. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, *Columbus Circle*, inside cover.

The older neighborhoods were conducive to revolts because people frequently barricaded the narrow streets for defense purposes during times of upheaval; the new urban design displaced and dispersed many of these rebellious populations while the wide avenues allowed troops to easily march into certain neighborhoods and restore order.<sup>31</sup> This belief in urban design and its taming effects continued to have currency into the twentieth century and Le Corbusier adopted it in his conceptual expositions. In fact, David P. Jordan has characterized Le Corbusier's proposals of clearing and rebuilding central Paris as "haussmannisme raised to another level."<sup>32</sup>

In the 1920s, Le Corbusier used conceptions of the garden city in order to advance his idea of the Radiant City; this was an area of twenty-four skyscrapers surrounded by lawns where pedestrians were separated from automobiles and businesses from residences. Le Corbusier believed that formal order in city planning was a precondition of efficiency. He advocated that the lessons of standardization and efficiency of Taylorism and Fordism be applied in city planning and building construction. He disliked the disorder that centuries of urban

development had created in cities like Paris where overcrowding, vehicular congestion, slums, and an inefficient built environment dominated. Le Corbusier likened Paris with “a vision of Dante’s inferno” and proposed that nothing less than its destruction would allow for the achievement of real improvements. In his Plan Voisin, Le Corbusier proposed to bulldoze most of central Paris north of the Seine and replace it with sixty story cruciform towers arranged in an orthogonal street grid surrounded by open green spaces. In his city plans, he advocated a planned functional segregation, so that areas for housing, work, shopping, entertainment, government, and monuments could be all separated. Le Corbusier also wanted to segregate different types of movement for the sake of efficiency; thus, pedestrian traffic would be separated from vehicular traffic and slow-moving vehicles would be required to use different roadways from fast vehicles. Though the great majority of Le Corbusier’s planning schemes were never built since they required immense political resolve and financial resources, many of his theoretical doctrines were adopted and applied by planners and architects around the world. He was behind many of the influential manifestos of the Congr s Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM). Le Corbusier became known for urban rebuilding in the form of towers surrounded by gardens.<sup>33</sup>



**Figure 3.** Drawing of the proposed rebuilt Pratt Institute Area in Brooklyn. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, *Pratt Institute Area: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, July 1953), 20–21.



**Figure 4.** The Pratt Institute Area before slum clearance. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, *Pratt Institute Area*, 6.

Robert Moses's urban renewal projects followed Le Corbusier's prescriptions of visual order. The gridiron street system was replaced with superblocks. Buildings and functions were separated from each other. Gardens surrounded buildings. Parking facilities were neatly integrated in the site. Playgrounds were placed within meaningful distance from the residential buildings and incorporated into the gardens. The streets surrounding the superblocks were widened so that automobile traffic could flow easier. Stores were limited to specific locations that were separate from the residential towers. The redeveloped sites appeared orderly especially from above and the comprehensive urban design established specific uses for each spatial subdivision. For example, walkways were for tenants walking to and from facilities inside and outside the development; playgrounds were made for children to play under the observation of adults; public benches were placed in specific areas for adults to sit and hang out; parking lots were designated for automobiles to park and for their drivers to walk to the walkways that would take them to their buildings; spaces were separated with fences from each other, so that individuals did not make the mistake of mixing them and using them improperly.



Off-limits areas such as grass lawns were also clearly fenced off and included signs instructing people to keep away. Nothing was left to imagination.



**Figure 5.** Buildings demonstrating “blighted” conditions in the Manhattantown slum clearance site in the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, *Manhattantown: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, September 1951), 34.

It was not only that Robert Moses’s modernist rebuilding plans resembled Le Corbusier’s proposals but also that his definition of the slum was influenced from platforms advanced by CIAM proponents. José Luis Sert, a follower of Le Corbusier’s planning theories, in his articulation of CIAM’s proposals in 1942 argued that the urban arrangement of New York City was obsolete. Sert asserted that “slums represent only one phase of the general process of decay that our cities are going through—something like the last stage of a protracted malady.”<sup>34</sup> This argument corresponded to ideas that slums were areas suffering from extreme conditions of blight. In a chapter about slums, Sert featured photographs of Manhattan brownstones, implicitly making the argument that these were not necessarily slum buildings,



but nonetheless buildings that were not modern and on their way to obsolescence.<sup>35</sup> These brownstones were too low, too close to each other, and too old to have a place in the modern city. In the caption of another set of photographs representing old London buildings, Sert claimed that slum clearance was an outmoded term that could “merely scratch the surface of London’s problems” and he instead proposed large-scale replanning.<sup>36</sup>



**Figure 6.** Buildings that were viewed as obsolete in the Pratt Institute slum clearance area. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, *Pratt Institute Area*, 46.

This idea of obsolescence (and blight) explains the incorporation in the slum clearance brochures of buildings that appeared to be well maintained. For example, in the *Manhattantown* brochure under the “land use” subheading, there is a photograph representing a significant portion of a block that would be difficult to characterize as a slum (Figure 5). Similarly, in the *Pratt Institute Area* brochure under the subheading of “age of existing structures,” there is a photograph of a series of attached four-story buildings with nothing visibly wrong (Figure 6). There are fifty-five such photographs in the “Demonstration of

Slum Conditions” section of the brochures, and there are a couple of reasons that can explain their presence; the first is that the photographers were unable to capture images that made the area appear more deteriorated and the second is that they operated under the assumption that the buildings photographed were blighted and on their way to obsolescence.<sup>37</sup> These photographs necessitated the eventual discarding of the term *slum* and its replacement with “blight.”



**Figure 7.** Empty lot with children playing in the Lincoln Square site. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, *Lincoln Square: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: The Committee, May 28, 1956), 40.

### **A Survey of the Slum Clearance Photographs**

In the 1950s, the Committee on Slum Clearance published twenty-six site-specific brochures (see Appendix). Given that the brochures intended to justify the clearance of areas designated as “slums” (or “blighted”) the most important section was entitled “Demonstration of Slum Conditions” (renamed to “Demonstration of Blight”). In this section, the authors of the brochures described matters such as land use, the condition and age of existing structures,

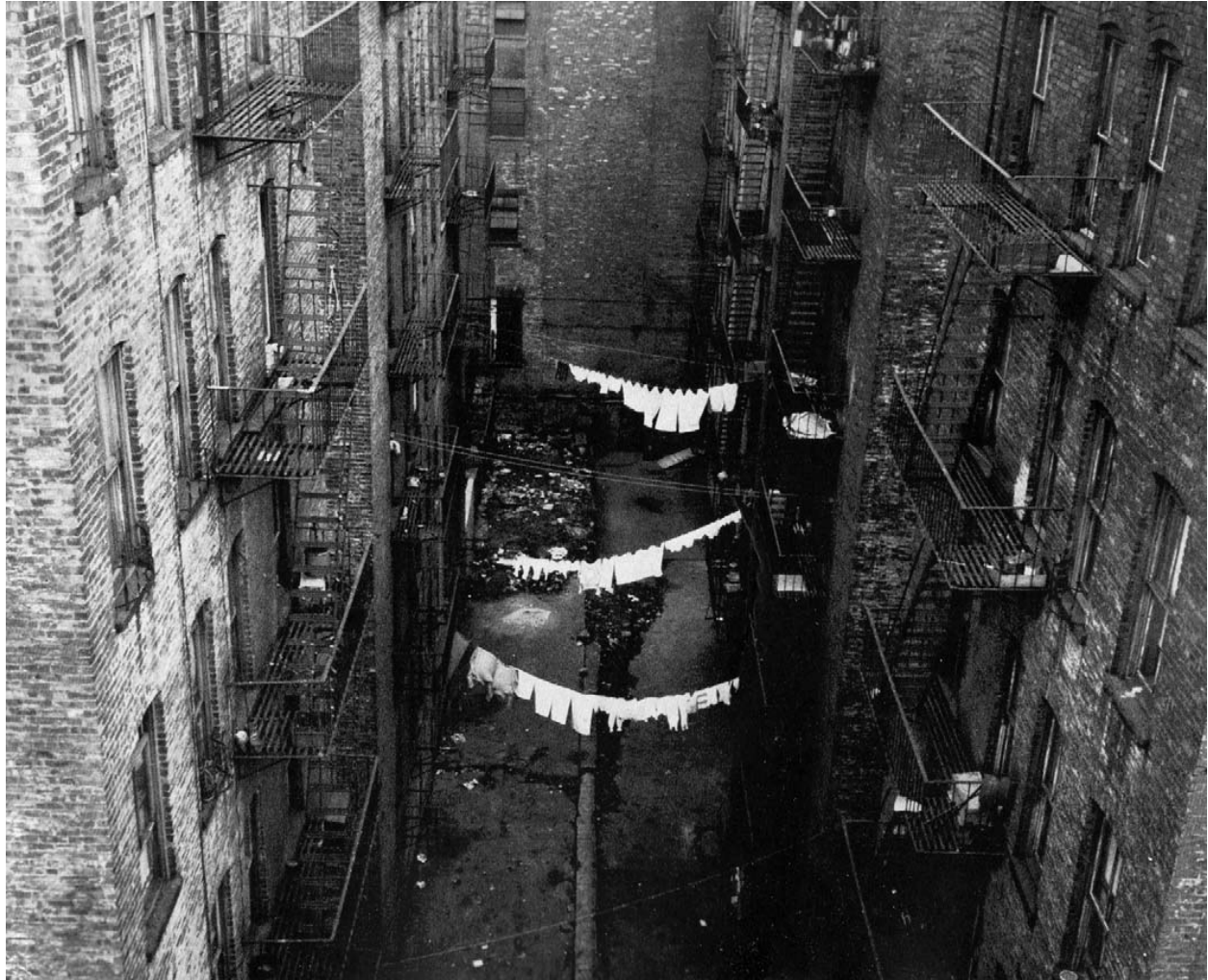
land coverage, existing zoning, population density, and tenant data.<sup>38</sup> Though the number of photographs varied, the majority of these brochures included five photographs of the “blighted” area. The photographs that displayed “blighted” conditions in the most persuasive manner explored three themes: empty lots, back alleys, and abandoned buildings.<sup>39</sup>



**Figure 8.** Empty lots surrounding a building in the Fort Greene clearance area. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, *Fort Greene: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, December 1952), 50.

Empty lots appeared twenty-two times in the brochures and represented the most popular depiction of urban blight (Figures 7 and 8).<sup>40</sup> They always implied that a building was missing, that space was underutilized, and that garbage ended up there. Although some of these empty lots had become parking lots and others were fenced up and possibly utilized, the ones that made the most powerful statement were not commercially used and open (or the photographer was able to go inside them). For example, in the Lincoln Square brochure, there is a photograph representing children playing in a sizable garbage-strewn empty lot, while in the background there is a poorly constructed wooden fence separating the back alleys of other buildings from the empty lot (Figure 7). The poorly constructed fences around these empty lots were visually unattractive and reinforced the assumption that there was something wrong with

the area presented. Although this photograph made a powerful visual statement of “blighted” conditions, many other ones failed to do so. In some cases, the empty lot was not the focal point of the photograph. In others, only the outside of a fenced up lot was shown. This is probably because empty lots were automatically considered to be among the most recognizable signs of urban blight. In general, there was nothing more uneconomic than the absence of a building in a dense urban area. The fact that the missing building had not been replaced by another one inferred that the owners of the land and potential lending institutions did not consider the area as commercially viable.



**Figure 9.** Dark back alley with clotheslines in Corlears Hook. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, *Corlears Hook: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, January 1951), 44.

Back alleys appeared twenty times in the brochures (Figures 9 and 10).<sup>41</sup> They usually showed lines with clothes hanging on them. The ground was filled with paper litter and this implied that there was other garbage lying there. Some of these back alleys were dark and this

indicated that portions of the buildings did not receive adequate sunlight.<sup>42</sup> Although the filled clotheslines symbolized a process of cleanliness, this was undermined because they were juxtaposed to the unsanitary darkness in the ground and the gray structures around them. Overall, the combination of structures, clotheslines, and garbage, exhibited a sense of visual chaos. From a public health point of view, people who existed alongside these back alleys probably lived in unhygienic conditions. The images of back alleys also asserted that the buildings of different owners were too close to each other and that no building improvement would be able to alter this. The only possible remedy was that of site clearance. A variant of the theme of the back alley was the photographing of the roofs of buildings (Figure 11).<sup>43</sup> The roofs of buildings were definitely not attractive, but they were cleaner than back alleys and they did not show the same degree of blight and disorder.



**Figure 10.** A back alley in the North Harlem slum clearance site. This back alley is wide enough to almost cover an entire city street. However, it is still too narrow according to the standards of modernist architecture. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, *North Harlem: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, January 1951), 42.

Abandoned buildings, some of which had been damaged from fire, appeared seventeen times (Figures 12 and 13).<sup>44</sup> This is surprising, given that the statistics provided in the brochures for many of the sites indicated that the percentage of vacant buildings exceeded





**Figure 11.** Roofs of buildings in the Morningside - Manhattanville area. Committee on Slum Clearance, *Morningside-Manhattanville: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, September 1951), 40.

the 20 percent mark, meaning that there could be more photographs of them. More than this, despite the fact that abandoned buildings could furnish powerful images of urban decay, many of them were photographed from far away and viewers were not aware of the devastation that closer shots could provide. Once again, abandoned buildings were viewed as natural statements of urban blight, which made for the indiscriminate inclusion of their photographs. They had a similar representational function as empty lots; abandoned buildings were uneconomic and the fact that their owners had not repaired them meant either that the buildings were beyond repair or that their owners were not optimistic about the profitability of these buildings.

In these three types of photographs, the presence of people is incidental. In most of them, there are no people at all. This is the case because Moses and his staff members viewed blight as a physical problem that required physical solutions. While it is possible that people who lived in these neighborhoods were also behaving in a “disorderly” fashion (rather than

being the “victims” of the “slum”), the elimination of the blighted area would displace these people and disperse them. In this case, slum clearance was also an instrument of social engineering, though the brochures emphasized the physical problem.<sup>45</sup>



**Figure 12.** Abandoned building on top of stores in the Delancey Street slum clearance area. Many stores used the buildings above them for storage, but in this case it is unlikely that these stores were able to occupy the entire building. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, *Delancey Street: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, January 1951), 38.

### **Representations of Commercial Areas**

The Committee on Slum Clearance usually sought the wholesale clearance of sites; this included commercial areas that were usually mixed with residential ones.<sup>46</sup> From a contemporary perspective, these commercial areas cannot be considered as blighted and even in the 1950s, for ordinary New Yorkers the representation of these shopping areas as blighted must have been troublesome. These photographs were showcased in the brochures, however, because they corresponded to the paradigm under which Moses’s organization was operating. The photographs made statements about the mixed zoning that prevailed in the sites and the disorder that their urban design generated. In general, the idea was that most spatial uses portrayed in the photographs were a relic of the past.



**Figure 13.** Abandoned building in Cadman Plaza, Brooklyn. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, *Cadman Plaza: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: The Committee, April 20, 1959), 36.

A photograph showing a grocery store with soft drink signs in the ground floor of a brownstone in the Lincoln Square site made the point that commercial establishments existed in residential streets (Figure 14). According to the modernist planning theories of Le Corbusier, such mixture of land uses was unacceptable and made for disorderly, inefficient, and overcrowding conditions. More than this, there is a sign advertising furnished rooms and apartments in the photograph. This implied that some of the buildings had been converted into single-room occupancies, attracting low-income people who were probably transients. A caption for this photograph would ask the question: "Is this a place for a woman and her child?"<sup>47</sup>

Another photograph also in the Lincoln Square site shows a man crossing the street (Figure 15). What is important appears in the sidewalk behind him, which is filled with people walking by numerous stores. The photograph intended to show that commercial establishments existed in residential buildings and that the people frequenting these stores were doing so in a disorderly fashion. Another photograph of a commercial area in Seward Park makes similar statements (Figure 16).<sup>48</sup>





**Figure 14.** Brownstones with rooming houses and a grocery store in Lincoln Square. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, *Lincoln Square*, 38.

There are stands outside the stores, but this has never been unusual in large cities. There are people who are possibly street vendors, but this is also nothing unusual either. Finally, there is a pushcart in the cobblestone street, which probably belongs to a street vendor. In the 1930s and early 1940s, the City of New York went after street vendors and their pushcarts and attempted to eliminate them.<sup>49</sup> This was viewed as a modernization project and a caption of this photograph could ask the question of whether a pushcart and a cobblestone street still had a place in New York City. This photograph corresponded to the notion that inappropriate land use represented one of the main causes of urban blight.

There were some inconsistencies with the presence of these photographs in many of the brochures. These images did not correspond to the notion that these areas were dying. They corresponded to the idea that the areas were overcrowded, but then these stores were not uneconomic as the brochures insisted. Modernist architecture may have considered these

commercial areas to be discardable; this did not imply that these stores contributed to slum conditions as the early brochures claimed.



**Figure 15.** Commercial area in Lincoln Square. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, *Lincoln Square*, 46.

### ***The Selection of Slum Clearance Sites and Their Legal Definition***

Title I of the US Housing Act of 1949 did not define slums or blighted areas. It was up to the Federal Administrator to approve the municipal agency's slum determination. In the brochures, Moses followed the slum definition of the US Housing Act of 1937, which stated that "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." When it came to litigation, the City of New York had to show that its actions satisfied not only the provisions of these housing acts but also state and local laws. The most important of these laws was General

Law §72-K, which allowed the municipality to acquire through eminent domain areas that were "substandard and insanitary."<sup>50</sup>



**Figure 16.** Commercial area in Seward Park. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, *Seward Park: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: The Committee, August 29, 1956), 44.

For Moses's Committee on Slum Clearance, the most important legal challenge involved the Columbus Circle slum clearance area. In 1953, after losing his case in the Supreme Court of New York, C. Clarence Kaskel appealed. One of the arguments that his lawyers made was that the Columbus Circle area was not "substandard and insanitary" as New York General

Municipal Law §72-K mandated. The case went all the way up to the Court of Appeals of New York (the state's highest court), where the judges ruled against Kaskel by a vote of 5–2. The majority opinion argued that the court would have to invalidate the decision of a number of public bodies such as the Triborough Tunnel and Bridge Authority, the New York City Planning Commission, and the Board of Estimate of the City of New York in order to determine that the area was not a slum. Instead, the majority of the judges uncritically accepted the notion that the Columbus Circle area was a slum:

In rounded figures, 20% of the land proposed to be taken is occupied by dwellings all but one of which are more than sixty years old, 7% of the site is covered by hotels and rooming houses, 34% is in parking lots where once there were outmoded buildings, and 39% is occupied by nonresidential structures. Of course, none of the buildings are as noisome or dilapidated as those described in Dickens' novels or Thomas Burke's "Limehouse" stories of the London slums of other days, but there is ample in this record to justify the determination of the city planning commission that a substantial part of the area is "substandard and insanitary" by modern tests, and that the whole 6.32 acres, taken together, may reasonably be considered a single "area" for clearance and redevelopment purposes.<sup>51</sup>

This decision restated major elements of Moses's paradigm. The argument was that the condition of the site was not as poor as to characterize it a slum, but obsolete and subject to clearance. The majority opinion also based this opinion on the site photographs: "a glance at the photographs . . . shows that a considerable number of buildings in this area are, on a mere external inspection, below modern standards because of their age, obsolescence and decay."<sup>52</sup> In the end, the majority of the court decided that unless the plaintiff could show that the designation of the Columbus Circle area as a slum was the result of corrupt activities, he could not pursue this case because expert agencies had already decided that slum conditions existed in the area. The dissent strongly disagreed with the majority opinion and questioned the determination that the Columbus Circle area was a slum:

It is undisputed that not more than 27.1% of the entire site area is occupied for dwelling purposes of any kind. Thirty-three and eight-tenths per cent of the site area is vacant land devoted to parking lots; even if some of this vacant land was formerly occupied by substandard and insanitary dwellings, there is no need to spend public funds to eliminate them since they have already been eliminated by private capital. Thirty-nine and one-tenth per cent of the site area is occupied by business or commercial buildings which have not been classified as substandard or insanitary by the municipal authorities. It does very well to cite Dickens' novels, or Thomas Burke's "Limehouse" stories of the London slums of other days, but these have nothing to do with condemning the Manufacturers Trust Building in this "slum" area, assessed at \$1,500,000, in order to make way for a coliseum—a laudable object, to be sure, but not one whose connection with slum clearance is so clear as to be taken for granted without a trial.<sup>53</sup>

Former chief of planning for the New York City Housing Authority, William C. Vladeck testified that only 10 percent of the buildings in the area could be characterized as "substandard and insanitary" and that only 2 percent of the entire clearance area could be characterized as a slum. He also contended that it would be a mistake to qualify all old law

tenements (buildings built before 1901) as substandard since the majority of them were equipped with running water, modern bathroom facilities, adequate ventilation, central heating, and fire-fighting devices and met the requirements of the city's building and fire codes. According to Vladeck, one-third of the city comprised of such old law tenements.<sup>54</sup>

This legal victory came only three years after the beginning of slum clearance in New York City and allowed Moses to continue with his slum clearance projects without major modifications of his paradigm. What was important in this legal case is that the judges were mostly impressed by the process under which Columbus Circle was declared a slum rather than with the actual prevailing conditions of the area. The message was that the owners of other areas undergoing reviews by the City Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate would have to conform to their decisions without being able to legally challenge slum determinations.

In spite of what the judges thought, the slum determinations were based on a process that was questionable. The Committee on Slum Clearance analyzed areas to see if they made good cases for its redevelopment purposes and also welcomed the recommendations of private investors and builders. Unless the private sector expressed interest, the Committee usually did not pursue the project. Once a site was selected, the Committee asked the Board of Estimate for permission to request funds from the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency for a study. Once such funding was approved, the Committee arranged meetings with potential private sponsors and published the complete redevelopment plan along with a study of the slum clearance area in a brochure. The brochure attempted to justify the clearance of the area, not because it was necessarily a slum or even blighted, but because there were sponsors willing to build in the area and because various political entities were on board with the redevelopment action. By the time the City Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate held hearings and voted on the matter, it was a usually a foregone conclusion that the area would be redeveloped.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite his successes in winning federal funding and completing difficult projects, Moses's design and execution of urban renewal was controversial and destroyed his reputation. Many observers pointed out that in his slum clearance projects, Moses targeted mixed-race or minority working class neighborhoods and replaced them with callous modernist structures. Caving in to criticism, in 1960, Mayor Robert Wagner disbanded the Committee on Slum Clearance and installed a new redevelopment team. Although Moses remained in various public posts until 1968, his power steadily declined after 1960 and his legacy was questioned. For decades, Robert Caro's 1974 classic *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*, which blamed Moses for employing inhumane methods and contributing to the decline of New York City, remained the dominant perspective on the master planner and his actions.<sup>56</sup>

In recent years, the reputation of Robert Moses has been improving, and this includes his standing among scholars. In *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* edited by Hillary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson in 2007, a number of prominent historians sought to rethink Robert Moses and his legacy. This volume was published in conjunction with three museum exhibitions about Moses and his accomplishments, and it is

more than certain that this revisionist activity will continue in the years to come. Still, this volume can hardly be considered a celebration of Moses's projects despite the fact that many of its essays have moved away from the interpretations advanced by Caro. This underlines the problem of trying to create a balanced historical account while completely rehabilitating Moses's image.<sup>57</sup>

This essay focused on the brochure photographs that Robert Moses incorporated in his slum clearance brochures during the 1950s. The photographs underscored the paradigm under which Moses's slum clearance organization operated. Certain areas that could attract the interest of private developers were designated as slums. After this designation, the Committee on Slum Clearance tried to represent these areas as substandard, uneconomic, disorderly, and obsolete. When it became difficult to continue using the term *slum*, given that conditions in the clearance sites were not that extreme, Moses and his staff members argued that these areas were "blighted" and that sooner or later they would become slums. The nature of the remedies applied to these designations of blight was important because the way of constructing blight shaped the remedies. The photographs and aerial views assisted in the framing of what urban blight was and what was suitable to replace it. Moses's paradigm was also influenced from the federal government guidelines, which sought the wholesale redevelopment of areas characterized as blighted. This meant that portions of these areas were not blighted in any ordinary sense and that the photographs had to focus on blighted conditions if such a possibility existed.

Regardless, many of the photographs failed to consistently represent the slum conditions that were important in the discourse of the slum that Moses relied and this contributed to the new characterization of sites as blighted. It could be that the photographers deployed in these areas did not do a great job. Or that the photographers and the editors of the brochures wanted to present a balanced photographic account of the slum areas, and this included both positive and negative aspects of them. However, both of these explanations are unlikely. The failure of the photographs to demonstrate consistent slum conditions reveals the fact that the slum was an ideological rather than a scientific construct. Even after the change in the name, the way that blight was defined attempted to satisfy the political-economic structure of New York City, and this had little to do with the actual condition of the areas. Moses acted as the coordinator who sought to accommodate the wishes of politicians, developers, builders, large landowners, real estate interests, and government officials.<sup>58</sup> Moses and his staff did not attempt to make objective decisions as to what constituted blight because such decisions would alienate a substantial portion of the holders of power involved in the slum clearance process. There were definitely alternative sites whose built environment had deteriorated much more than that of areas proposed in the brochures; however, these areas were uneconomic and would fail to attract redevelopment sponsors. Moreover, the city government wanted to redevelop areas in strategic areas of the city that had experienced undesirable demographic changes, rather than just areas where low-income people had lived all along. This is why Manhattan included the majority of slum clearance projects with Brooklyn being a distant second. Whatever the case, the problem with defining blight in a way that accommodated political and corporate powerholders is that besides being problematic, it excluded small landlords, existing tenants, or independent storeowners. Furthermore, this definition had no

place for racial diversity or working-class culture. Early court decisions assisted Moses's paradigm, since efforts to legally define what constituted a slum failed.<sup>59</sup>

Historical debates about Robert Moses and his impact are likely to continue. However, if the areas that were designated as slums (or blighted) were not the worst in the city, but the Committee on Slum Clearance selected at least twenty-six of them for urban renewal, then the claim that Moses's actions benefited the city is difficult to establish. The destruction of sound urban neighborhoods cannot be characterized as beneficial.

## Appendix

The brochures surveyed in this essay are the following (arranged chronologically):

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Corlears Hook: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, January 1951).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Delancey Street: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, January 1951).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Harlem: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, January 1951).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *North Harlem: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, January 1951).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *South Village: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, January 1951).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Washington Square South: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, January 1951).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Williamsburg: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, January 1951).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Manhattantown: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, September 1951).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Morningside-Manhattanville: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, September 1951).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Columbus Circle: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, December 1952).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Fort Greene: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, December 1952).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Pratt Institute Area: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, July 1953).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Washington Square Southeast: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, August 1953).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *New York University–Bellevue: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, 25 February 1954).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Seaside Rockaway: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949* (New York: The Committee, October 1954).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Lincoln Square: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: The Committee, May 28, 1956).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Seward Park: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: The Committee, August 29, 1956).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Park Row: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: The Committee, October 15, 1956).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Hammels-Rockaway: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: The Committee, November 12, 1956).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Penn Station South: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: The Committee, August 19, 1957).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Riverside-Amsterdam: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: The Committee, November 10, 1958).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Battery Park: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: The Committee, January 19, 1959).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Gramercy: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: The Committee, February 16, 1959).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Soundview: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: The Committee, March 16, 1959).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Cadman Plaza: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: The Committee, April 20, 1959).

Committee on Slum Clearance, *Park Row Extension: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: The Committee, June 8, 1959).



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Joel Schwartz, *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner City* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993); Hilary Ballon, "Robert Moses and Urban Renewal: The Title I Program," in *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 94–121.

<sup>2</sup> George E. Spargo and Harry Taylor, "General Memorandum. Title One Procedure for the City of New York," (Robert Moses Papers, Box 116, Folder: Housing, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, New York, August 19, 1954).

<sup>3</sup> Ballon, "Robert Moses and Urban Renewal," 99. Samuel Zipp also agrees with the persuasive power of the brochures; see Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 223.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Moses Memorandum to William S. Lebowitz, (Robert Moses Papers, Box 116, Folder: Robert Moses's Library Corr. From Housing File 1 of 3, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, New York, December 3, 1956). This quotation also appears in Ballon, "Robert Moses and Urban Renewal," 99.

<sup>5</sup> J. A. Yelling, *Slums and Slum Clearance in Victorian London* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Physical solutions applied in neighborhoods sought to address both physical and social disorder. However, in his brochures, Moses emphasized physical disorder.

<sup>7</sup> Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> For this conceptual tradition in architecture, see Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 240–48.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Cresswell, *The Tramp in America* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 171–6; John Thomson, *Victorian London Street Life in Historic Photographs* (New York: Dover, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Maren Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America, 1890-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1–46; Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 157–240; Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles* (New York: Zone Books, 1996); Keith Gandal, *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 27–38 and 61–114.

<sup>11</sup> John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 143.

<sup>12</sup> Cresswell, *The Tramp in America*, 198.

<sup>13</sup> Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life*, 89–148; Cresswell, *The Tramp in America*, 197–206.

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<sup>14</sup> John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 90.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Rothstein, "Direction in the Picture Story," in *The Complete Photographer*, ed. Willard D. Morgan (Chicago: National Educators Alliance, 1943), 1356.

<sup>16</sup> There were actually occasional problems in the brochures with some images not corresponding to the narrative well. This means that they were consistent as much as possible with the general paradigm rather than with many of the details.

<sup>17</sup> The editor of most of these brochures was Richard C. Guthridge. However, in this essay, I use the term editors because there were more people involved in editorial decisions including Moses himself.

<sup>18</sup> For amore comprehensive discussion of the term blight and its relationship to "slum," see Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 317-80. Fogelson shows how "blight" had a history that predated the 1930s and early 1940s.

<sup>19</sup> Mabel Walker, *Urban Blight and Slums* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Harland Bartholomew, "The Neighborhood—Key to Urban Redemption," in *American Planning and Civil Annual: A Record of Recent Civic Advance*, ed. Harlean James (Washington, DC: American Planning and Civic Association, 1941), 243-46.

<sup>21</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown*, 357.

<sup>22</sup> Bernard Frieden and Lynne Sagalyn have showed how the definition of blight remained fluid and city officials used this to their advantage. See Bernard J. Frieden and Lynne B. Sagalyn, *Downtown, Inc.: How America Rebuilds Cities* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

<sup>23</sup> The Supreme Court of New York ruled against Kaskel in *Kaskel v. Impelliteri*, 204 Misc. 346, 121 N.Y.S. 2d 848 (1953). However, Kaskel appealed.

<sup>24</sup> Committee on Slum Clearance, *Columbus Circle*, 6-7.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Committee on Slum Clearance, *Pratt Institute Area*, 6, 8, and 18-19.

<sup>27</sup> For the aerial photographic discourses that developed in the early part of the twentieth century, see Paul K. Saint-Amour, "Modernist Reconnaissance," *Modernism/Modernity* 10 (2003): 349-80.

<sup>28</sup> To be sure, Moses did not think highly of Le Corbusier and his work.

<sup>29</sup> Forty, *Words and Buildings*, 240-48; Robin Evans, *The Fabrication of Virtue: English Prison Architecture, 1750-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 118-94.

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<sup>30</sup> David P. Jordan, *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labors of Baron Haussmann* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>31</sup> David P. Jordan rejects this view articulated by Walter Benjamin and even Haussmann himself and argues that the "prefect's motives were aesthetic, bureaucratic, and economic." See footnote 18 in David P. Jordan, "Haussmann and Haussmannisation: The Legacy for Paris," *French Historical Studies* 27 (Winter 2004): 87–113.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Fox Weber, *Le Corbusier* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006); Le Corbusier, *Essential Le Corbusier: L'Esprit Nouveau Articles* (Oxford: Architectural Press, 1998). Mardges Bacon has found the singling out of Le Corbusier as responsible for modernist city planning by Jacobs and others to be exaggerated, though not without merit. Bacon argues that by 1935 most of Le Corbusier's principles behind the Radiant City had become elements of New York City housing and planning policy, though many of these principles had probably developed independently; Mardges Bacon, *Le Corbusier in America: Travels in the Land of the Timid* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 168–69. Eric Mumford has shown that CIAM members had almost no involvement in the towers with gardens built in the United States, though Le Corbusier's ideas influenced many of the manifestos of CIAM; Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000). The argument advanced in this and the previous paragraph has been made in Themis Chronopoulos, *Spatial Regulation in New York City: From Urban Renewal to Zero Tolerance* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 34–36.

<sup>34</sup> José Luis Sert, *Can Our Cities Survive? An ABC of Urban Problems, Their Analysis, Their Solutions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), 12.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. These photographs did not have a caption. For a discussion of the images that Sert employed in his works, see Jordana Mendelson, "Creating a Public for Modern Architecture: Sert's Use of Images from GATCPAC to The Heart of the City," in *Josep Lluís Sert: The Architect of Urban Design, 1953-1969*, ed. Eric Mumford and Hashim Sarkis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 39–52.

<sup>36</sup> Sert, *Can Our Cities Survive*, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Photographs that represent streetscapes, buildings, and commercial areas with no obvious symptoms of deterioration appeared in the following brochures: Battery Park (3), Cadman Plaza (3), Columbus Circle (3), Delancey Street (2), Fort Greene (1), Gramercy (4), Hammels—Rockaway (1), Harlem (2), Lincoln Square (2), Manhattantown (2), Morningside—Manhattanville (1), New York University—Bellevue (2), North Harlem (1), Park Row (1), Park Row Extension (3), Penn Station South (2), Pratt Institute Area (3), Riverside—Amsterdam (2), Seaside—Rockaway (1), Seward Park (2), Soundview (2), South Village (2), Washington Square South (4), Washington Square Southeast (4), and Williamsburg (2).

<sup>38</sup> The names of the categories slightly varied from brochure to brochure, but their meaning was the same.

<sup>39</sup> This article focuses on the photographs that appear in the "Demonstration of Slum Conditions" or the

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“Demonstration of Blight” section of the brochures. The photographs appearing in the rest of the brochure were usually overviews of the areas and regardless it would be unfair to claim that they also tried to demonstrate blighted conditions.

<sup>40</sup> Photographs of empty lots appeared in the following brochures: Battery Park (1), Cadman Plaza (1), Corlears Hook (2), Delancey Street (1), Fort Greene (3), Gramercy (1), Hammels—Rockaway (1), Harlem (2), Lincoln Square (1), Manhattantown (1), North Harlem (1), Park Row (2), Park Row Extension (1), Penn Station South (1), South Village (2), and Williamsburg (1). Empty lots that had become parking lots are included in this list.

<sup>41</sup> Photographs of back alleys appeared in the following brochures: Columbus Circle (1), Corlears Hook (3), Delancey Street (1), Harlem (1), Lincoln Square (1), Manhattantown (1), Morningside—Manhattanville (1), New York University—Bellevue (2), North Harlem (1), Park Row Extension (1), Penn Station South (1), Pratt Institute Area (1), Seward Park (2), Washington Square Southeast (2), and Williamsburg (1).

<sup>42</sup> Since the nineteenth century, (dark) back alleys have been among the most favorite photographic representations of slums. See Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 117–52.

<sup>43</sup> Photographs of roofs appeared in the following brochures: Columbus Circle (2), Harlem (1), Manhattantown (2), Morningside—Manhattanville (3), and Washington Square Southeast (2).

<sup>44</sup> Photographs of abandoned buildings appeared in the following brochures: Battery Park (1), Cadman Plaza (1), Corlears Hook (2), Delancey Street (1), Fort Greene (1), Harlem (1), Park Row (2), Pratt Institute Area (1), Seward Park (2), South Village (3), Washington Square Southeast (1), and Williamsburg (1). This category requires some qualifications. It is unclear whether some of the buildings (as in Battery Park) are actually abandoned or used for storage and manufacturing (in this essay, these buildings are counted as abandoned). It is also possible that buildings that have windows are also abandoned; however, this cannot be determined, and it is not likely that the photographers or brochure editors were trying to represent this.

<sup>45</sup> Physical and social disorder has been delineated and employed in Robert Sampson and Stephen Raudenbush, “Systematic Social Observation of Public Spaces: A New Look at Disorder in Urban Neighborhoods,” *American Journal of Sociology* 105 (November 1999): 603–51; Erving Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings* (New York: Free Press, 1963); Lyn H. Lofland, *A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Wesley G. Skogan, *Disorder and Decline: Crime and the Spiral of Decay in American Neighborhoods* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Frank Hearn, *Moral Order and Social Disorder: The American Search for Civil Society* (New York: Aldyne de Gruyter, 1997); Chronopoulos, *Spatial Regulation in New York City*, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Photographs of functional commercial areas mixed with residential ones appeared in the following brochures: Cadman Plaza (2), Columbus Circle (1), Delancey Street (2), Gramercy (2), Harlem (1), Lincoln Square (1), Morningside—Manhattanville (1), Park Row (1), Penn Station South (2), Seward Park (1), South Village (2), Washington Square South (1), and Williamsburg (1).

<sup>47</sup> None of the photographs in the brochures had captions.

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<sup>48</sup> To be sure, the angle from which this photograph is taken is problematic and does not completely capture the vitality of the area.

<sup>49</sup> For New York's efforts to curb street vending, see Thomas Kessner, *Fiorello H. La Guardia and the Making of Modern New York* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989), 351–55; Daniel M. Bluestone, "'The Pushcart Evil': Peddlers, Merchants, and New York City's Streets, 1890-1940," *Journal of Urban History* 18 (November 1991): 68–92; Themis Chronopoulos, "Morality, Social Disorder, and the Working Class in Times Square, 1892-1954," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 30 (July 2011): 73–91.

<sup>50</sup> Ballon, "Robert Moses and Urban Renewal," 100; Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 135.

<sup>51</sup> *Kaskel v. Impellitteri*, 306 N.Y. 73; 115 N.E.2d 659; 1953 N.Y. (1953), 11–12.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–22.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>55</sup> Spargo and Taylor, "General Memorandum," 1954. There were occasions in which urban renewal did not occur because of various problems. However, the process itself made the redevelopment action appear inevitable and aimed at generating a feeling of hopelessness among the people being displaced.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Random House, 1974).

<sup>57</sup> Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson, eds., *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).

<sup>58</sup> Moses actually failed to satisfy all of these groups all the time, but for about a decade he succeeded in convincing many key players to support his projects.

<sup>59</sup> Besides the Columbus Circle legal case, there were also a couple of other court decisions that refused to overturn the slum determination: *In re Harlem Slum Clearance Project*, 114 N.Y.S.2d 787; 1952 N.Y. (1952); *Boro Hall Corp. v. Impellitteri*, 128 N.Y.S.2d 804; 1954 N.Y. (1954).

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