This article explores the national debate about modern housing in Southern California during the 1930s through an examination of Federal Housing Administration (FHA) participation at the 1935 San Diego World’s Fair. Shaped by the political and cultural crises of the Depression, the FHA’s first exhibition of model housing contained two contradictory impulses: an idealistic and social democratic architectural modernism and a sound bottom-line promotion of the real estate industry. These original dual impulses indicated that suburban expansion and industrial dispersion were not the only alternatives to demographic and industrial growth in Southern California after World War II. The social idealism embedded within numerous examples of model housing suggested that patterns of development and housing in Southern California and the nation might be more egalitarian and democratic: true mixed-use communities characterized by variety in social class complexion and, by implication, race and ethnicity. For a number of important reasons, by the 1940s, FHA financial requirements did not push suburban developers to change their operations much from the 1920s. In the end, the FHA only federalized the voluntary and arbitrary practices created by the housing division of the Commerce Department for the real estate industry of the 1920s.

Promoting a Fair and a Social Vision

In the midst of the Great Depression, San Diego city leaders decided to stage the city’s second World’s Fair in Balboa Park, a rambling 1,400-acre urban park with scrubby green Bermuda grass, eucalyptus trees, steep arroyos, and shallow ravines. The park was also the repository for the structures left over from the first exposition, the cultural legacy of aesthetic city leaders who had been successful at building public institutions dedicated to archeology and anthropology, botany, and the arts and crafts (PCEC Executive Committee, 1915, pp. 662–668; San Diego Park Commission, 1915–1920). San Diego’s second fair was one of several “century of progress” expositions of the 1930s, cultural events that sought to restore hope in national progress and create a vision of future prosperity for millions of Americans. The fair promoted ideals of material abundance and consumerism within architecturally modernistic settings.
League. Social discontent extended even to "respectable" citizens, who exhibited waning faith in municipal government due to appalling local political corruption. Indeed, local businessmen had tried to rally support for another world's fair in 1931, but were met with apathy from all ranks of the city (Bokovoy, 1999; Pourade, 1967; Rydell, 1993).

When Long Beach newspaperman Frank Drugan moved to San Diego in 1933, he marshaled powerful elites in order to reverse the morose civic sentiment and persuaded local businessmen that another world's fair presented long-term benefits for the local economy. Besides, thought Drugan, in addition to economic prosperity, San Diego's first exposition had promoted the special cultural qualities of the city and region and offered hope to its citizens about San Diego's future. There was no time better than the present to uplift the collective morale of the city, state, and region. Drugan's successful efforts drew upon his personal contacts with and commitments from Franklin D. Roosevelt; Norman H. Davis, ambassador-at-large for the Roosevelt administration; and Jesse H. Jones, head of the New Deal's Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC). Drugan had other influential individuals in his corner, such as Cyrus McCormick and Paul Massman who were both involved with the executive committee and exhibits department at the Chicago "Century of Progress" Exposition of 1933. They assisted Drugan in soliciting exhibitors for San Diego's fair. In addition, the city had some well-placed San Diegans in the state legislature and in Washington, D.C., particularly liberal Republican State Senator Ed Fletcher who appealed to ordinary people and businessmen alike (Branton, 1991; Christman, 1985; Fletcher, 1934; "Little Man," 1935).

The exposition exploration committee named the future event the California-Pacific International Exposition (CPIE) and scheduled its opening for Memorial Day 1935. The executive committee of the fair maintained that the "exposition will tend to inspire national confidence and a higher appreciation of American institutions, stimulate business and industry, and assist the government in bringing a more abundant life to its peoples" (CPIE Executive Committee, 1934, n.p.). The event attracted participation from many important New Deal agencies, especially the newly created Federal Housing Administration (FHA), and from corporate interests such as the Ford Motor Company, General Motors, and the Standard Oil Corporation of California ("Facts and Information," 1935; Wangenheim, 1935).

The exposition opened on May 29, 1935 to initial crowds of over 250,000 visitors per week. It showcased the federal government's efforts for relief, recovery, and reform, and corporate America's designs for progress and abundance in Southern California and the western United States. The Official Guide and Souvenir Program: California-Pacific International Exposition, 1935 announced that the fair would be a "real pageant of the progress of our West in four centuries—from covered wagons to transcontinental planes," and that "it sums up the total progress of mankind" ("Put the World in Your Pocket," 1935, p. 19). The four million visitors during its two seasons could view magnificent modernistic exhibits and the architectural wonders of industrialization, consumption, and modernity that were intended to animate their optimism-starved imaginations.

Frank Belcher, Jr., exposition president and local Bank of America executive, reassured visitors that California's future would be bright. He hoped that the San Diego Fair, "America's Exposition—1935," might "live and breathe and be an everlasting symbol of the West" ("To Our Guests," 1935, p. 7). The Official Guide confirmed Belcher's impression, stating that the fair attempted "to give the visitor a glimpse, a pre-visions of what the future holds for the Far West" as the Federal Government financed such projects as "Boulder Dam, its All-American Canal, its Grand Coulee Project, and a host of other activities that mark a new era" ("Built Upon a Glorious Past," 1935, p. 9; White, 1991). W. P. Whitsett, chairman of the L.A. Metropolitan Water District, gave a rough but accurate summary of how federal agencies such as the Bureau of Reclamation could create an economically integrated consumer society in Southern California. He believed that the "coastal plain of California of the south is but one economic unit, crossed and cris-crossed with the arteries of commerce and trade," ("Expo Ceremonies Mark Dedication," 1935, n.p.) recognizing how water development would have an unprecedented impact upon future demographic growth in the region (McWilliams, 1949).

Although not the primary intention of local exposition boosters, the San Diego Fair foretold a more modern vision of everyday life, a notion of abundance that scholars have termed "abundancism" or a "culture of abundance." A culture of abundance promised that the productive capacities of the industrial economy and the rising standard of living reached in the 1920s could eliminate scarcity and want, providing for the social needs and desires of an increasing number of American consumers. At times, scholars have conflated the notion of abundance with the hallmark of the post-World War II American standard of living, variously named the "affluent society" or subsumed as part of Henry Luce's conception of the "American Century." However, radicals, government bureaucrats, businessmen, ordinary people, and intellectuals concluded, in very different ways, that science, social intelligence, and industrialism should
serve human ends and provide the "good life" (Lefebvre, 1984, 1991, 1995; Miller, 1979; Pells, 1973; Starr, 1990; Susman, 1984; Zunz, 1998). 1

Those on the communist or noncommunist Left, like Lewis Corey (1935) in The Crisis of the Middle Class, believed that the "new" middle class was the first historical middle class that was left propertyless in its contemporary predicament. Even though it was composed of white-collar workers, according to Corey, it had more in common through employer exploitation and income level with the working class than with the traditional bourgeoisie. Only by overcoming "bourgeois attitudes" could the middle class become revolutionized and equate its interests with the working class. When they had assumed control over the State, the means of production would be turned towards achieving humane ends. In this way, the "good life" of abundance would become an equally distributed right of citizenship and ideally lead to social democracy.

Businessmen, traditional social reformers, and New Dealers with less radical political inclinations believed in government plans to formulate public policy that promoted consumption. Rather than investment, consumerism served as the stabilizing engine that would drive the industrial economy and constituted the best way to save industrial capitalism. Massive federal spending, according to New Deal policymakers, would help promote a consumer democracy rather than the social democracy favored by those on the Left. The new culture of advertising, mass communication, and consumption had forever altered the consciousness of Americans from the 1920s to the 1940s. The question was not whether the actual achievement of abundance was a real possibility. It only mattered that the American people believed that abundance could be achieved (Brinkley, 1989, 1995; Corey, 1935; Denning, 1996; Ferguson, 1989; Hawley, 1962; Mandel, 1999; Pells, 1973; Susman, 1984).

In tune with the optimistic portrayal of "abundance," the newly created FHA used the San Diego Exposition to mount its first extensive public display and present its own national vision for housing industry recovery and widespread home ownership. The FHA believed that its programs would allow more Americans to purchase single-family detached houses, bringing the "good life" and abundance to the new middle class and, hopefully, to less wealthy Americans. More importantly, the FHA also promoted ideas of social housing and democratic community planning during its first 6 years of activity from 1934 to 1940. These social ideals of architecture and planning arose from FHA reliance on local conditions and personnel to make the agency effective nationally. This aspect of FHA enterprise rarely enters discussions of its development. However, given the importance of FHA (and Veterans Administration) activity to promote widespread home ownership in the post-World War II (WWII) period, the first 6 years of FHA housing initiatives are vital for understanding paths not taken in federal housing policy. Furthermore, FHA policy appealed to more widely dispersed longings during the 1930s for the alleviation of want and the cultivation of social democracy in everyday life. The participation of the FHA at the San Diego Exposition of 1935–1936 is only one small slice of that neglected story. However, as the opening day of the exposition approached, the optimism shown by the CPIE executive committee towards federal spending in the city and region became clear. The committee proclaimed that their goals were the "fullest example of co-operation with the federal government in its efforts to bring about recovery," and further remarked that "the depression is over—our faces are forward—we are looking ahead to the great achievements of mankind in the next twenty years" (CPIE Executive Committee, 1934, n.p.).

**Modeling Better Housing**

The most important federal participant at the exposition, from the standpoint of the Californian experience, was the FHA, whose exhibits were located within the Palace of Better Housing on the Spanish-themed avenue El Prado. The San Diego Better Housing Program campaign committee sponsored the FHA exhibit. The Better Housing Program was a regional and local FHA initiative meant to promote and advertise information about housing design and mortgage financing in each state. The FHA exhibits displayed the federal government's ideal for modern housing, mortgage lending, and community planning in an imagined national recovery and post-Depression future. As a venue for publicizing the objectives of the FHA, the San Diego Fair became a top priority. The exposition began 11 months after the passage of the National Housing Act of June 27, 1934, during the second season of the Chicago Fair, which contained a less comprehensive and more limited housing exhibit sponsored by the home building industry and appliance manufacturers (Raley, 1934). The designers of the FHA, Winfield Riefler, Miles Lanier Colean, Frances Perkins, Marriner Eccles, Avell Harriman, and Henry Wallace, hoped that it could stimulate home construction and real estate recovery without direct federal spending, relying solely on private enterprise.

There were four points of attack in the FHA's objectives. Directly, it sought to improve the designs and conditions of housing generally, make home financing more reasonable, and assert a stabilizing influence on the mortgage market. The fourth point was indirect: The
FHA presumed its efforts could alleviate unemployment, since 33% of the nation’s unemployed workers were believed to be associated with the building trades (Jackson, 1985). Real estate development and mortgage financing had always been the economic backbone for the promotion of the California Dream, but housing starts in San Diego County decreased drastically in 1931 (S. D. Federal Writer’s Project, 1937). The Depression hit the real estate industry and building trades extremely hard. Nationally, investment in new construction and rehabilitation of old structures dropped roughly 92% between 1928 and 1933 (Jackson, 1985). FHA activity in home construction and real estate recovery would be crucial for the revival of the home construction industry, its suppliers, and millions of Americans who tied their livelihood to this key sector of the national economy.

The Better Housing Program exhibits showcased architectural plans and small-scale models of housing and modern communities that would be located in the suburbs near the metropolitan areas of the nation. The FHA intended the displays within the Palace of Better Housing for a variety of homeowners, primarily first-time buyers, but also Americans short on capital for improvements on their existing housing investments. “Modeltown” contained miniature, 3-foot-high renditions of 56 homes, which embodied the “newest types of residential construction” (CPIE Executive Committee, 1935a, n.p.) for prospective audiences, according to its press release. The exhibit showed audiences the FHA’s list of plans for “14 types of houses” among “four classifications” that distinguished “different types of architecture—Spanish, English, French, etc.—of one- and two-story construction in frame, stucco, brick, concrete, and steel” (CPIE Executive Committee, 1935a, n.p.). In particular, the architects working for the FHA’s Better Housing Program conceived Modeltown around the idea of the Garden City, a small city that had the feel of a rural small town, with a population not to exceed 10,000. The pattern of development indicated a mixed-use and apparently self-sustaining community, with a “civic center, business district, public parks, playgrounds, industrial, residential sections” (Ripley, 1935, n.p.). Modeltown assured audiences that all of the FHA-sponsored homes were “houses that can be built for $30 per month, $40 per month, $50 per month, and $60 per month, inclusive of interest, taxes, fire insurance and amortization of principal” (“FHA Now Building,” 1935a, n.p.).

Given its special setting among the exhibits of the Better Housing Pavilion, the exhibition offered case study homes that were visual representations of modern and rationalized home design and community planning, but also innovative mortgage financing. Where Modeltown previewed standardized modern home construction, community planning, and home financing for audiences, “Modernization Magic” indicated the manner in which antiquated, rural communities and rundown inner-city areas could be rehabilitated at relatively little cost. Modernization Magic consisted of 30 village-like structures in miniature, showing a “community of buildings, antiquated, poorly designed and in need of repairs” (“Industrial Firms,” 1935, n.p.). The exhibit demonstrated how depressed rural towns and poor urban neighborhoods could become affordable modern communities with new amenities and comforts. The entire “magic” assemblage rotated on a turntable mechanism, circling in front of audiences every 10 minutes from an old deteriorated hamlet to a modern town. For less than $2,000 per home, the FHA brochure asserted, a modern and improved community “will spring up—from a dilapidated, antiquated village” (“FHA Now Building,” 1935b, n.p.).

However, FHA administrators in Washington, D.C., did not create the Modeltown and Modernization Magic exhibits. The exhibitions had come to them literally intact. In early January 1935, Stuart Ripley, executive manager of the San Diego Better Housing Committee, had approached Alfred Swinerton, the FHA regional director of District 12, which covered the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Arizona, Nevada, and California. Ripley (1935) had proposed that Swinerton persuade Washington to “sponsor, supervise, and conduct a model village or Tiny Town to be known as America’s Better Housing Community” (n.p.) for the San Diego Fair. According to Ripley, the FHA could conduct a nationwide model home competition among architects, state by state. A national tour would follow for each state’s winning design, then Better Housing Program personnel would reconstruct each “model home” at the San Diego Fair for a national competition, with awards given to the best designs. Ripley enthusiastically insisted that the exhibit, in his words to Swinerton, “offers tremendous nation-wide publicity possibilities, thus—inoculating every man, woman, and child with home consciousness” (n.p.).

Although it is not known exactly how Ripley conceived of the idea for Tiny Town, it is apparent that he gained his inspiration from a strictly voluntary housing design campaign also called Tiny Town staged in Springfield, Missouri, in 1919 and 1925 to increase the volume of local building permits. This model housing competition might have been part of the Better Homes for America campaigns begun in the early 1920s by the Housing Division of the Commerce Department under Herbert Hoover (Radford, 1996; “The Story of Tiny Town,” 1935). Building on the Tiny Town idea, Ripley (San Diego Better Housing Committee, 1935a) stipulated
that each state should create its own competition to address the most "practical answer to the small house problem as dictated by the particular local requirements and historical background of the state," and further reiterated that "local style and character should be given primary consideration in the designs" (n.p.). He maintained that there was no "more fitting climax to this contest and the Better Housing Program than to have it featured at a World's Fair" (n.p.). Sold on Ripley's plans, Swinerton (1935) contacted Ward Canady, FHA director of public relations, and told him that the Tiny Town idea proposed by the San Diego Better Housing Committee "will be of inestimable value, not only to San Diego and the exposition there, but to the whole country" (n.p.). Canady and James Moffet, FHA director, instructed Swinerton and his deputy director, Austin Black, to notify the San Diego exposition authorities of their plans. Black (1935) informed them that the FHA had rejected the national housing design competition, but approved of a "substitute plan" that would "include territory west of the Rockies" (n.p.) that had the promotional and funding support of "important Pacific Coast financial institution[s]" (n.p.). In addition to a California housing design competition, the Better Housing Program exhibit would "enable the public to inspect materials and obtain authentic and general information in the fields of real estate, architecture, engineering, contracting, financing, building materials, furniture, decorations, etc." (n.p.). The FHA administrators in Washington rechristened the San Diego idea "Modeltown" and "Modernization Magic" and mounted a "concentrated publicity campaign" in FHA District 12, the entire United States, and "inter-nationally" as well (Black, 1935, n.p.).

The modern home ideal created for the San Diego Exposition through display and mass advertising, no matter how optimistic or unbelievable, set standards for housing that contrasted sharply with existing conditions. The Exposition would also teach audiences about federal activity to promote widespread and affordable home ownership. Representing a local perspective, Frank Belcher, Jr. (1935), felt that the FHA exhibits "possessed tremendous possibilities for creating intense interest in the Better Housing Program" (n.p.) among the private
real estate market, contractors, and the general public. The San Diego Union told readers that James Moffet believed that these FHA exhibits “will visualize phases of the National Housing Act, now clouded under legal and technical verbiage” (“Industrial Firms,” 1935, n.p.). The Better Housing Program exhibits promised Californians and other visitors that the federal government, with the support of the “responsible” and “reformist” arm of the housing and real estate industry, would address the chronic housing shortages that had plagued Southern California during the 1920s. Modeltown and Modernization Magic projected a bright spot in the future for modern home ownership during the Depression, when cost-prohibitive materials limited options for housing consumers. In its publicity brochure, the FHA assured visitors of the possibility for affordable home ownership, stating that the Better Housing Program exhibits were “designed to visualize the countless ways the public may benefit from the National Housing Act” (CPIE Executive Committee, 1935a, n.p.).

Modernism California Style

The genesis of the Better Housing Program exhibits in the local and regional context of San Diego and the western United States gave the FHA program, particu-
larly Modeltown, a unique Southern California flavor. The participants in the architectural design competition for Modeltown suffused the exhibit with the social concerns of European modern architecture and community planning and also the ordinary designs of traditional American suburban development. In addition, the architectural designs of the 56 standardized houses in Modeltown drew upon Anglicized versions of regional architecture from Southern California’s Spanish, Mexican, and indigenous past. These designs melded well with the themes of abundance and economic recovery within the architectural universe of the Better Housing Program exhibits. Most popular were the Mission and Santa Fe styles, which were invented building traditions created by Californian and New Mexican real estate developers and economic boosters during the early 20th century. After the first San Diego exposition in 1915, Carey McWilliams (1946), the prominent Los Angeles intellectual, believed these physical manifestations of the stock image of the California Dream had “assumed the proportions of an epidemic” (p. 358; Covington, 1993; CPIE Executive Committee, 1935b; Rothman, 1998; Schaffer, 1998; Wilson, 1997). Other invented American regional styles and the modern International style were included, but even these case-study houses were influenced by the climate, lifestyle considerations, and the invented public culture of Southern California, the material form of a regional aesthetic that McWilliams (1946) would refer to as the Spanish “fantasy heritage” (pp. 70–83).

Of the 56 houses on display in Modeltown, a majority closely anticipated the drab contractor suburbs of post-WWII California. These designs embraced the tenets of the minimum standard dwelling mandated by the FHA, which had been pioneered and voluntarily endorsed by the more innovative community builders within the real estate industry during the 1920s (Hise, 1997). The team of architects imagined that these relatively inexpensive modern houses would be sited on individual lots, with ample yard space and landscaping. Among the architectural designs, a “developer vernacular” clearly emerged in the Better Housing Pavilion. Los Angeles architect H. Roy Kelley plied his talents in many genres. His repertoire enlisted vernacular housing types from many regions of the United States, such as the popular “ranch” house (see Figure 3), the New England colonial cottage, and the Spanish casita with a tiled courtyard (CPIE Executive Committee, 1935b). Spanish and Indian architectural forms were well represented in the exhibit, as evidenced by the presence of stuccoed exteriors and red tile roofs. Although following plain aesthetics, the houses contained open and multifunctional floor plans, with the addition of terraces, backyards, and
porches. These design additions reflected the regional consciousness of the Southwest and the importance of outdoor living in Southern California.

Despite the traditional exteriors, many Modeltown designs were products of experimentation and innovation, both structurally and aesthetically. These designs signaled the fusion of social modernism with vernacular building styles, whether "invented" or more "traditional." There were numerous examples of European modernism among the standardized designs, which used new machine-age materials such as steel-frame construction (as a replacement for wooden balloon-frame walls), concrete walls, stuccoed façades, and glass panel windows. The look of these modern houses was light and sleek. In addition, these International Style houses could be built quickly and inexpensively because the parts were often interchangeable and could be manufactured in high volume. In theory, many of the two-bedroom modernist designs carried mortgages that could be lower than similar mortgages for "developer vernacular" models, if built on a more modestly priced lot (CPIE Executive Committee, 1935b).

The acclaimed modernist architect Richard Neutra contributed his own design to Modeltown, house no. 25 (see Figure 4). Neutra was an Austrian émigré and a protege of Frank Lloyd Wright and Rudolph Schindler, and is now a practicing Los Angeles architect. Known for his avant garde designs, he was not exempt from the regional influences (or social politics) that emerged in Southern California during the 1930s. His designs reflected the social concerns of his European training. Neutra's work appeared modern in the eyes of audiences, and his philosophy of design was profoundly influenced by Southern California's environmental considerations and the types of physical and health-oriented lifestyles promoted in, and arising from, the region (CPIE Executive Committee, 1935b). Along with sound ecological planning, Neutra believed that modern architecture should serve the larger cultural function of social transformation. Between 1932 and 1941, the architect designed and completed a number of public schools, low-income housing projects for the federal government, and state and federal office buildings. Indeed, Neutra's design for Modeltown has strong aesthetic and functional similarities to the modest Los Angeles home he built in 1934 for William and Melba Beard (William was the son of the historians Charles and Mary Beard). Neutra fused the idealism of his social modernist sensibilities with his quest for experimentalism in mass-production techniques. The Beard house was completed for $5,000 (Hines, 1982; Modeltown house no. 25 theoretically held an FHA mortgage of $4,500, with the ability to "borrow from your own financial institution, on the

![FIGURE 4. Los Angeles architect Richard Neutra standing beside the model of his modern-style house, 1935. (Photo courtesy San Diego Historical Society)](image)

insured mortgage plan" 80% of the FHA's appraisal of "your proposed house and building site" (CPIE Executive Committee, 1935b, n.p.).

The floor plans for Neutra's houses were open and blurred the boundary between the surrounding outdoor environment and the domestic space of the dwelling. This approach bore the influence of "traditional" southwestern vernacular architecture on his residential designs, particularly the architectural geometry of Hopi, Navajo, and Pueblo cultural forms. One critic has remarked that Neutra's work, which mixed aesthetic innovation, ecological amenities, and sites within dense and communal clusters of buildings, stood "at its best where the building program could be interpreted as making a direct contribution to the psycho-physiological well-being of its occupant" (Frampton, 1980, p. 249).

Although Neutra had received critical acclaim for his hillside designs for elite and bohemian Angelenos during the 1920s, the poor ecological and community planning of the private market during the late 1920s and early 1930s pushed him to denounce bad planning, speculative development, and the corrosive effects of privatism. Neutra had corresponded with Upton Sinclair about the feasibility of large-scale, high-quality, low-income housing for workers, eventually supporting Sinclair's "End Poverty in California" campaign in 1934. In addition, numerous important Hollywood figures on the political Left lived in his Strathmore Apartments (built in 1937). These included Orson Welles, Dolores

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Del Rio, Luise Rainer and her husband Clifford Odets, and Lilly Latte, who was the companion of Fritz Lang. With his activity on the new California State Planning Board, first as a member, then as its chairman from 1939 to 1941, Neutra moved towards a more radical vision for architecture and planning in Southern California (Davis, 1998; Denning, 1996; Hines, 1982). European modernism injected a critical edge into architecture and planning in Southern California, forming a constellation of designs and ideas that were developmental alternatives to unplanned and speculative housing. Contributors to Modeltown who were influenced by émigré architecture were the Los Angeles architects George Adams (see Figure 5) and Gordon Kaufman, both of whom had gained considerable experience designing modern housing during the Los Angeles Small Homes Exhibition in 1928 (Hise, 1997). The other participants were Leland Fuller, whose designs favored Spanish Mission-style façades, and the San Diego-based team of Kenneth Messenger and Antonio Ruocco (CPUE Executive Committee, 1935b). Reginald Johnson, who contributed two designs for the exhibit, would help to design Baldwin Hills Village in 1942 with Clarence Stein and Robert Alexander (a future partner of Neutra). Baldwin Hills Village was one of the best examples of European-style social modernist planning and the most enduringly egalitarian of public housing projects in Southern California (Davis, 1998; CPUE Executive Committee, 1935b; Stein, 1966). In many ways, the social modernist designs found among the 56 Modeltown houses made references to the aesthetics of traditional Southwestern vernacular architecture and European modernism. These designs introduced the idea of social housing and democratic community planning that would allow working-class Californians to experience expanded opportunities to participate in the “culture of abundance” as homeowners of the minimum standard dwelling. The social modernist architecture of the Better Housing Program promoted an ideal of social democracy, rather than a middle-class consumer democracy of abundance and entitlement. This alternative architecture explored regional and environmental variations in housing and community planning that were important expressions of national housing standards and the invented traditions and regional consciousness of Southern California.

The overall pattern imagined for Modeltown added more to the traditional form of northeastern United States suburbs, which lacked centers of industry and commerce of their own, much less public spaces such as parks and playgrounds. The nostalgic small-town construct of Modeltown resembled many of the social ideals embodied by middle- and working-class Garden Cities...
in both Europe and the United States. Modeltown's plan more closely harbored similarities with the designs for limited-dividend, Garden City communities published by Ebenezer Howard in 1898. Howard's bold plans inspired the towns of Letchworth (built in 1902) and Welwyn (built in 1920), located in the English countryside outside of London. Both Modeltown and Howard's Garden Cities stressed private ownership of property, both individually and corporately, and relied upon private enterprise for development. However, Howard's Garden City ideal aimed at a diversity of social classes and undercut land speculation by capturing for the community the increase in rent and land values, thus eliminating landlords and turning the income from rents towards the betterment of the community (Fishman, 1982). These Garden City communities were somewhat economically dependent on larger metropolitan areas due to their economic bases of light industry and small-scale agriculture. The prospect of economic self-sufficiency could be achieved in both plans, but the social class composition of each ideal community was less certain. Howard intended his Garden Cities to have populations reaching 32,000 people, where the Better Housing Program recommended 10,000 (Girouard, 1985; Hise, 1997).

Modeltown also appeared to be a precursor to Rexford Tugwell and Clarence Stein's Greenbelt Town communities planned and built by the Resettlement Administration (RA) in Maryland, Wisconsin, and Ohio from 1936 to 1947 (continued under other federal departments later on). But there were differences. The RA communities served as lower-middle- and working-class satellite cities near major metropolitan centers without industrial bases. RA plans similarly approached the FHA's desired population of 10,000 people. In direct opposition to Modeltown, the work of the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) in the 1920s inspired the RA settlements, with its insistence on apartment block construction, inundated with green space and surrounded by open "greenbelts" (Lubove, 1963; Radford, 1996). Unlike the RPAA's design for Radburn, New Jersey, the federal government, rather than private enterprise, owned all the land in the Greenbelt Town settlements. Considering social class complexion, the Greenbelt Towns were decidedly low- and moderate-income, while the social makeup of Modeltown would be determined by the land and house values dictated by the private market (Arnold, 1971; Schaffer, 1982; Stein, 1966).

More accurately, in terms of the social modernist currents of design within the Better Housing Program exhibits at the exposition, the FHA's idea resembled a suburban version of the French architect and planner Tony Garnier's socialist designs for the *cité industrielle*. The Lyons architect designed the *cité* in 1898, the same year that Howard had published his Garden City plans. Garnier envisioned an infinitely expandable and self-sufficient industrial city, functionally zoned, and with an abundance of public institutions and green spaces to be enjoyed by its entire citizenry. Steeped in the socialist politics of working-class Lyons, utopian Fourierist ideals, and the romantic socialism of Émile Zolà, Garnier's design for this city of 32,000 also strove to retain regional characteristics of culture and place. The architect believed that his scheme would promote governmental decentralization and create an associational autonomy among regional cities outside of the dominant role of the State. Residents owned property in common, unlike in Modeltown. In parts of Garnier's *cité industrielle*, it was evident from his plans that both large-scale apartment blocks and single detached worker's houses in bungalow-like courts would be sited within the rambling parklands of the residential areas of his Arcadian city (Frampton, 1980; Wiebenson, 1969). These were housing types and planning practices evident in the projects devised by the British Garden City movement, the RPAA, the Greenbelt Town Program, and in the FHA's Modeltown as well. In the realm of utopian architecture and community planning, the *cité industrielle* brought the idea of the Resettlement Administration's satellite garden city into line with the idea of the decentralized, self-sustaining, and infinitely expandable regional industrial city. Modeltown shared an architectural and functional sameness with these prior designs and plans. With respect to Modeltown's overall layout, the only important exception was that the FHA's ideal would be the product of private investment and initiative. If brought to realization, Modeltown would be the recipient of unregulated industrial dispersion and real estate speculation, a pattern of growth indirectly promoted and subsidized by the FHA (Hise, 1997; Rodgers, 1998; Stein, 1966).

Nevertheless, the Better Housing Program's Modeltown exhibit straddled a fine line between social modernism in content and form and free-market capitalism in function. The exhibit clearly contained designs of experimental model housing suffused with radical social ideals that drew upon the more challenging early-20th-century reform impulses found within American architecture and planning, in addition to the working-class housing concerns of European architectural modernism. These contradictory social currents were a reflection of the bureaucratic specialization of the FHA's personnel, split between architects and planners (the "artists" of home and community design) at the local and regional levels and economists, realtors, bankers, and financial analysts ("practical-minded" bureaucrats).
in Washington, DC (Brinkley, 1995; Denning, 1996; Rodgers, 1998). Both sets supported the promotion of low-income and moderate-income housing as an avenue for citizens to participate in the culture of abundance. Radical architecture and planning culture aimed ideally to create social democratic communities in Southern California. Social housing and democratic community planning would theoretically be safe from tainting by the private market because of federal sponsorship and private-sector adherence to FHA building codes and design standards required by federal mortgage insurance. The intentions and unintended consequences of the FHA Modeltown ideal were eventually shaped by the political and economic conservatism behind New Deal fiscal policy, the discharge of communist and noncommunist political leftists from New Deal agencies (beginning in 1938), and most importantly, post-WWII economic prosperity (Brinkley, 1995; Denning, 1996; Zunz, 1998).

Corporate Abundance

The promise of a social democratic version of the culture of abundance made possible by federal sponsorship of widespread home ownership in Southern California gave way to more powerful interests: federally subsidized business interests operating in the consumer markets of Southern California; the Californian real estate and banking industries; and local, state, and national political conservatives and professional anticommunists. The California real-estate industry and other corporate interests, whose buoyed optimism flowed from dreams of FHA mortgage guarantees, believed that restored prosperity and abundance would be achieved by industry’s leadership in delivering easy lifestyles and new products to America’s middle class. The expectation of federal guarantees for home financing and a subsidized mortgage market excited private-sector businesses. They viewed federal initiatives in Southern California, such as infrastructure investment, work relief, and real estate recovery efforts, as a harbinger of things to come. San Diego’s own Better Housing Committee told Ward Canaday of the FHA that “this type of publicity will do more to electrify the building industry and the people of the United States than million[s] of dollars put into printed propaganda” (San Diego Better Housing Committee, 1935a, n.p.).

The Better Housing Program, by indirectly subsidizing the home financing and construction industries, created heightened expectations in those sectors dependent upon home construction and real estate development. An associate of Alfred B. Swinerton remarked that the “more I think of the Oil Companies financing this [Better Housing Program exhibit] the better I like the idea, and I can see where it would definitely tie into their program” (Anonymous, 1935, n.p.). He suggested that “$50,000 apportioned among the oil companies would be a trifling amount, for the good will and actual business to result therefrom” (n.p.). Indeed, in anticipation of the second season of the exposition in 1936, J. David Larson and Hart Miller (Larson & Miller, 1935, n.p.) notified one of their colleagues that FHA officials had called a special meeting of the “presidents or the heads of most of the large industrial firms of the country” (n.p.). “These firms went on record to the effect that they would be space buyers” at the exposition’s second season, they said, noting excitedly that the corporations “would support the FHA in any program it endorsed” (n.p.). Ford Motor Company, General Motors Corporation, and Standard Oil of California committed to the final season.

In the broader picture, by promoting and financing rational community planning and the minimum standard dwelling, the FHA offered Americans the option to be citizens and neighbors among others of like mind in their newly planned communities. The subtle and brief window of economic recovery from 1935 to 1936 created an atmosphere of optimism among Southern Californians, and the FHA exhibit helped support that sentiment. FHA director James Moffet, also a former Standard Oil of California executive and former Housing Division official at Hoover’s Commerce Department (Ferguson, 1989; Starr, 1996), visited San Diego in the Spring of 1935. He placed Southern California at the front line of attack for revitalizing the depressed national housing market, as he pointed to San Diego as “one of the leading cities helping to carry out the ‘business stimulating’ provisions of this act” (“S.D. Praised by Chief,” 1935, n.p.). “California,” said Moffet, “leads the nation in the campaign to ‘bring back prosperity’” (n.p.). Alfred Swinerton confirmed Moffet’s optimism, stating that “no community in the region is doing the job as thoroughly and enthusiastically as San Diego” (n.p.). Remarks on his visit to the Exposition in June 1935, President Hoover found new benefits in government programs. He explained that “if we could see the whole American people lifted to the high standards of San Diego, we would have solved a large part of the problem of this country” (“S.D. Standard Set Up Mark,” 1935, n.p.). Indeed, industry leaders in the construction and real estate sectors welcomed the FHA’s powerful interventionist role because it was amenable to their own interests. Suburban community builders increased their market share due to FHA activity because it federalized housing standards, bypassed the politics of local planning boards, and insured banks and builders against losses through federalized mortgages. Needless to say, FHA requirements were less antagonistic to industry in general than other New Deal
business legislation. Those same requirements appeared to be similar to the voluntary tradition of public/private sector cooperation under the Housing Division at Hoover’s Commerce Department during the 1920s (Weiss, 1987).

The policies of the FHA moved away from designing “social housing and communities” and towards the business and finance end of the private-housing market. There were two reasons for this change. According to one historian (Weiss, 1987), this new federal agency was “run to a large extent both by and for bankers, builders, brokers” (pp. 142–143) who had predominantly real estate and financial backgrounds. The aspirations of FHA personnel did not include radical social transformation, but rather the creation of federally sponsored financial conditions that would increase investment in housing starts and spur higher rates of home ownership (Jackson, 1985). As mentioned earlier, the FHA’s Better Housing Program lacked strong vision at the national level, relying solely on local and state FHA districts to provide them with their creative publicity agenda. This arrangement would eventually succumb to bureaucratic centralization and would not last for long, effectively knocking local housing initiatives out of the administration at the highest level. That is, federalized mortgages and building standards were easier to implement nationally than social planning for home and community designs. Therefore, it was not surprising that San Diego Bank of America branch offices were excited by the prospect of federal intervention in the housing industry. An associate of exhibits director Waldo Tupper (Davidson, 1935) assured him that “Modeltown is so unusual in its direct selling of FHA loans by Banks that an exception should be made” (n.p.) by his institution’s commitment to provide funds for participation and advertising at the Better Housing Pavilion. The FHA consolidated around its primary objective for pump priming the real estate industry, which returned high profitability to the building industry and revolutionized the contours of home ownership in the United States.

Even the lowest federally guaranteed monthly mortgage payment for a Modeltown house made working-class home ownership difficult under Depression conditions between 1934 and 1940. Eligibility for an FHA mortgage required a 10–20% down payment on a Modeltown house. The lowest priced house cost $2,500, requiring a down payment of $250–500. At that time, even a highly skilled union laborer under full employment conditions could not afford such a sacrifice, an amount equal to roughly one-fifth to one-third of an annual median income of $1,200 during the Depression. The mortgage terms specified by the Better Housing Program exhibit initially limited the possibility of home ownership to families in the upper third of the national income bracket, much like the national profile of home ownership during the 1920s. Similar to the voluntary efforts of the Commerce Department under Herbert Hoover, FHA plans to subsidize the real estate and home-building industries failed to advance working-class home ownership in the 1930s. Only after WWII did the FHA and the Veterans Administration make widespread home ownership a reality for White workers and most veterans (Davis, 1998; Radford, 1996, Warner, 1995).

Modeltown also served as an information clearinghouse for the economic interests involved in the private housing market, with the federal government serving as facilitator and guarantor of the mortgage market—a virtually risk-free market activity for banks and realtors due to the stamp of federal approval. The publicity for Modeltown alerted “the public” that it could “inspect materials and obtain authentic information regarding real estate, contracting, financing, household appliances” (FHA Los Angeles, 1935, n.p.). During “Real Estate Day” at the fair in July of 1935, the FHA office in Los Angeles released a memorandum to realtors in Southern California, telling them that the “housing exhibit of California-type homes will give a practical plan how you may add to the new home-owners in your community and at the same time enable you to increase your sales volume” (n.p.). In this memorandum, the FHA regional office explained its intentions, asserting that “we want to see realty firms throughout California join hands in building up [a] nation-wide business recovery” (n.p.). It was clear that the real estate and banking industry would compromise the social democratic housing and planning vision on display within the FHA exhibit and would instead promote individual housing consumption. The L.A. office of the agency promised realtors that “we trust you will be represented at the Exposition [and]...benefit from ‘Modeltown’ and the several programs” (n.p.).

FHA director James Moffet, in addition to his industry ties and prior governmental service, brought his well known antiradicalism to the agency (Ferguson, 1989; Starr, 1996). Conservative business leadership of federal housing policy allowed the real estate industry to dominate community building and home financing, and would eventually minimize model home and community plans that promoted social democratic ideals like those found in Modeltown. The primary thrust of FHA activity would eventually create the privatized, repetitive, but planned suburban sprawl that Modeltown’s architecture and planning had tried to counteract, thus promoting a culture of abundance that favored the middle class. One positive aspect of FHA policy in the 1930s was the rising quality and new features of the modern home, such as standardized building codes, new
materials, modern appliances, and the lower construction cost of housing assembled in large tracts. Yet in the end, James Moffet remarked that the financially sound and cautious FHA activities were a “conservative business operation” (Jackson, 1985, p. 213).¹⁰

Conclusion

During the San Diego California-Pacific International Exposition of 1935–1936, amid the general uncertainties of the Depression, the future contours of social and economic life in Southern California were uncertain. Many historians, critics, and writers have studied the geographical form and social life of Southern Californian suburban communities. Some have celebrated it, others have criticized it, while still others have indicated how suburbanization was a conscious and planned phenomenon created by a power elite and not the product of the random “invisible hand” of the market (Banham, 1973; Brown & Venturi, 1972; Davis, 1990, 1998; Klein, 1997; Olin & Kling, 1991). According to historian Mark Weiss (1987), the financial arrangements pioneered by the FHA gave the agency “an extraordinary degree of control over real estate development patterns” (p. 145). Looking back upon the initial efforts of the FHA’s Modeltown and Modernization Magic exhibits at the San Diego Fair of 1935, indeed, considering FHA efforts between 1934 and 1940 in general, it is possible to make claims that the future of social housing and community planning would not be completely determined by powerful real estate and business interests. The social democratic design culture found within Modeltown arose from the interaction between European democratic socialism and the Southern California and regional Western experience, bringing local and regional concerns directly into the federal government. As much as the FHA shaped federal measures for real estate recovery, mortgage insurance, and home ownership, local and regional architects and community designers temporarily shaped an architecture and planning culture in the heart of this very important federal agency. Home ownership has long been a national symbol of abundance, personal success, self-sufficiency, and the American Dream. The housing and community designs in the Modeltown exhibit at the Better Housing Pavilion reassured visitors that they might experience those same opportunities during an era when options appeared limited. Creative expressions of exhibition housing and novel financial arrangements initially characterized FHA operations, dividing the agency between social democratic forms of architecture and community planning and sound-bottom-line real estate promotion fit for a consumer democracy.

The market imperatives of the FHA prevailed before the end of WWII, for it was certain that they lacked core federal personnel who had the vision and imagination to redesign America’s housing and communities. The FHA mimicked federal agencies where those ideas appeared as public projects, sought advice at the state and local levels for creative designs of housing and community planning, or kept federal channels open to local and regional offices. I suggest that a thread for further research would be to assess the way that the Roosevelt and Truman administrations discharged many of their most capable and imaginative personnel at the local and state levels in the loyalty and un-American activities investigations between 1938 and 1948. Surely this would account for the loss of key personnel connected with the FHA who had creative design talents. More work would have to be done on that aspect of the FHA and other New Deal agencies involved in housing promotion. As late as 1939, the FHA still relied heavily on the resources of its regional offices to provide model housing and community planning for the agency’s exhibition at the National Archives (Jackson, 1985). FHA administrators from the real estate industry certainly favored agency activities to stabilize the mortgage market, relieve unemployment, revive home building, and stimulate home construction. Their efforts created a powerful developmental template more than a decade in advance of post-WWII suburbanization. In addition, the agency made few demands on the real estate developers and community builders from the pre-Depression era. These developers and builders did not fundamentally change their methods and plans for increasing the nation’s housing stock after WWII. The FHA made the assembly of large housing developments highly attractive and profitable for the real estate and construction industry, virtually a sure bet (Pincetl, 1999).

From the perspective of Southern California, FHA housing and community planning designs at the San Diego Fair suggested the possibility that the Edenic qualities of the Southern Californian landscape could be retained as an amenity of everyday life. The alternative (sub)urbanism expressed within the Modeltown exhibit promoted a humanistic and sustainable form of housing and community development that contrasts with the planned and speculative subdivisions favored by the FHA and real estate interests after WWII. In the end, citizen participation in the 1950s version of the culture of abundance, known as the “affluent society,” had very little to do with democratic social planning by the State. Rather, unprecedented postwar prosperity and private enterprise supported by federal mortgage insurance and guarantee programs promoted home ownership and affluence beyond and below the middle class to
the industrial working classes. Like many areas of American life during the 1930s and 1940s, the contours of social housing and community planning in Southern California were caught in a period of conflict and debate. The most fundamental aspects of everyday life in Southern California, where residents live and work and where their lives play out significantly but quietly, might have been suffused with social democratic possibilities.

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NOTES

1. There were similarities between technocratic and Marxist arguments about "abundancism" in 1930s France, described by Lefebvre (1995), that parallel those put forth in the compensatory liberal wing of the New Deal, as well as by intellectuals on the Marxian and non-Marxian Left and the radical leaders of the U.S. labor movement during the 1930s. However, anticomunist crusades in the late 1930s and the experience of WWII would change the tune of both the Marxist and independent Left.

2. The Modeltown prints of 56 architectural plans contain drawings of the structures, floor plans, the prices of mortgages, and the terms of FHA policy.

3. All 56 Modeltown houses were designed by Southern California architects.

4. A design of similar square footage would have been less expensive to home buyers if built on a cheaper lot. For example, see Modeltown house no. 50, designed by the San Diego team of Kenneth Messenger and Antonio Ruocco, which was theoretically built for a lot valued at $1,610. Compared to the design by Norris Knaus of Glendale, which was theoretically placed on a lot valued at $650, Messenger and Ruocco avoided promoting the overconsumption of domestic space. Under an FHA 20-year amortized mortgage (the FHA hadn't followed Homeowner's Loan Corporation's innovations as of yet), the monthly payment for house no. 50 would have been $62.04, and the similar payment for no. 49 would have been $24.31. The land value ratios are practically the same.

5. Neutra's architectural plan for Modeltown was house no. 25 (see Figure 4).

6. Observing the floor plans and drawings shown in Thomas Hines' (1982) book, Neutra's FHA model house is almost identical to the Beard house, with only very slight modification.

7. Thomas Hines (1982) notes that Neutra was part of the radical Left in Hollywood, but also quite familiar with the work of the Resettlement Administration through his client Colonel Lawrence Westbrook, a New Deal bureaucrat who ran rural rehabilitation and drought relief for the Roosevelt Administration in 1934. In addition, Neutra served as architectural consultant for the National Youth Administration in 1939 and 1940.

8. Adams designed house no. 37, Kauffman no. 41, Fuller nos. 6 and 7, and Messenger and Ruocco nos. 50 and 53–56.

9. Johnson designed Modeltown house nos. 1 and 2.

10. Jackson (1985) notes that the FHA was one of the very few federal agencies under the New Deal to turn a small surplus of capital, or profit—a true testament to its overall social and economic conservatism.

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