



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Wives or Widows?

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Donald Montgomery, Consumer's Counsel of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture described the situation we are facing today in the following words:

"Dollar prosperity without question, will flow from the defense expenditures. But will these dollars feed, clothe and house people, or will they feed the hungry maw of speculation which has lived on an invalid diet for eleven years and begins now to show signs of convalescence.... Will the defense prosperity raise our standard of living, especially at the bottom where it is disgracefully depressed even now, or will it lead us to a fool's paradise of increasing pay envelopes and higher farm prices that don't purchase more of the things men live by? Must we again watch the farmers and the working people throw their dice in a game where they cannot win.

"In our land there is still the possibility that we can produce, and that people can have the things they live by. For us, the overwhelming question is not whether we can, but whether we will; or whether, failing in this imperative national purpose, we shall let our economic machinery get out of hand, whirl us a few dizzy times around, and toss us again into the ashcan with the job undone."

That ashcan is where the so-called "defense prosperity" of the last war left us.

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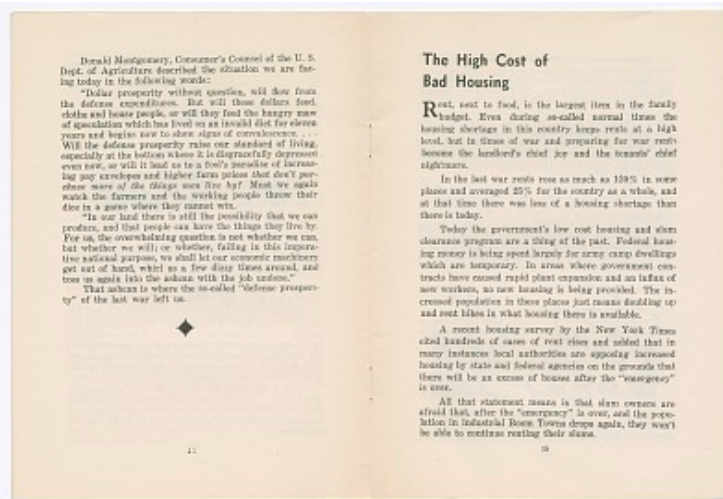
The High Cost of Bad Housing

Rent, next to food, is the largest item in the family budget. Even during so-called normal times the housing shortage in this country keeps rents at a high level, but in times of war and preparing for war rents become the landlord's chief joy and the tenants' chief nightmare.

In the last war rents rose as much as 120% in some places and averaged 25% for the country as a whole, and at that time there was less of a housing shortage than there is today.

Today the government's low cost housing and slum clearance program are a thing of the past. Federal housing money is being spent largely for army camp dwellings which are temporary. In areas where government contracts have caused rapid plant expansion and an influx of new workers, no new housing is being provided. The increased population in these places just means doubling up and rent hikes in what housing there is available.

A recent housing survey by the New York Times cited hundreds of cases of rent rises and added that in many instances local authorities are opposing increased housing by state and federal agencies on the grounds that there will be an excess of houses after the "emergency" is



over.

All that statement means is that slum owners are afraid that, after the "emergency" is over, and the population in industrial Boom Towns drops again, they won't be able to continue renting their slums.

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