

ANNEMETTE SØRENSEN

PETER SEKAER

fotografier fra 1930'ernes USA

New Deal Photography



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Det kongelige Bibliotek
The Royal Library
1990

Katalogen er udarbejdet af cand. mag. Annemette Sørensen.

Oversættelse: bibliotekar Virginia Laursen, kort udarbejdet af grafiker Claus Lynggaard.

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Trykt hos Fihl-Jensens Bogtrykkeri/Offset, Frederiksberg 1990.

Trykt i 1.000 eks.

ISBN 87-7023-550-3

Forside: Peter Sekaer: "I de nordlige stater er der love mod at gøre forskel i behandlingen af hvide og sorte. Disse love overtrædes imidlertid som reglen. I syden er der derimod love som forbyder Negre at spise i samme café'er o.s.v. som hvide. De maa ikke sidde i Biografen undtagen paa Galleriet. Et billed af en Negergalleri-indgang i Anniston, Alabama." [ca. 1935-1936] (57)

Cover: Peter Sekaer: In the nothern states there are laws against differential treatment of blacks and whites. These laws are generally violated. In the south there are laws that forbid Negroes from eating in the same cafes, etc. as whites. They are not allowed to sit in the movie theatres except in the balcony. A picture of a Negro balcony entrance in Anniston, Alabama. [c. 1935-1936] (57)

Artiklen *Nothing to Photograph Here!* er gengivet med tilladelse fra Mrs. Elisabeth Sekaer Rothschild.

Katalogen er udgivet med støtte fra:
Augustinus Fonden og
Aktieselskabet Dagbladet Politikens Fond.



Peter Skaer: Selvportræt [ca. 1935]
Peter Skaer: Self-portrait [c. 1935]

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FORORD

I 1985 modtog Det kongelige Biblioteks Kort- & Billedafdeling en kasse med 100 fotografier taget af den dansk-fødte fotograf Peter Sekaer. Fotografierne stammer fra 1930'ernes kriseår i USA og udgør en del af den amerikanske social-dokumentariske, fotografiske tradition, som netop fandt sit fornemste udtryk i dette årti.

To andre danskere har indenfor de sidste hundrede år gjort sig bemærket som fotografiske skildrere af et USA med social slagside. Den ene er Jacob A. Riis, hvis arbejde med at dokumentere den new york'ske slum i slutningen af forrige århundrede er velkendt i både USA og Danmark. Den anden er Jacob Holdt, hvis fotografier fra 1970'ernes sorte Amerika mange danskere kender, og som stadig vises som lysbilledshow rundt omkring i USA.

Tidsmæssigt, midt imellem disse to og deres velkendte personlige skildring af nogle af det amerikanske samfunds ringest stillede samfundsgrupper, befinder der sig en tredje dansker: Peter Sekaer, hvis arbejdsfelt var skildringen af de omkostninger krisen i 1930'erne havde for mange mennesker i USA.

Hvor Jacob A. Riis og Jacob Holdt er kendt af en større offentlighed i både USA og Danmark, er Peter Sekaer næsten ukendt i Danmark.

I USA, derimod, er Peter Sekaers fotografier repræsenteret i flere samlinger, ligesom interessen for ham igennem de senere år har været stærkt stigende, samtidig med at der er blevet arrangeret flere retrospektive udstillinger med hans billeder.

Det kongelige Biblioteks Kort- & Billedafdeling har siden erhvervelsen af de 100 Sekaer-fotografier planlagt at råde bod på det danske ukendskab til Peter Sekaer ved at præsentere størstedelen af fotografierne for et bredt publikum. Denne katalog er således den første af sin art om Peter Sekaer, og den følger i første omgang udstillingen med hans billeder, der afholdes i Rundetårn fra den 12. juni til den 22. juli 1990.

Annemette Sørensen

Foreword

In 1985, the Maps, Prints, and Photography Department of the Royal Library was presented with a box containing 100 photographs taken by the Danish-born photographer Peter Sekaer. These photographs, taken in the U.S.A. during the Depression years, make up part of the American social-documentary photographic tradition which achieved its highest expression in that decade.

Within the last century two other Danes made a name for themselves as photographic reporters on the underprivileged side of American life. One of these was Jacob A. Riis, whose work documenting conditions in the New York slums at the end of the last century is well-known in both Denmark and America. The other is Jacob Holdt, whose photographs of life in Black America in the 1970's are familiar to many Danes. Holdt's pictures are still being shown as a slide-show around the U.S.A.

Mid-way between these two well-known personal portrayals of poverty in American society stands a third Dane: Peter Sekaer. Sekaer illustrated in particu-

lar the distress and misery that the Depression caused for many people in the U.S.A. in the 1930's.

Though the Danish and American general public are acquainted with the work of Jacob A. Riis and Jacob Holdt, Peter Sekaer is virtually unknown in Denmark.

In the United States, however, Peter Sekaer's photographs are represented in several collections. Interest in his work has increased in recent years, and several retrospective exhibitions of his photographs have been held.

Since acquiring the 100 Sekaer pictures, the Royal Library's Maps, Prints, and Photography Department has planned to make up for the Danish ignorance of Peter Sekaer by presenting most of the photographs to the general public. This catalogue is the first of its kind on Peter Sekaer and it forms a companion to the exhibition of his pictures held in the Round Tower, Copenhagen from 12 June to 22 July, 1990.

Annemette Sørensen

DET AMERIKANSKE SOCIAL-DOKUMENTARISKE FOTOGRAFI

Mange kender den berømte amerikanske instruktør John Fords film Vredens Druer. Filmen, der i dag er en klassiker, er fra 1940 og bygger på John Steinbecks roman fra året før. Vredens Druer handler om den skæbne, der overgik nogle af ofrene for 1930'ernes økonomiske krise i USA. Den krise der var verdensomspændende, og som i sin amerikanske udgave er kendt under navnet 'Depressionen'.



Still-billede fra John Fords Oscar-belønnede film Vredens Druer. Med Henry Fonda som Tom Joad og Jane Darwell som hans stoiske mor Ma Joad. (Det kongelige Biblioteks Kort - og Billedafdeling).

Still from John Ford's Oscar winning film, The Grapes of Wrath. Henry Fonda as Tom Joad and Jane Darwell as his stoic mother, Ma Joad. (Collection: The Royal Library, Department of Maps, Prints, and Photography).

Da både John Steinbeck og John Ford skulle skabe deres personer og miljøer til Vredens Druer, benyttede de som forlæg nogle fotografier, der allerede dengang var velkendte af en større offentlighed, og som sidenhen skulle gå hen og blive de 'klassiske' billeder af Depressionens Amerika.

Grundlaget for dette findes i den demokratiske præsident Franklin D. Roosevelts forsøg på at afhjælpe Depressionen via sin 'New Deal' -politik. En politik der til stadighed krævede dokumentation for, hvor galt det var fat i de forskellige dele af samfundet.

New Deal-politikken forsøgte at indføre planøkonomien på det statslige plan, og kom således i et modsætningsforhold til de mere konservative kræfter, der ville fastholde den hidtil dominerende politik gående ud på, at staten burde blande sig mindst muligt i de forskellige dele af samfundslivet.

Disse konservative kræfter i bl.a. Kongressen skulle overbevises til at vedtage de forskellige initiativer af New Deal-politikken, og til dette formål ansattes der af Roosevelt-regeringen bl.a. et stort korps af nogle af Amerikas mest fremragende fotografer, der talte navne som Walker Evans, Ben Shahn, Dorothea Lange, Russel Lee, Jack Delano og Arthur Rothstein.

Billederne, som disse fotografer tog, ledsagede talrige regeringsrapporter og pjecer foruden en mængde artikler i aviser, ugeblade og bøger. Samtidig med at de blev vist på udstillinger rundt omkring i USA.

I dag udgør disse fotografier billedmaterialet i mange skolebøger og andre historiske værker om 1930'ernes USA. Ligesom der til stadighed arrangeres talrige, retrospektive udstillinger og udgives adskillige foto-bøger omhandlende New Deal-fotograferne og deres virke.

Disse fotografier er således i høj grad gået hen og blevet medbestemmende for, hvorledes denne så vigtige periode i USA's historie fremstilles, tolkes og opleves.

JACOB A. RIIS - og dokumentarfotografiets første tid

Fotograferne fra New Deal-perioden byggede videre på en social-dokumentarisk tradition, der havde sine rødder i slutningen af 1800-tallet. Herunder især i den dansk-fødte journalist og fotograf Jacob A. Riis' arbejde. Jacob Riis emigrerede som 21-årig - som netop udlært tømrersvend - til Amerika i 1870. Som tømrer kunne han dog ikke ernære sig i sit nye land, og i mange år hutlede han sig igennem med diverse småjobs.

I 1877 fik han arbejde som politireporter på new yorker avisen Tribune samt for nyhedsbureauet Associated Press. Som politireporter stiftede han bekendtskab med noget af Amerikas - og verdens - værste slum: Lower East Side distriktet i New York. Og han, hvis opgave det oprindeligt var at skrive om mord, overfald, tyveri og utugt, blev oprørt over de miserable forhold, slummens beboere levede under. Efterhånden så han slummen som den dybereliggende årsag til den kriminalitet, han havde fået til opgave at skildre, og han begyndte derfor at agitere for bedre boligforhold for dens indbyggere.

Da der allerede på daværende tidspunkt var opstået en bred vifte af sociale organisationer, der på privat, kristen basis arbejdede på og agiterede for at forbedre forholdene i slumkvartererne, vandt Riis hurtigt lydhørhed i disse kredse, som til gengæld brugte hans materiale i deres kampagner.

I 1888 tog Riis fat på at bruge kameraet til at understøtte sit korstog mod de

kummerlige boligforhold i Lower East Side, og med disse påtrængende fotografiske vidnesbyrd begyndte også de kommunale myndigheder og politikere for alvor at lytte.

Da Riis i 1890 - altså for 100 år siden - udgav sin første bog: "How the Other Half Lives", var den ledsaget af 38 illustrationer byggende på fotografier taget af Riis og hans assistenter. Halvtone-teknikken var ikke på daværende tidspunkt fuldt udviklet, og illustrationerne var således eftergjorte tegninger med fotografierne som forlæg. Ikke desto mindre besad billederne en autencitet, som ikke var til at komme udenom for det publikum Riis henvendte sig til. - Det publikum som repræsenterede alt andet end "Den anden Halvdel".



Jacob A. Riis: Fem Cents pr. plads. New York ca. 1889. (Det kongelige Biblioteks Kort- og Billedafdeling).

Jacob A. Riis: "Five Cents a Spot." New York, c. 1889. (Collection: The Royal Library. Department of Maps, Prints, and Photography).

Riis' bog blev meget populær og medførte siden flere af slagsen. Og på det helt lokale plan fik agitationen en - om ikke storstilet, så dog umiddelbar effekt: Et af Riis' mest fotograferede områder - en boligblok kendt under navnet "The Bend" - blev revet ned og erstattet af en park. Der blev installeret lys i de mørke gangkorridorer i andre slumbebyggelser, og på længere sigt blev der opført lejligheder, hvor lysskakternes dagslys nåede ind i de fleste rum, ligesom også vandforsyningen blev forbedret. Dette var som sagt, hvad der skete på det lokale plan. Stat og regering reagerede på en helt anden og sandsynligvis ganske utilsigtet måde. Den liberale immigrationspolitik, der hidtil havde været så kendetegnende for USA, blev nu igennem stadig flere restriktive immigrationslove en saga blot.

Især kom det til at berøre befolkningsgrupperne fra de syd- og østeuropæiske lande. Lower East Sides beboere stammede netop primært herfra, og regeringen kom altså til at opfatte slummen i området - således som den f.eks. var blevet dokumenteret af Jacob Riis - som et spørgsmål om manglende integrations- og assimilationsvilje hos disse nationaliteter ...

LEWIS W. HINE

Hvor det sidste årti af det forrige århundrede og nogle år ind i dette i billedmæssig henseende især udtrykkes gennem Riis' slum-billeder fra New York, skulle årene frem til den første verdenskrig især komme til at stå i Lewis Hines tegn.

I denne periode skete der en betydelig udbygning af det industrielle produktionsapparat, og den øgede konkurrence de forskellige virksomheder imellem gav sig bl.a. udtryk i et stort behov for billig arbejdskraft. Og da USA f.eks. ikke havde nogen føderal lov, der forbød børnearbejde, betød det, at mange børn blev groft udnyttede i især bomuldsspinderierne og kulminerne.

Lewis Hine, der nogle år tidligere havde gjort sig bemærket som foto-dokumentarisk skildrer af immigrationsansøgere på Ellis Island ud for New York, begyndte i 1906 at arbejde som fotograf for the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC).

NCLC var en organisation, der på privat, filantropisk basis arbejdede for at få både de enkelte staters og den føderale lovgivningsmagt til at fastsætte restriktioner på børnearbejde-området.



Lewis W. Hine: Arbejdsdreng i et glasværk, Alexandria, Va. Skifteholdsarbejde, arbejder den ene uge om dagen, den anden uge om natten. (International Museum of Photography, N.Y.).

Lewis W. Hine: "Carrying-in boy in Alexandria Glass Factory, Alexandria, Va. Works on day shift one week and night shift next week." (Collection: International Museum of Photography, New York).



Lewis W. Hine: Spinderske i et spinderi i New England, 1913. (International Museum of Photography, N.Y.).

Lewis W. Hine: "Spinner in New England Mill, 1913." (Collection: International Museum of Photography, New York).

Med billeder som disse, taget af Hine og underbygget af omfattende statistik og fyldige rapporter forfattet af NCLC's medarbejdere, kunne NCLC overbevise en ofte tvivlende offentlighed og lovgivningsmagt om, at børnearbejde vitterlig fandt sted, og at noget måtte gøres for at begrænse det.

Men det var ikke nogen nem sag. Skønt Kongressen flere gange vedtog love, der indirekte skulle forsøge at begrænse børnearbejdet, var modstanden så stor hos industrien, at disse tiltag gennem Højesteret blev erklæret i strid med den fri konkurrence og dermed i strid med den amerikanske forfatning.

At lægge begrænsninger på den frie foretagsomhed ved f.eks. at forbyde udnyttelsen af børn i industrien blev anset som både ulovligt og u-amerikansk. Og den dag i dag findes der ikke nogen lov gældende for alle Amerikas Forenede Stater, der forbyder børnearbejde. Det er stadig op til de enkelte stater at lovgive på dette område.

Både Riis og Hine arbejdede sammen med private, sociale organisationer, der prøvede at påvirke offentlighed og myndigheder til at forbedre vilkårene for samfundets dårligst stillede. Fælles for deres kritik var en tro på at det overordnede system - samfundets indretning som sådan - var godt nok. Men at man befandt sig i en overgangsfase, hvor mange af de mest udsatte grupper - som f.eks. børn og indvandrere - behøvede en hjælpende hånd til at bryde ud af deres ringe kår.

Selvom man kan synes, at de konkrete forbedringer for disse mennesker var temmelig ringe, skulle det dog vise sig, at forståelsen og solidariteten havde fundet en vis grobund hos den bedre stillede del af befolkningen.

Denne forståelse kom især Roosevelt-administrationen til gode da 1930'ernes krise - Depressionen - skulle afhjælpes på regeringsplan.

DEPRESSIONEN, NEW DEAL OG 1930'ERNES SOCIAL-DOKUMENTARISKE FOTOGRAFI

Selvom termen 'dokumentar-fotografi' hidtil er blevet anvendt om den genre indenfor fotografiet, som Riis og Hine praktiserede, er det dog først i 1930'erne, at ordet 'dokumentar' bliver knyttet til denne form for fotografisk udtryk. Det er dog også på dette tidspunkt, at dokumentarfotografiet for alvor bryder igennem og populariseres. Både på det rent kommercielle område, hvor store billedblade såsom Life og Look første gang - i 1936 - ser dagens lys, og også, som vi skal se i det følgende, på det rent politiske og statslige plan.

Da Franklin D. Roosevelt blev indsat som USA's præsident i 1933, var krisen på sit højeste med 14 millioner arbejdsløse og en social nød, der var uden fortilfælde i USA's historie og som berørte alle dele af samfundet.

Roosevelt-administrationen iværksatte i første omgang en række nødlove, der tilsammen udgjorde den såkaldte Første New Deal. Udover at give direkte økonomisk støtte til sultende familier, hjemløse og andre nødstedte, iværksattes økonomiske reformer og arbejdstilbud til flere millioner arbejdsløse. Endvidere blev der lovgivet omkring nogle af de kardinalpunkter, som netop Riis og Hine og deres respektive organisationer havde agiteret så indgående for i årtier: Børnearbejdet blev begrænset - ihvertfald midlertidigt -, ligesom minimumsløn og arbejdstidslængde blev fastsat. Roosevelt-regeringen måtte kæmpe en hård kamp for at få vedtaget sit program, og mange kompromisser måtte indgås undervejs. Den fri konkurrences talsmænd i bl.a. oppositionen og i Højesteret så disse planøkonomiske tiltag som værende i klar modstrid med forfatningen.

Også i den følgende New Deal-periode, der benævnes den Anden New Deal, og som blev iværksat fra 1935, måtte Roosevelt-regeringen kæmpe hårdt og indgå mange kompromisser.

Ikke desto mindre blev der oprettet en lang række af selvstændige, statslige organer til afhjælpning af krisen, hvoraf nogle gik hen og fik permanent status.

I 1935 blev således Resettlement Administration (RA) dannet som et uafhængigt organ under Landbrugsministeriet. RA stod bl.a. for opkøb af marginale jordområder, som derefter blev fordelt som småbrug til de jordbrugere, der havde

måttet forlade deres oprindelige brug pga. Depressionen. RA's virke var kontroversielt. Men for at fremme forståelsen for RA's dispositioner opstod ideen om at ansætte fotografer på regeringen lønningsliste til at underbygge og dokumentere, at der var behov for hjælp.

RA-fotografernes arbejde havde deres rødder i både den Riis'ske og Hine'ske tradition. Og selv skulle de pga. deres umiddelbare succes komme til at udgøre blot begyndelsen på, hvad der skulle gå hen og blive en næsten legendarisk brug af fotografiet i Roosevelt-administrationens æra.

Således blev der også knyttet fotografer til andre af New Deal-politikken projekter. Samme år - i 1935 - oprettedes f.eks. det stadig eksisterende organ: Rural Electrification Administration (REA). REA var oprindelig både et jobskabelses- og et udviklingsprojekt, som bl.a. via favorable låneordninger skulle forsyne landdistrikterne med elektricitet for derved at være med til at forhindre flugten fra land til by.

Peter Sekaer blev i årene fra 1936 til 1942 tilknyttet REA som stabsfotograf. Han efterfulgte iøvrigt Lewis Hine, der i 1935 i en kort periode havde arbejdet med at udføre dokumentationsarbejde i staterne Pennsylvania, Ohio og New York. Indenfor samme tidsrum kom Peter Sekaer også til at arbejde for Office of Indian Affairs samt for United States Housing Authority (USHA). Hvor Office of Indian Affairs var et gammelt foretagende fra omkring 1875, var USHA endnu et New Deal-organ, som hørte under Indenrigsministeriet, og som var blevet skabt ved lov i september 1937.

Peter Sekaer arbejdede desuden løst for Farm Security Administration (FSA), der var en re-organisering af Resettlement Administration (RA), som i 1937 blev underlagt embedsmændene i Landbrugsministeriet. Hvor RA/FSA overvejende tog sig af landdistrikternes boligforhold og andre problemer, var det USHA's opgave primært at stå for sanering af byernes slumområder og opførelsen af nye, tidssvarende boliger, der var til at betale for de laveste indkomstgrupper.

De her nævnte regeringsorganer er blot nogle få af dem, der blev oprettet under New Deal. Men samtidig er det dem, der i videst udstrækning brugte dokumentar-fotografiet som en vigtig og integreret del af deres arbejde.

Da Roosevelt blev genindsat som præsident i januar 1937, kunne han derfor i sin tiltrædelsestale - med henvisning til de mange regeringsrapporter og andet materiale, der var rigt forsynet med illustrationer tilvejebragt af de regeringsansatte fotografer - anmode om yderligere støtte til den -

“One third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished”. (“Den trediedel af nationen (der havde) dårlige boligforhold, (gik) ringe klædt, (og som var) dårligt ernæret”).

Billederne havde talt deres eget klare sprog. Og også fremover kom disse billeder og andre med dem til at præge talrige rapporter, udstillinger og andet materiale, som både offentligheden og oppositionen var nødsaget til at tage stilling til.

PETER SEKAER

Knap 50 år efter at Jacob Riis forlod Danmark for at søge lykken i det fremmede, ankom Peter Ingemann Sekjær (som var Peter Sekaers oprindelige navn) til Amerika.

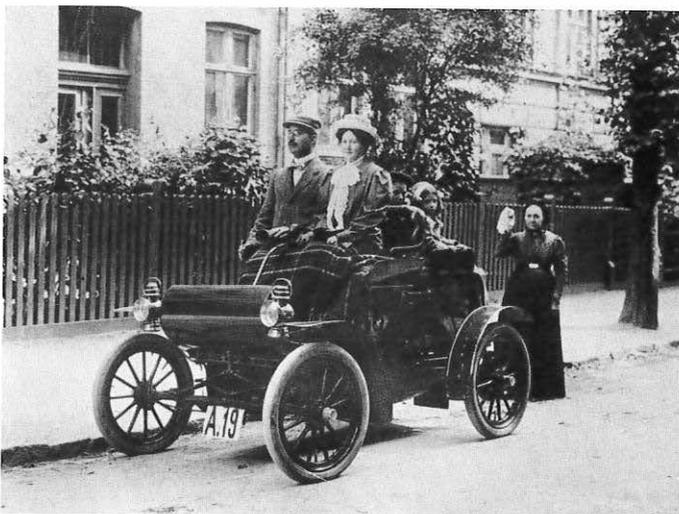
I en alder af 17 år forlod Peter Sekaer i 1918 sit københavnske hjem, fordi han ikke ønskede at gå ind i sin fars importfirma. Peter Sekaer var den ældste af fire søskende.



Peter Sekaers lillesøster Karen, faren - Christian Sekjær -, Peter Sekaer selv og hans to nyfødte brødre tvillingerne Herluf og Christian (d. 4/1-1914).

Peter Sekaer's younger sister Karen, his father Christian Sekjær, Peter Sekaer himself and his two new-born twin brothers, Herluf and Christian (January 4, 1914).

Faren tjente mange penge som importør og grossist af maskiner og var noget af en tyrann. Han havde sat sig for at Peter Sekaer - som den ældste søn - på længere sigt skulle overtage firmaet. Peter Sekaer, der ellers var blevet optaget i gymnasiet på Metropolitanskolen, blev istedet beordret til "at arbejde sig op nedefra" i firmaet. Faren mente, at der var akademikere nok - så mange "at man kunne fodre svin med dem".



Familien Sekjær: Peter Sekaers far og mor, hans søster Karen, han selv og hans bedstemor. Foran hjemmet Kongs Georgs Vej 32, Frederiksberg, København. (ca. 1910).

The Sekjær family: Peter Sekaer's father and mother, his sister Karen, Peter himself and his grandmother. In front of their home, Kong Georgs Vej 32, Frederiksberg, Copenhagen (c. 1910).



Peder Skrams Gade 13, København. Her blev Peter Ingemann Sekjær født i 1901, og billedet viser farens forretning, der også havde til huse her. Personerne i den nærmeste trappenedgang viser faren, Peter Sekaer selv og en af firmaets ansatte (ca. 1917).

Peder Skrams Gade 13, Copenhagen. Birthplace of Peter Ingemann Sekjær, 1901, in the same building where his father's firm was housed. In the first stairway, Sekaer's father Christian Sekjær, Peter Sekaer himself and one of the employees of the firm (c. 1917).



Pasbillede af Peter Ingemann Sekjær (1918).
Passport photo of Peter Ingemann Sekjær (1918).

Peter Sekaer kom efterhånden i stærk opposition til sin far. Og bl.a. inspireret af den populære Jack Londons naturalistisk-romantiske bøger om den amerikanske vildmark forlod han Danmark og begav sig til Amerika for ikke at vende tilbage før i 1937 - næsten 20 år senere - på et kort besøg, der også skulle blive hans eneste.

Han sejlede til New York, men var lige ved ikke at kunne komme fra borde. Skibet var blevet erklæret i karentæne pga. den spanske syge, der på daværende tidspunkt hærgede i Europa. En dag annoncerede kaptajnen, at skibet ville sejle tilbage til Europa samme dag klokken fire, og dem, der ikke var kommet fra borde inden da, ville blive fragtet hjem igen. Peter Sekaer og flere af hans medpassagerer opfattede dette som en opfordring til hurtigst muligt at klatre ned ad rælingen. I land kom han og begav sig derpå til Canada, hvor han havde flere morbrødre, der var landmænd, og hos hvem han i en kort periode arbejdede. Derefter rejste han vestpå, hvor han undervejs havde forskellige jobs som skovarbejder, brandmand og kok.

I 1920 rejste han tilbage til New York City, hvor han ankom uden en krone på lommen og måtte søge ind på Frelsens Hærs herberg.

Peter Sekaers færd i den følgende tid i New York fortaber sig i det uviste. Men i 1922 begyndte han som skiltemaler og dekoratør, og fra 1926-1934 drev han en forretning, som producerede store, håndmalede biografplakater. I 1929-1934 studerede han samtidigt hermed maleri på den velrenommerede kunstskele Art Students' League.

På Art Students' League blev der ikke undervist i fotografi, men at Peter Sekaer alligevel begyndte at interessere sig for fotografiet skyldes, at der blandt hans medstuderende befandt sig den senere så kendte maler og fotograf: Ben Shahn. Peter Sekaer og Ben Shahn blev gode venner, og da Ben Shahn omkring dette tidspunkt delte atelier med en anden kendt fotograf - Walker Evans, lærte Peter Sekaer også ham at kende.

Peter Sekaer ophørte i 1934 med at studere på Art Students' League for i stedet det følgende år på fuld tid, at studere fotografi på skolen New School for Social Research, hvor også fotografen Berenice Abbott gik.

Året 1935 blev et vendepunkt i Peter Sekaers liv. Han havde før taget billeder for sjov, men nu blev det en fuldtidsbeskæftigelse. Hans motiver fra tiden på New School blev byen New York (jvf. billederne nr. 1-11). Sammen med Berenice Abbott gik han omkring og fotograferede gademiljøer, mennesker og New Yorks havnekvarter.

Walker Evans var en af de allerførste fotografer, der blev tilknyttet RA's - det senere FSA's - fotografiske stab. Dette medførte at også Peter Sekaer og Ben Shahn kom med i dette stadig større selskab af regeringsansatte fotografer.

De fleste af billederne i Det kongelige Biblioteks eje stammer således fra en fælles rejse til Sydstaterne Walker Evans og Peter Sekaer tog ud på i 1935-36. Og som gik til staterne South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi og Louisiana.

Mange af Sekaers billeder har motivfællesskab med Evans' billeder. F.eks. Sekaers billede (nr. 26) af en færge på Mississippi-floden, og billedet (nr. 42) af et forladt og faldefærdigt sydstatshus fra Vicksburg - også Mississippi. Også billedet af de tre barbersaloner (billede nr. 55, se s. 48) er næsten identisk med et af Evans' samtidige billeder. Både Evans og Sekaer dyrkede arkitektur som motiv, ligesom de begge havde en forkærlighed for personer og detaljer. Jvf. f.eks. motiverne med 'folkekunst' (se f.eks. billede nr. 51, s. 46).

Walker Evans' og Peter Sekaers fælles rejse fandt som sagt sted i 1935-36. Det var umiddelbart inden Peter Sekaer begyndte sin karriere som professionel fotograf hos REA. Walker Evans, derimod, var allerede på dette tidspunkt regeringsansat fotograf, og det er derfor sandsynligt, at denne rejse skulle betragtes som en slags svendeprøve-tur for Peter Sekaers vedkommende. Peter Sekaer bestod sin svendeprøve, blev hovedfotograf hos REA og sidenhen leder af REA's fotografiske afdeling, hvor han var indtil 1942.

I 1939 besluttede REA sammen med U.S. Film Service at lave en dokumentarfilm med den internationalt kendte, hollandsk-fødte filmmand Joris Ivens som instruktør.

Peter Sekaer blev tilknyttet projektet som research- og still-billede-fotograf.



Peter Sekaer: Filminstruktøren Joris Ivens. Billedet er taget i forbindelse med indspilningen af dokumentarfilmen *The Power and the Land*. [1939].

Peter Sekaer: Film director Joris Ivens, taken by Peter Sekaer while working on Power and the Land film [1939].

REA's dokumentarfilm fik titlen "The Power and the Land", og dens sigte var at vise fordelene ved at forsyne landdistrikterne med elektricitet. Ved at elektrificere landbruget mente man at kunne højne dets effektivitet og indtjeningsmuligheder og dermed forhindre affolkningen af landdistrikterne og stoppe den igangværende masseflugt fra land til by. En flugt der, synligt for enhver i byerne, medførte både overbefolkning og social forarmelse.

Som *case-story* havde filmholdet af REA fået besked på at finde et familiebrug af den traditionelle, gammeldags slags - uden moderne hjælpemidler og elektricitet. Det var lettere sagt end gjort. Filmholdet ledte og ledte, men enten var gårdene for store eller også var de totalt forfaldne.

Omsider fandt filmholdet i staten Ohio det helt rigtige sted med den helt rigtige familie. Det var bare det '*aber dabei*', at der allerede var installeret elektricitet på stedet. Men ved i de første par scener at fjerne nogle af installationerne og undgå at fokusere på de øvrige, lykkedes det filmholdet at få lavet en troværdig film om en landbofamilies lykkelige overgang fra en traditionel og besværlig dagligdag til en dagligdag fuld af elektricitetens velsignelser.

Omstændighederne omkring "The Power and the Land" afspejler iøvrigt meget godt, hvorledes den dokumentariske genre - ikke kun inden for film, men også inden for fotografiet - fungerede i praksis. Når New Deal-fotograferne blev sendt i marken, havde de forinden fået nøje besked på hjemmefra, hvad det var deres respektive arbejdsgivere havde brug for. Ofte blev de udstyret med såkaldte '*shooting scripts*' - dvs. en slags drejebøger med både en ønskeliste over hvilke emner, der skulle fotograferes og en instruktion i, hvordan det gennemgående udtryk i disse billeder skulle være. Som det fremgår af Peter Sekaers artikel

“Nothing To Photograph Here!”, i U.S. Camera fra august 1941 (dansk oversættelse se s. 63), der beskriver hans arbejdsmetode under arbejdet for United States Housing Authority (USHA), blev hans rejserute nøje afstukket efter, hvor regeringen havde planlagt at sanere og bygge. Der skulle tages ‘før og efter’-billeder af de forskellige lokaliteter, og samtidig blev Sekaer pålagt ikke at støde de lokale myndigheder på mancherterne. Det skulle nødtigt fremstå som om byernes beslutningstagere selv kunne klandres for de ringe boligforhold. Man ønskede ikke konfrontation men samarbejde.

Ikke desto mindre var det overordnede tema i både ‘*shooting scripts*’ og i det fælles, færdige resultat den både pragmatiske og konsekvensjournalistiske, *meneskelige* synsvinkel. En synsvinkel der i det hele taget var selve udgangspunktet for New Deal-fotografernes virke, hvilket skinner tydeligt igennem i Peter Sekaers artikel, hvor han konstaterer, at - “. . . the only pictures that tell *about* humans are pictures *of* humans.”

Langt de fleste af New Deal-billederne udstråler både respekt for og solidaritet med de fotograferede ‘ofre’, hvor det er sympatien og forståelsen for f.eks. slumbeboernes problemer fremfor det ‘eksotiske’ og fremmedartede, beskueren konfronteres med.

Således kommer denne periodes fotografer i højere grad til at ligge på linie med Lewis Hines arbejde end med Jacob Riis’. Jacob Riis’ billeder beskriver nogle værgeløse, fremmedartede mennesker, som det er svært for modtageren at identificere sig med i al deres ekstreme elendighed. Lewis Hines billeder, derimod, har ikke som udgangspunkt det anderledes og degraderede. Hine så sine ‘ofre’ som ligeværdige mennesker. Det fordomsfulde og generaliserende er vejet for en solidarisk og indlevende beskrivelse af nogle individuelle personligheder, hvor den enkeltes karakterstærke træk træder frem og møder beskueren på ligeværdig fod. New Deal-fotografernes motiver var ikke “Den Anden Halvdel” (jvf. titlen på Jacob Riis’ bog - *How the Other Half Lives*), men den “trediedel” af deres egne landsmænd, som var ramt af en uforskyldt, udefrakommende skæbne. Og som det var det øvrige samfunds - og især statens - pligt at afbøde og rette op på. Det var staten, der skulle blande kortene og fordele dem påny - en New Deal.

Men endnu før Depressionen kunne siges at være overvundet, meldte en ny krise sig. Den anden Verdenskrig så mere og mere ud til at være en uundgåelig realitet, og i og med USA’s aktive indtræden på kamppladsen, skete der et markant skift i New Deal-fotografernes ideologiske udgangspunkt. Hvor hele New Deal-æraen var præget af spørgsmålet: ‘Hvor galt er det fat, og hvordan kan vi gøre det bedre?’, blev Den anden Verdenskrig perioden, hvor der blev sat fokus på spørgsmålet: ‘Hvad vil det sige at være amerikaner, og hvad er det vi vil forsvare?’. USA oprustede, der kom gang i krigsindustrien og arbejdsløshedskøerne svandt ind.

I 1942 blev FSA-fotograferne således underlagt det amerikanske propagandaministerium: Office of War Information (OWI). Og udover at fotografere krigsindustrielle komplekser og skurbyer opført af regeringen til at huse krigsindustriens arbejdere, var vægtningen af det udpræget positive nu i højsædet. Billederne skulle nu forestille - “mænd, kvinder og børn, som ser ud til virkelig at tro på USA”, - som det hed i et af FSA/OWI-fotografernes ‘*shooting scripts*’ fra februar 1942.

Året før - i 1941 - havde Museum of Modern Art udskrevet en åben fotokonkurrence under titlen: "Image of Freedom". Både professionelle og amatører var inviteret til at deltage, og af indbydelsen fremgår, hvad det var dommerkomiteen ønskede:

"Lad os tage et kig på disse Forenede Stater . . . nu i disse kriseramte tider, hvor vort liv og alt hvad der giver det mening er truet: () vi har set indgående fotografiske studier af spild af liv og jord (), og vi har set starten på forbedringer. Lad os nu med samme klarsyn, se den kraft, der kan afhjælpe disse forseelser . . . den mægtige, ubevidste kraft hos de millioner af os, der bor på amerikansk jord, den ånd som kommer af vore tanker, vores måde at være på, vores hjem, vores arbejde".

Peter Sekaer modtog tre priser for tre billeder i "Image of Freedom"-konkurrencen.

To af disse viser beboerne i to boligkomplekser opført af hhv. staten og en privat, filantropisk organisation. Førstnævnte billede forestiller således fire smilende, jødiske kvinder, der kigger ud af deres vindue i et af staten opført boligkompleks.



Peter Sekaer: Jødiske lejere i et boligprojekt i Williamsburg. (Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gengivet med tilladelse fra MoMA og Mrs. Elisabeth Sekaer Rothschild).

Peter Sekaer: "Jewish tenants in a housing project in Williamsburg." (Collection: Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gelatin-silver print, n.d. Reproduced by permission from MoMA and Mrs. Elisabeth Sekaer

Det andet billede viser en legeplads med legende børn, beliggende i et boligkvarter, der er bygget på privat, filantropisk initiativ. Det tredje og sidste billede forestiller to mexikanske piger. Den ene sidder i en gyngestol og spiller guitar, mens den anden står i døråbningen med et barn på armen.



Peter Sekaer: To medlemmer af en af Amerikas mest undertrykte minoriteter - mexikanere i San Antonio, Texas, hvis tilværelse ikke er uden glæde. (Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gengivet med tilladelse fra MoMA og Mrs. Elisabeth Sekaer Rothschild).

Peter Sekaer: "Two Members of One of America's Most Oppressed Minorities - Mexicans in San Antonio, Texas - Who Do Not Lead Cheerless Lives." (Collection: The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gelatin-silver print. n.d. Reproduced by permission from MoMA and Mrs. Elisabeth Sekaer Rothschild).

De tre Image of Freedom-billeder giver tilsammen et meget godt billede af den linie indenfor dokumentarfotografiet, der efterfulgte New Deal-perioden: vægtningen af resultater og det positive. Selvom der stadig var ting der kunne blive bedre, var og blev Amerika de rige muligheders land, og et land med rige menneskelige ressourcer. Et land hvor både staten og den enkelte kunne og skulle

være med til at tjene det mangfoldige og dog samme folk, der udgjorde Amerikas Forenede Stater.

Peter Sekaer opnåede ikke i sin samtid at blive ligeså berømt som sine venner og kolleger hos FSA - som f.eks. Walker Evans, Ben Shahn og Dorothea Lange. Dette skyldes flere forhold.

For det første fik RA/FSA, som var det først oprettede regeringsorgan, der havde ansat fotografer, den største offentlige opmærksomhed. Roy Stryker, der var leder af FSA-fotograferne, vidste nøje, hvad det var Roosevelt-regeringen skulle bruge af fotodokumentarisk materiale og udarbejdede og varierede sine 'shooting scripts' derefter. FSA-fotografernes billeder var - især i begyndelsen af perioden - desuden af en mere visuel opsigtsvækkende og skæbnetung karakter end de billeder Peter Sekaer tog for REA og USHA. Billeder af landbofamilier drevet på flugt har umiddelbart mere appel end f.eks. billeder af opsætningen af elmaster.

Peter Sekaer udførte et par gange arbejde for FSA. Men pga. et gammelt modsætningsforhold mellem ham og Roy Stryker blev det kun til begrænsede opgaver for FSA. Modsætningsforholdet stammede sandsynligvis tilbage i 1936, hvor Peter Sekaer i samarbejde med Roy Stryker arrangerede en udstilling med FSA-fotografernes (på daværende tidspunkt RA) billeder.

Forordet til udstillingskatalogen er signeret R. G. Tugwell - en af Roy Strykers embedsmandskolleger - , men i virkeligheden var det skrevet af Peter Sekaer selv.



Peter Sekaer: En skurby til arbejderne på Vultee flyfabrik. Nashville, Tenn. Maj 1941. (Library of Congress, FSA Collection).

Peter Sekaer: "A trailer camp for defense workers of the Vultee Aircraft plant, Nashville, Tenn. May 1941." (Collection: Library of Congress, the FSA Collection).

Oprindelig bad Peter Sekaer Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt - præsidentfruen - om at skrive forordet. Og af hans brev til hende med forslag til tekstens formulering, kan man tydeligt se, at det er de samme udtryk og sætninger, der går igen her som i det endelige forord.

En kilde til forståelsen af Peter Sekaers manglende, brede berømmelse kan også tilskrives hans noget enerådende karakter og deraf manglende samarbejdsvillighed med en autoritet som Roy Stryker. Da FSA-fotograferne ved USA's oprustning til 2. verdenskrig begyndte at dokumentere bl.a. krigsindustrielle komplekser, blev Peter Sekaer af Roy Stryker sat til at fotografere opførelsen af en skurby til arbejderne på en militær flyvemaskinefabrik i Nashville, Tennessee.

Af ovenstående fotografi fremgår det tydeligt, at Peter Sekaer absolut ikke har fundet opgaven spændende og udfordrende.

I 1942 flyttede Rural Electrification Administration fra Washington til St. Louis, og Peter Sekaer sagde sin stilling op. Det følgende år arbejdede han i en kort periode for Office of War Information, - det, som nu også af navn, var blevet FSA-fotografernes nye arbejdsgever.

Senere i 1943 blev han leder af den fotografiske stab i Amerikansk Røde Kors, og også her var arbejdet blevet koncentreret om krigssituationen. Sandsynligvis fordi den personlige frihed i det fotografiske udtryk efterhånden blev mere og mere begrænset og det hele fik for meget skær af snæver krigspropaganda, besluttede Peter Sekaer at sige sit job op. Inden årets udgang flyttede han til New York, hvor han indtil sin død i 1950 primært arbejdede som reklamefotograf for bl.a. Kodak og Bell Telephone, og udførte fotoarbejde for diverse ugeblade som Vogue og Glamour Magazine.

Hvor det amerikanske social-dokumentariske fotografi gennem 1930'erne var af både høj håndværksmæssig- og kunstnerisk standard og samtidig udtrykte et stærkt personligt engagement hos hver enkelt regeringsansat fotograf, blev dokumentarfotografiet op gennem krigsårene en stadig mere propagandafyldt affære. I det månedlige tidsskrift U.S. Camera afspejles dette meget tydeligt. Siden den japanske bombing af Pearl Harbor i 1941 bliver halvdelen af hvert U.S. Camera-nummer nu helliget krigsfotografiet. Og i 1944 udsender U.S. Camera et helt temanummer om krigen: U.S.A. at War. Redaktionen har fundet et af Peter Sekaers billeder frem - taget omkring et år før Pearl Harbor. Billedet forestiller en fotograferende japaner, og under overskriften: HØJST ÆREDE TURIST står følgende:

"Intet kunne være mere symbolsk end dette billede af vores luskede ven, taget kort tid før Pearl Harbor. I virkeligheden var han i færd med at tage noter og fotografere et lille statsligt kraftværk, da Peter Sekaer, som dengang arbejdede som fotograf for Rural Elelctrification Administration, knipsede ham. Et kamera i hans hænder skulle blive dødbringende, lige så dødbringende, skulle det vise sig, som et bid fra en klapperslange. Overalt i vore hjem, vore restauranter og vore universiteter fandt disse lede små væsener ud af alle vore svagheder; og de forsøgte at analysere og kopiere vore stærke sider. Vores dumhed hjalp dem i deres begærlighed. Den 7. december 1941 slog de til med en sådan kraft, at det fulde omfang ikke skulle gå op for os, før vi så billederne af vores hjælpeløse sænkede flåde - blot et år efter."

Fotografierne i denne katalog stammer for størstepartens vedkommende fra årene 1935-36 - fra den tur Peter Sekaer tog ud på sammen med Walker Evans og som bl.a. gik gennem staterne South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi og Louisiana. Endvidere er der en del fotografier fra New York City, som sammen med de fleste af denne katalogs fotografier stammer fra perioden før Peter Sekaer blev professionel, regeringsansat fotograf. Men selv om Peter Sekaer altså ikke var professionel af navn på daværende tidspunkt, er der dog for størsteparten af billedernes vedkommende tale om virkelig professionelt udført arbejde, med - som det også fremgår af kommentarerne til billederne - en stærk personlig holdning bag. Kommentarerne er Peter Sekaers egne. De er oprindeligt skrevet på dansk, da de var henvendt til Peter Sekaers familie i Danmark - sammen med fotografierne, der nu befinder sig i Billedsamlingen på Det kongelige Bibliotek.

KORT BIOGRAFI

1901: Født d. 19/7 i København. Oprindelige navn: Peter Ingemann Sekjær. Død d. 14/7-1950 i Ardsley, New York.

1918-1920: Forlod i 1918 - 17 år gammel - København, da han ikke ønskede at gå ind i sin fars importfirma. Kom til New York og rejste derfra videre til Canada, hvor han havde flere onkler, der var landmænd. Rejste vestpå og arbejdede som skovhugger, brandmand og kok.

1920: Kom tilbage til New York City.

1922-26: Arbejdede som skiltemaler og dekoratør.

1926-1934: Drev en forretning, der lavede store, håndmalede biografplakater.

1928-29: Sad i den amerikanske filmkritiker-kommission.

1932: Blev amerikansk statsborger.

1929-1934: Studerede maleri på kunsthøjskolen Art Students' League, hvor han havde livsvarigt medlemskab. Blandt hans lærere var: Warren Chappel, Georg Grosz, Hans Hoffmann, Jan Matulka og Homer Boss. Redigerede Art Students' Leagues blad: The League, fra 1932-33. Sad i skolens bestyrelse fra 1933-34 (skolen var elevstyret). Mødte maleren og fotografen Ben Shahn, som også studerede her. Ben Shahn delte på dette tidspunkt atelier med fotografen Walker Evans, og således lærte Peter Sekaer også denne at kende.

1934-1935: Studerede fotografi på the New School for Social Research sammen med fotografen Berenice Abbott.

1935-36: Tog på en tur sammen med Walker Evans til Sydstaterne.

1936: Arrangerede en vandrestilling for the College Art Association med fotografier fra the Resettlement Administration (RA) - det senere Farm Security Administration (FSA) - taget af bl.a. Walker Evans, Ben Shahn, Arthur Rothstein og Dorothea Lange.

1936-1942: Blev stabsfotograf for Rural Electrification Administration (REA) og senere leder af REA's grafiske afdeling. Blev fra 1938-1940 udlånt til United States Housing Authority (USHA) og i 1940 til Office of Indian Affairs. Udførte ligeledes arbejde for FSA i 1941.

1938: Deltog i vandrestillingen 'Roofs for 40 Million' arrangeret af An American Group Inc., bl.a. vist i Rockefeller Center, N.Y.

1940: Research og still-billede fotograf på REA's og U.S. Film Services dokumentarfilm: The Power and the Land, med Joris Ivens som instruktør.

1941: Deltog i Museum of Modern Arts 'Image og Freedom' - konkurrence. Vinder af tre priser.

1943-1944: Arbejdede for Office of War Information (OWI). Fra d. 24/5-1943 til d. 6/5-1944 var han ansat hos Amerikansk Røde Kors, hvor han fra d. 12/7-1943 var leder af den fotografiske afdeling.

1943-1950: Arbejdede som reklamefotograf og lavede fotoreportager for diverse ugeblade og magasiner.

1950: Dør d. 14/7 i Ardsley, New York af et hjerteslag.

1980: d. 12/3-19/4: Eneudstilling i Witkin Gallery, N.Y.

1982: d. 1/11-1/12: Eneudstilling i Esther Raushenbush Library, Sarah Lawrence College i Yonkers, Bronxville, N.Y.

1985: Det kongelige Bibliotek erhverver 100 af Sekaers fotografier.

1986: Tre af Sekaers fotografier udstilles på Charlottenborg i København i forbindelse med den store udstilling med eksempler på Kort- & Billedafdelingens fotosamling.

1988: November og december: Eneudstilling i the Gallery at South Presbyterian Church, 343 Broadway, Dobbs Ferry.

1990: d. 12/6-22/7: Ca. 90 af Peter Sekaers fotografier i Det kongelige Biblioteks eje udstilles i Rundetårn, København.

ARKIVER OG SAMLINGER HVORI PETER SEKAERS BILLEDER ER REPRÆSENTERET

Danmark:

Det kongelige Biblioteks Kort- & Billedafdeling - ialt 100 stk.

USA:

Museum of Modern Art, N.Y. - ialt 12 stk. 3 stk. fra 'Image of Freedom'-konkurrencen, 9 stk. fra Maryland, Kentucky og Alabama; forestillende krigsproduktions- og metal-koncentrationsanlæg.

National Archives, Washington D.C. Motiver fra diverse lokaliteter med vægt på boligforhold: Florida, Chicago, New Orleans, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Tennessee og Texas, taget for United States Housing Authority (USHA) - ialt 43 stk.

Ligeledes i National Archives: Taget for Office of Indian Affairs, - ialt 28 billeder med Sequoyah-indianere, Oklahoma. Samt et ukendt antal billeder for Rural Electrification Administration (REA).

National Records Center, Suitland, Maryland - ialt et par hundrede stk. Taget for United States Housing Authority (USHA).

Harvard University Art Museums, MA. - ialt 4 stk. 1 stk. med gadescene fra New York. 3 stk. med kirker.

University of Louisville, KY. - ialt 1 stk. Gadebillede fra New York med valgplakater.

Library of Congress, Washington D.C. - ialt 8 stk. Alle fra 1941. Viser opførelsen af en skurby til krigsindustriens arbejdere. Nashville, Tenn. Taget for Farm Security Administration (FSA).

Library of Congress har desuden fornylig modtaget en samling med 300 af Sekaers fotografier gennem Sekaers familie. Disse vil være offentlig tilgængelige i 1996.

Arkiv:

Christina Sekaer, N.Y.

Peter Sekaer - New Deal Photography

American Social-Documentary Photography

John Ford's now classic filming of John Steinbeck's novel, The Grapes of Wrath, was made in 1940, the year after the novel appeared. It depicts the fate of rural victims of the American Depression of the 1930's.

*Both Steinbeck and Ford were inspired in the creation of the characters and the scenery for The Grapes of Wrath by documentary photographs that were then already well-known; photographs which were to become the classic pictures of America in the Depression. The Democratic president Franklin D. Roosevelt's attempts to deal with the Depression, the 'New Deal' policies, were the *raison d'être* for this upsurge of documentary photography. Successful promotion of Roosevelt's policies demanded continual documentation of how bad conditions were in various social groups.*

The 'New Deal' attempted to introduce a planned economy at the federal level, and thus came into conflict with more conservative forces which preferred to preserve the status quo of minimal government intervention.

These conservative forces in Congress had to be convinced to pass the various pieces of New Deal legislation, and to create public support for its goals the Roosevelt administration hired a large corps of some of America's best photographers, among them names such as Walker Evans, Ben Shahn, Dorothea Lange, Russel Lee, Jack Delano, and Arthur Rothstein.

Numerous government reports, pamphlets and books, as well as many articles in newspapers and magazines, were illustrated with their photographs. Nor were opportunities for showing the photographs at exhibitions all over the United States neglected at the time.

Interest in the work of these photographers has not diminished. On the contrary, today these photographs are used as illustrations in many school textbooks and other historical works on the 1930's in the United States; numerous retrospective exhibitions of the photos are being arranged and photo-books dealing with the New Deal photographers and their work keep appearing.

To a considerable degree these photographs themselves have determined how this significant period in U.S. history is presented, interpreted and experienced.

Jacob A. Riis - and early documentary photography

The photographs from the New Deal period continued a social-documentary photographic tradition that had its roots in the last years of the nineteenth century. Not least in the work of the Danish-born journalist and photographer Jacob A. Riis. In 1870, at the age of 21, Jacob Riis emigrated to America, just after completing his apprenticeship as a carpenter. He was, however, unable to earn a living as a carpenter in his new country and for many years he scrambled to make a living at a variety of odd jobs.

In 1877 he got a job as a police reporter for the New York Tribune and the news bureau the Associated Press. As a police reporter he became acquainted with some of America's - and the world's - worst slums: the Lower East Side of New York. Riis, whose original task was to write up murders, mugging, thefts and vice, became indignant at the miserable conditions in which the slum dwellers lived. He gradually came to view the slum conditions themselves as the underlying cause of the crimes on which he was sent to report, and he started to agitate for better urban living conditions.

Since there already existed a broad range of private Christian organizations engaged in social work and agitation to improve slum conditions, Riis quickly received a ready response from these circles and his material was eagerly included in their campaigns.

In 1888 Riis started to use the camera to add weight to his crusade against the appalling housing conditions on the Lower East Side, and his compelling photographic evidence initiated a serious response from the city authorities and politicians. When Riis published his first book, How the Other Half Lives, in 1890 - 100 years ago - the text was accompanied by 38 illustrations based on photographs taken by Riis and his assistants. Half-tone technique was not fully developed at that time, so the illustrations were drawings based on the photographs. Nonetheless the pictures carried a message of unavoidable authenticity to the public to whom Riis appealed. - This was the public who represented all else than 'the Other Half'.

When Riis' book achieved a popular success he quickly followed this up with more books in the same vein. On the local level his agitation succeeded in an immediate way, though without widespread consequences: one of the locations most photographed by Riis, a tenement known as 'The Bend', was torn down and replaced by a park. Lights were installed in the dark hallways in other slum tenements; in the longer run apartments were built where daylight reached most of the rooms through light shafts and the water supply was improved. These were the local effects.

Reaction at the federal level came in another, and probably quite inadvertent fashion. The liberal immigration policies which had up until this point characterized the U.S.A. were now challenged and finally eliminated through a series of more and restrictive immigration laws. Riis' exposure of tenement squalor brought about reactions both against the sufferings of the slum dwellers, and - inadvertently - against the very presence of these newer immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe whose powers of assimilation appeared to be weaker than those of earlier waves of immigrants.

In particular the various Eastern and Southern European nationalities were viewed as undesirable. The inhabitants of the Lower East Side came primarily from these areas, and the slums - as documented by Jacob Riis - were seen as the result of their lack of will or ability to assimilate or integrate...

Lewis W. Hine

Though pictorially the last decade of the nineteenth century and the early years of the next were associated in particular with Riis' slum photographs from New York, the years just prior to the first World War are identified with the photographer Lewis Hine.

During this period industrial production expanded considerably and cheap labor was needed to meet increasing competition. Since there was no federal law against child labor, many children were exploited, especially in the cotton mills and coal mines.

In 1906, Lewis Hine, who a few years earlier had attracted attention by his photo-documentary portrayals of arriving immigrants at Ellis Island in New York Harbour, began work as a photographer for the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC). NCLC was a private, philanthropic organization that worked for legislation to restrict child labor on both the state and federal level.

Pictures of child labor taken by Hine and supported by detailed statistics and thorough reports written by the NCLC staff, proved persuasive with an all too often doubting public and legislators on the issue of whether child labor abuses actually did occur, and that something ought to be done to restrict it.

But this was not an easy issue. Despite repeated passage by Congress of legislation that indirectly sought to limit child labor, opposition was so strong in industry that these laws were struck down by the Supreme Court as being in restraint of free enterprise and thus unconstitutional.

Placing federal limits on free enterprise by forbidding the exploitation of children in industry was considered illegal and un-American. To this day there is no federal law forbidding child labor; the area remains one in which legislation rests with the individual states.

Both Riis and Hine worked with private reform organizations that attempted to influence public opinion and public authorities to improve conditions for the poorest placed members of society. Common to their criticisms was the belief that the social system in itself was good enough, but that in periods of transition groups particularly in jeopardy - e.g. children or immigrants - needed a helping hand to break out of their miserable conditions.

Even though it might appear that tangible improvements for these people were minimal, it would later become clear that understanding and solidarity had gained something of a foothold in the more prosperous social classes.

This foothold would prove itself to the advantage of the Roosevelt administration when the Depression of the 1930's became the transcendent pre-occupation of the federal government.

The Depression, the New Deal, and Social-Documentary Photography of the 1930's

Even though the term 'documentary photography' has here been used to describe

the genre practiced by Riis and Hine, it was not until the 1930's that the label 'documentary' was attached to this form of photography. It was during this period that this type of photography made its real breakthrough as a popular art form. On the commercial scene the large-scale picture magazines Life and Look appeared in 1936, and also on the purely political and governmental scene, as the following will demonstrate.

When Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated as president in 1933, the economic crisis was at its height: 14 million were unemployed and all levels of society were touched by extreme distress unknown previously in the history of the United States.

The Roosevelt administration immediately enacted a series of emergency measures that are collectively referred to as the First New Deal. Above and beyond direct economic aid to hungry families, the homeless and others in distress, various economic reforms and employment opportunities for several million unemployed were set up. Legislation was also passed on some of the major issues that Riis and Hine and the organizations for whom they had worked had agitated for so intensely for decades: child labor was restricted - at least temporarily - , and a minimum wage and the length of a work week were fixed. The Roosevelt administration had to fight hard to get its program through the Congress and many compromises were made along the way. The spokesmen for free enterprise among the Republicans and the Supreme Court viewed these proposals for economic planning as clearly unconstitutional.

Also in the 'Second' New Deal period, started in 1935, the Roosevelt administration had to struggle to achieve its aims and often make concessions. Nevertheless, a whole group of independent government agencies were established to alleviate the effects of the Depression, and some of them achieved permanent status. In 1935 the Resettlement Administration (RA) was created as an independent agency under the Department of Agriculture. The RA was to purchase marginal land, and redistribute it to small farmers who had lost their own farms in the Depression.

Controversial as the RA's program were, there was an obvious need for documentation of the necessity for dealing with these problems. Photographers were hired by the federal government to substantiate and document the need for aid.

The work of the RA-photographers had its roots in the tradition of both Riis and Hine. The immediate success of their work made them merely the beginning of what was to become a legendary use of photography in the Roosevelt era.

Other New Deal projects also acquired staff photographers. The REA (Rural Electrification Administration), which still exists, was also established in 1935. Originally the REA was both an employment creation scheme and a development project, and its aim was to provide rural areas with electricity on favourable lending terms and thus help stem the tide of migration from countryside to city.

Peter Sekaer worked as staff photographer for the REA in the years from 1936 to 1942. As a matter of fact he succeeded Lewis Hine in this position who had provided documentation for a short period in 1935 from the states of Pennsylvania,

Ohio and New York. In the same period Peter Sekaer also worked for the Office of Indian Affairs and the United States Housing Authority (USHA). Though the Office of Indian Affairs was an old and established agency dating back to 1875, the USHA was yet another New Deal agency under the Department of the Interior, created by legislation passed in September of 1937.

In addition Peter Sekaer did free lance work for the Farm Security Administration (FSA), which was a re-organized version of the Resettlement Administration (RA) that had been placed under the jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture in 1937. Whereas the RA/FSA primarily was concerned with rural housing and related problems, the USHA's major task was urban slum clearance and construction of new, modern affordable housing for the lowest income groups.

The government agencies mentioned above are only a few of those which were created by the New Deal, but they are those which made greatest use of documentary photography as a significant and integrated part of their activities. Thus when Roosevelt was re-inaugurated as president in January of 1937 he could in his inaugural speech - with reference to the many official reports and other material provided with a wealth of illustration by the government photographers - ask for further support for the -

"One-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished."

The pictures had spoken in their own clear language. In the future these photographs and others like them were to place their imprint on numerous reports, exhibitions and other materials which confronted both the general public and the anti-New Deal forces with the realities of the Depression.

Peter Sekaer

Peter Ingemann Sekjær arrived in America nearly 50 years after Jacob Riis had left Denmark to seek his fortune abroad. In 1918, at the age of 17, Peter Sekaer left his home in Copenhagen because he did not wish to join his father's import business. Sekaer was the eldest of four children.

Christian Sekjær, Peter's father, made a good living as an importer and wholesaler of machinery. As a father he showed a tyrannical streak. He had decided that Peter, as the oldest son, was in the long run to take over the family firm. As a part of this plan he took Peter out of school and ordered him to "work his way up" in the firm.

As time passed Peter Sekaer increasingly came in conflict with his father. Inspired by the popular naturalistic romanticism in Jack London's books about the American wilderness, Sekaer left Denmark for America. He first returned after nearly 20 years had passed, and then only for a short visit. He sailed to New York and from there moved on to Canada where several of his uncles were farmers, for whom he worked for a short period. Next he traveled west, working along the way at various jobs as lumberjack, fireman and cook. In 1920 he returned to New York City, arrived without a cent and had to stay at the Salvation Army shelter.

Peter Sekaer's activities in the following period in New York are not known in

detail, but in 1922 he started as a sign painter and window-decorator. From 1926 to 1934 he ran a business that included producing large, hand-painted cinema posters. In the years from 1929 to 1934 he also studied painting at the well-reputed Art Students' League.

Photography was not taught at the Art Students' League, but nevertheless Peter Sekaer became interested in photography was due to the presence among his fellow-students of the later-to-be prominent painter and photographer Ben Shahn. Sekaer and Shahn became good friends, and since Shahn shared a studio at this point with another famous photographer, Walker Evans, he and Sekaer also became acquainted.

Peter Sekaer stopped his studies at the Art Students' League in 1934 and instead began to study photography full-time for the next year at the New School for Social Research. The photographer Berenice Abbott was also studying there at that time.

The year 1935 was a turning point in Peter Sekaer's life. He had previously taken pictures for his own amusement, but it now became a full-time occupation. His motifs from the period at the New School were from New York City (cf. pictures nos. 1 - 11). Together with Berenice Abbott he walked around and photographed street scenes, people and the harbour neighbourhoods of New York.

Walker Evans was one of the very first photographers hired for the photographic staff of the RA - the later FSA. As a consequence, both Peter Sekaer and Ben Shahn were hired as members of the steadily increasing staff of federally employed photographers.

Most of the pictures in the possession of the Royal Library originated on a trip that Walker Evans and Peter Sekaer took together through the South in 1935-36 to the states of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana.

Many pictures taken by Sekaer share both subject matter and motifs with pictures by Evans. Sekaer's picture of a ferry on the Mississippi River (no. 26), the picture of an abandoned and delapidated house in Vicksburg, Mississippi (no. 42) as well as the picture of the three barbershops (no. 55, see p. 48) provide examples. Both Evans and Sekaer cultivated architectural motifs, and both also were partial to details and people, e.g. the 'folk art' motifs (cf. no. 51, see p. 46).

Walker Evans and Peter Sekaer made their trip together in 1935-36, just before Sekaer started his career as a professional photographer at the REA. Walker Evans, however, was already on the government payroll as a photographer. It is likely that this trip was to be viewed as a form of trial of professionalism by Peter Sekaer. He came through with flying colors, became head photographer at REA and later on the head of REA's Graphic Unit. Sekaer stayed at REA until 1942.

In 1939 REA and the U.S. Film Service decided to make a documentary film together using the internationally known, Dutch-born Joris Ivens as director. Peter Sekaer was assigned to this project as the stills and research photographer.

The purpose of this documentary, entitled "The Power and the Land", was to demonstrate the advantages of providing rural areas with electricity. Rural electrification, it was assumed, would increase the efficiency of agriculture, raise income levels from agriculture, and thus prevent the depopulation of rural areas and arrest the current mass migration from country to city. This exodus, as was

clear to everyone in the urban areas, merely led both to crowding and poverty.

The film crew had been instructed by REA to find a traditional, old-fashioned family farm, without modern machinery or electricity to use as a case study. This was more easily said than done. The film crew searched and searched, but either the farms were too large or else they were completely run-down. Finally just the right farm and just the right family turned up in Ohio, but there was one catch: they had already installed electricity. By shooting around the installations and removing a few for the early scenes, the crew managed to make a credible film about a farm family's successful transition from a traditional and strenuous daily life to a routine blessed by the wonders of electricity.

The circumstances surrounding "The Power and the Land" reveal how the documentary genre - not just in films, but also in photography - actually functioned in practice. When, for example, the New Deal photographers were sent into the field, they had instructions on just what it was their agencies needed. They were often equipped with 'shooting scripts', scenarios that included a list of what subjects to photograph and instructions in what the overall impressions in these pictures ought to be. As related by Peter Sekaer in his article "Nothing to Photograph Here!", in *U.S. Camera*, August, 1941, (see p. 65) in which he describes his method of work for the United States Housing Authority (USHA), his travel route was carefully planned according to where the government had planned for clearance and building projects. 'Before' and 'after' shots were to be taken of the various locations, but Sekaer was also reminded not to offend local authorities. There was no need to appear to blame the city fathers themselves for poor housing conditions. Cooperation, not confrontation, was the goal.

None the less, the leading theme in both the 'shooting scripts' and the common finished product was the both pragmatic and human viewpoint. A viewpoint that on the whole was the foundation for the New Deal photographers' work, and as Peter Sekaer says in his article, "... the only pictures that tell about humans are pictures of humans."

By far the majority of the New Deal pictures exhibit both respect for and solidarity with the photographed 'subjects.' What confronts the viewer is sympathy and understanding of, say, slum inhabitants' problems, rather than 'exoticism' or alienation.

On this point these photographers are closer to the work of Lewis Hine than that of Jacob Riis. Riis' pictures describe defenseless, alien people with whose extreme misery the audience finds it hard to identify. Lewis Hine's pictures, in contrast, do not have their point of departure in the alien and degraded. Hines viewed these people as his equals. The prejudicial and generalizing has given way to a solidarity and empathetic description of individual personalities. The character traits of these individuals step forth to meet the audience on equal footing.

New Deal photographers were not portraying "the Other Half," as had Riis, but the "Third" of their fellow countrymen who had been hit by an undeserved, external fate. A fate that it was the responsibility of the rest of society - in the guise of the government - to alleviate and remedy. It was the government which was to reshuffle the cards and deal anew, a New Deal.

But even before the Depression could be said to have been overcome, a new crisis appeared. The Second World War assumed the look of unavoidable reality, and after the U.S. actively entered the fighting, a marked shift appears in the ideological point of departure of the New Deal photographers. Whereas the whole New Deal era was characterized by the question: 'How bad are conditions, and how can we improve them?', during the Second World War the focus shifted to the issue: 'What does it mean to be an American, and what are we defending?' The United States re-armed, the war industries boomed and unemployment diminished. In 1942 the FSA photographers were transferred to the American propaganda agency: the Office of War Information (OWI). And aside from photographing war industry complexes and trailer camps set up by government to house war workers, emphasis was now definitely to be placed on the positive.

Pictures were now to portray "men, women and children who appear as if they really believed in the U.S." as it was expressed in one of the FSA/OWI photographers' shooting scripts from February of 1942.

The year before, in 1941, the Museum of Modern Art in New York had set up an open photo competition with the title: "Image of Freedom". Both amateurs and professionals were invited to participate, and from the announcement it is clear what the jury wanted:

"Let us look at these United States .. now in these critical days, when our lives and all that gives them meaning are threatened: () We have seen searching photographic studies of the waste of life and land (), and we have seen the beginnings of reclamation. Now let us see, with a vision equally exact, the power which can remedy these faults ... the vast, unconscious power of millions of us living on American earth, the spirit born of our thoughts, our ways, our homes, our jobs."

Peter Sekaer received three prizes for three pictures in the "Image of Freedom" competition. Two of these show the inhabitants in two housing projects constructed respectively by the government and a private, philanthropic organization.

The first picture shows four smiling Jewish women, looking out of their window in one of the public housing projects (see p. 20). The other picture shows children playing in a playground in a housing project built by private philanthropy. The third and last picture portrays two Mexican girls. One is sitting in a rocking chair playing the guitar, while the other is standing in a doorway holding a child (see p. 21).

Together the three "Image of Freedom" pictures illustrate the direction that documentary photography followed after the New Deal period: emphasis on results and on the positive sides of things. Even though there was much that could become better, America was, and remained, a land of rich possibilities, a land with a wealth of human resources. A land where both the government and the individual could, and should, participate in serving the manifold and yet united people that made up the United States of America.

Peter Sekaer did not become as famous in his lifetime as his friends and colleagues at the FSA, Walker Evans, Ben Shahn and Dorothea Lange. There are several reasons for this.

To begin with, the RA/FSA, the first agency to hire photographers, received by far the greatest public attention. Roy Stryker, head of the FSA photographers, knew just what the Roosevelt administration required in the way of photo-documentary material and attuned his shooting scripts to these needs. In addition, the pictures of the FSA photographers were of a far more visually sensational and momentous sort, especially at the beginning of the period, than those taken by Peter Sekaer for the REA and the USHA. Pictures of fleeing farm families have more immediate appeal than pictures of the erecting of poles for power lines. Peter Sekaer did work for the FSA on a few occasions. But because of an old conflict with Roy Stryker, Sekaer did a limited amount of work for the FSA. This conflict probably arose in 1936, when Sekaer and Stryker together had arranged an exhibition of pictures by FSA (then RA) photographers. The foreword to the exhibition catalogue is signed R.G. Tugwell - a colleague of Roy Stryker's in the federal civil service - but actually it was written by Peter Sekaer himself. Originally Sekaer asked Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt to write the foreword. In his letter to her with suggestions for the formulation of the text are phrases and sentences that reappear in the final foreword.

Insight into Peter Sekaer's failure to attain fame might also be gained by recognizing his independent character, and its consequence, a lack of willingness to cooperate with an authority like Roy Stryker. When the FSA photographers began to document the build-up of the war industry during rearmament for the Second World War, Roy Stryker sent Peter Sekaer to photograph the construction of a trailer camp for the workers at a military airplane factory in Nashville, Tennessee.

That Peter Sekaer did not find the assignment exciting and challenging is more than clear in part of the result shown on p. 22.

In 1942 the Rural Electrification Administration moved from Washington to St. Louis, and Peter Sekaer resigned. For a short period in the following year he worked for the Office of War Information, - the agency which by now had become the new official employer of the FSA-photographers.

Later on in 1943 he became the head of the photographic staff at the American Red Cross. Here, too, the work now concentrated on the war situation. Perhaps it all narrowed down too much to mere war propaganda for Peter Sekaer, as well as limited freedom in photographic expression.

Whatever the reason, before the end of 1943 Sekaer had moved to New York, where, until his death in 1950, he worked primarily as an advertising photographer for Kodak and Bell Telephone, among others. He also did photographic work for magazines like *Vogue* and *Glamour Magazine*.

Whereas American social-documentary photography in the 1930's was of a high standard both as craft and as art, and also expressed a strong personal engagement by each of the government photographers, documentary photography during the war became more and more a matter of propaganda. The monthly magazine *U.S. Camera* reflects this clearly. After the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, half of the magazine was devoted to war photography. In 1944

U.S. Camera published a whole issue on the war: *U.S.A. at War*. The editors had dug out one of Peter Sekaer's pictures - taken about a year before Pearl Harbor. The picture shows a Japanese taking a picture, and under the headline "VERY HONORABLE TOURIST" is the following text:

Nothing could be more symbolic of our sneakthief friend than this picture taken some time before Pearl Harbor. He was actually photographing and taking notes on a small government power project when Peter Sekaer, at that time a Rural Electrification Administration photographer, snapped him. A camera in his hands became deadly, as deadly as the bite of a rattlesnake, we were soon to learn. Scattered through our homes, our restaurants, our universities, these condescending little gremlins found our every weakness; attempted to analyze and duplicate our every strength. Our stupidity aided their cupidity, aided it to the very brink of disaster. On December 7th, 1941, they struck with an effect so shattering we were not to know its full meaning until all the pictures of our helpless sunken fleet were shown, just one year later.

The photographs in this book are mostly from the years 1935 to 1936 - from the trip Peter Sekaer took together with Walker Evans to the states of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. In addition there are some photographs from New York City, which are from the period before Peter Sekaer turned professional and was hired by the federal government. Even though Sekaer was not in actual fact a professional at that time, the pictures for the most part exhibit a highly professional level of work, and - as the captions also demonstrate - with a strong personal commitment. The comments are Peter Sekaer's own words. They were originally written in Danish as explanations of the photographs for his family at home. These photographs are now in the Department of Maps, Prints, and Photography of the Royal Library, Copenhagen.

Short Biography

1901: Born July 19, in Copenhagen. Original name: Peter Ingemann Sekjær. Died July 14, 1950 in Ardsley, New York.

1918-1920: Left Copenhagen at the age of 17 in 1918 to avoid joining his father's import firm. Came to New York and went on to Canada, where several uncles were farmers. Moved on westward and worked as a lumberjack, fireman and cook.

1920: Returned to New York City.

1922 - 26: Worked as a sign painter and window decorator.

1926 - 1934: Ran a business that made large, hand-painted movie signboards.

1928 - 29: Member of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures.

1932: Became an American citizen.

1929 - 1934: Studied painting at the Art Students' League, of which he was a lifelong member. Among his teachers were: Warren Chappel, Georg Grosz, Hans Hoffmann, Jan Matulka and Homer Boss.

Edited the Art Students' Magazine: *The League*, from 1932-33. Sat on the school's Board of Control from 1933-34 (the school was run by the students). Met the painter and photographer Ben Shahn, who was a fellow student. Ben Shahn shared a studio with the photographer Walker Evans at this time, and so Peter Sekaer also became acquainted with Evans.

1934 - 1935: Studied photography at the New School for Social Research together with the photographer Berenice Abbott.

1935 - 36: Went on a trip with Walker Evans to the South.

1936: Arranged a travelling exhibition for the College Art Association of photographs from the Resettlement Administration (RA) - the later Farm Security Administration (FSA) - taken by Walker Evans, Ben Shahn, Arthur Rothstein and Dorothea Lange, among others.

1936 - 1942: Became a staff photographer for the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) and later on the head of REA's graphic department. Was lent to the United States Housing Authority (USHA) from 1938 to 1940 and in 1940 to the Office of Indian Affairs. Also worked for the FSA in 1941.

1938: Exhibited in a travelling exhibition called "Roofs for 40 Million" arranged by An American Group Inc., shown at Rockefeller Center, N.Y.

1940: Research and stills photographer for REA's and U.S. Film Services documentary: *The Power and the Land*, directed by Joris Ivens.

1941: Competed in the Museum of Modern Art's Image of Freedom photo contest. Won three prizes.

1943 - 1944: Worked in 1943 for the Office of War Information. From May 24, 1943 to May 6, 1944 he worked for the American Red Cross, where he was the head of photography from July 12, 1943.

1943 - 1950: Worked as an advertising photographer and did photojournalism for various magazines.

1950: Died July 14, in Ardsley, New York, of a heart attack.

1980: March 12 - April 19: One-man show at the Witkin Gallery, N.Y.

1982: November 1 - December 1: One-man show at the Esther Raushenbush Library, Sarah Lawrence College in Yonkers, Bronxville, N.Y.

1985: The Royal Library receives 100 of Sekaer's photographs.

1986: Three of Sekaer's photographs included in the substantial exhibition at Charlotten-

borg, Copenhagen, illustrating the photographic contents of the Department of Maps, Prints, and Photography.

1988: *November and December: One-man show at the Gallery at the South Presbyterian Church, 343 Broadway, Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.*

1990: *June 12 - July 22: About 90 of the Peter Sekaer photographs in the possession of the Royal Library exhibited in the Round Tower, Copenhagen.*

Archives and Collections in which Peter Sekaer is represented

Denmark:

The Department of Maps, Prints, and Photography at the Royal Library, Copenhagen - 100 items.

U.S.A.:

Museum of Modern Art, N.Y. - 12 items. 3 from the Image of Freedom contest, 9 from Maryland, Kentucky and Alabama; depicting war production and metal reduction plants.

National Archives, Washington D.C. Motifs from various areas, emphasis on housing conditions: Florida, Chicago, New Orleans, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Tennessee and Texas, taken for the United States Housing Authority (USHA). - 43 items.

Also in the National Archives: - 28 items with Sequoyah Indians, Oklahoma. Taken for Office of Indian Affairs. And an unknown number of items taken for the Rural Electrification Administration (REA).

National Records Center, Suitland, Maryland - several hundred items in all. Originally taken for the United States Housing Authority.

Harvard University Art Museums, Ma. - 4 items. 1 with a street scene from New York. 3 of churches.

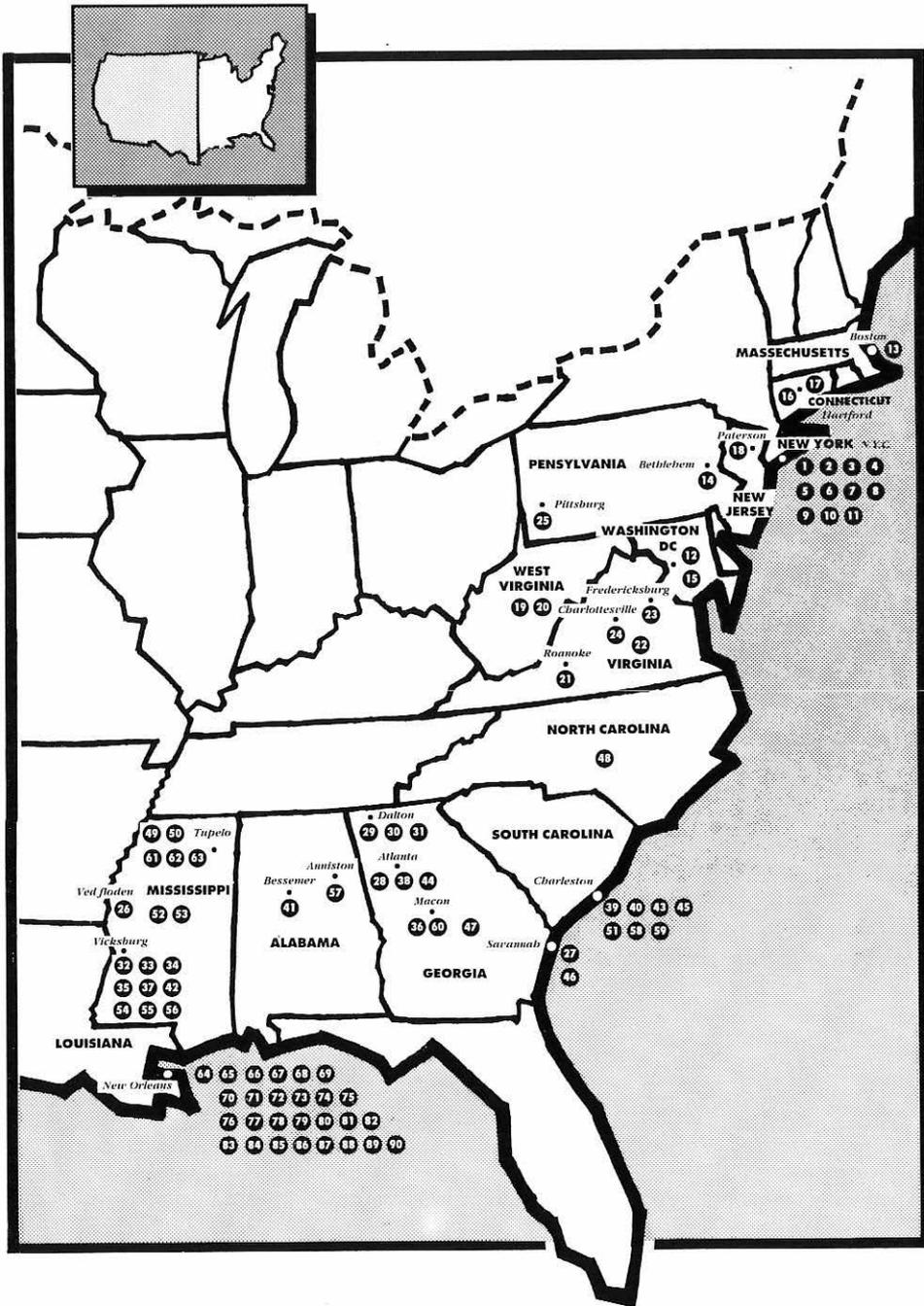
University of Louisville, Ky. - 1 item. Street scene from New York with election posters.

Library of Congress, Washington D.C. - 8 items. All from 1941. Shows construction of a trailer camp for workers in war industry. Nashville, Tenn. Taken for the Farm Security Administration (FSA).

The Library of Congress has also recently received a collection of 300 Sekaer photographs via the Sekaer family. These will become accessible to the public in 1996.

Archive:

Christina Sekaer, N.Y.



Kort over det østlige USA. Numrene refererer til Peter Sekaers fotografier.
 Map showing the eastern part of U.S.A. The numbers refer to Peter Sekaer's pictures.



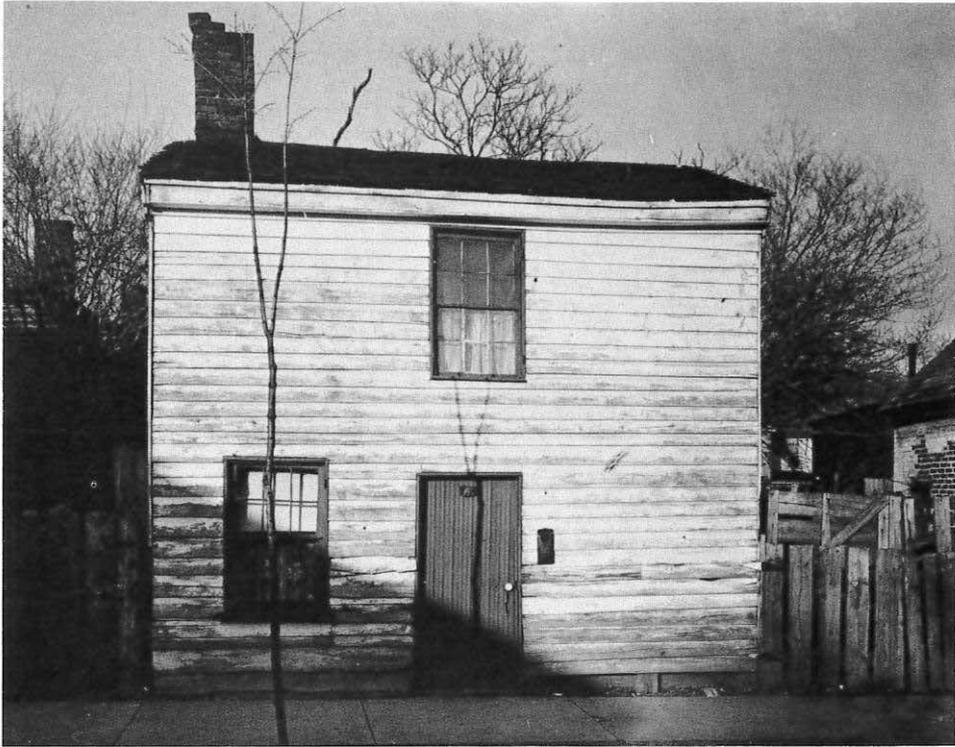
Peter Skaer: "Valgplakater 10de Avenue.N.Y." [ca. 1934-1935] (2)
Peter Skaer: Election posters 10th Avenue. N.Y. [c. 1934-1935] (2)



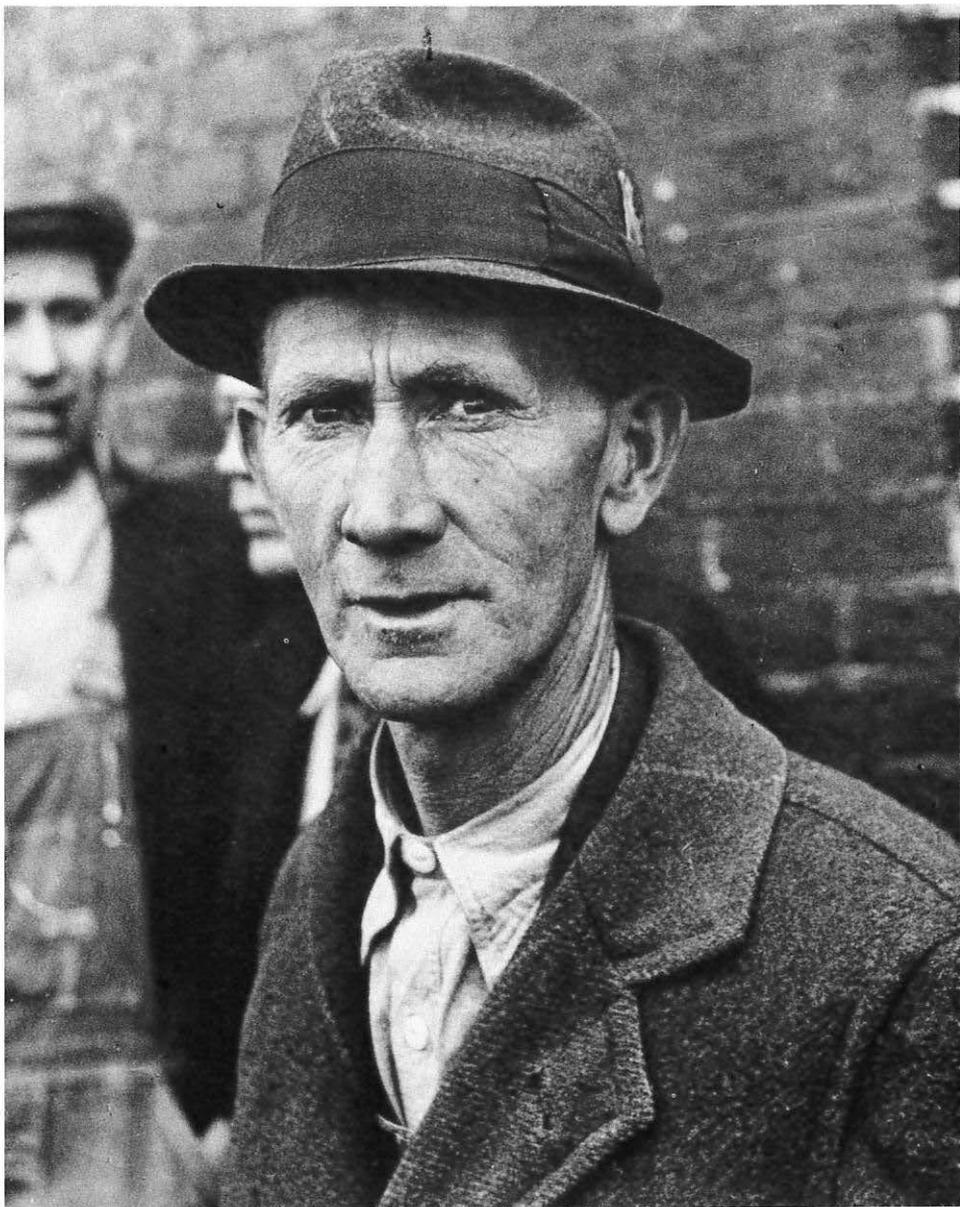
Peter Sekaer: "Gadeparti. N.Y." [ca. 1934-35] (3)
Peter Sekaer: Street scene. N.Y. [c. 1934-35] (3)



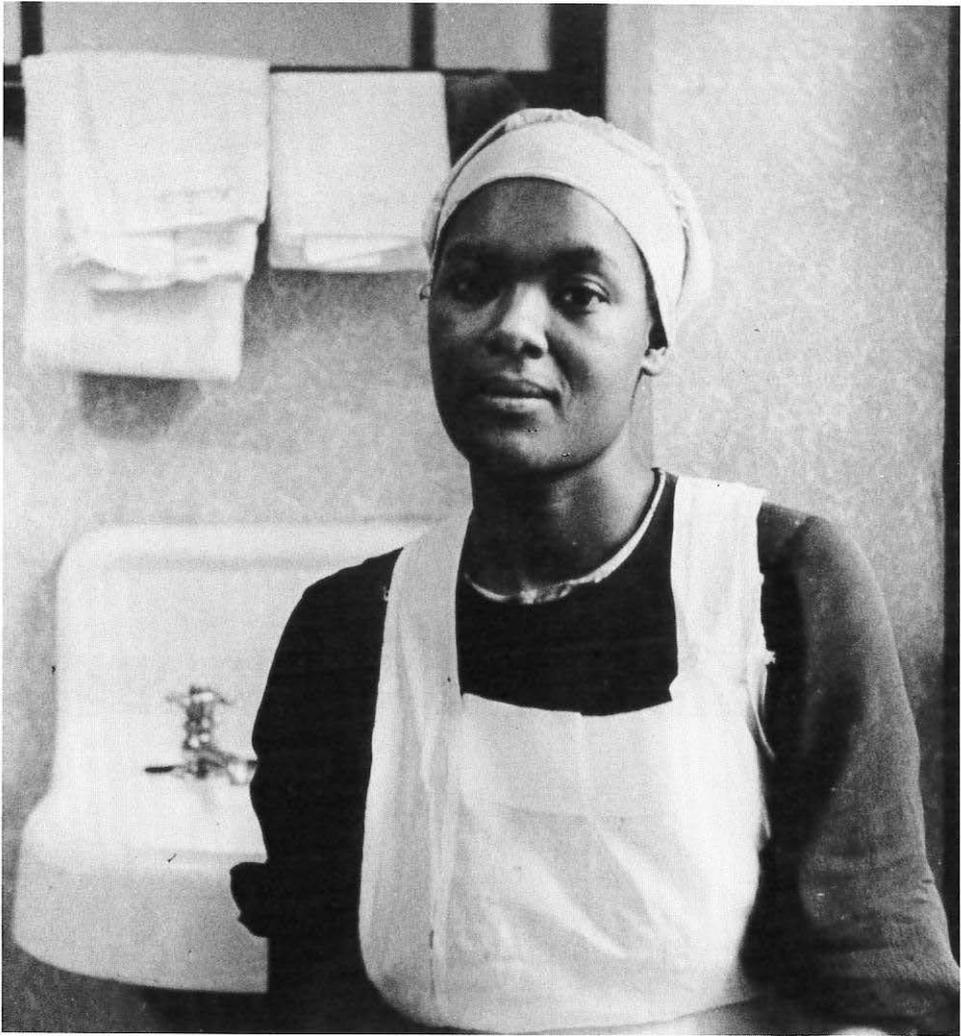
Peter Skaer: "En typisk New Yorker lader sig veje og maale." [ca. 1934-1935] (6)
Peter Skaer: A typical New Yorker gets weighed and measured. [c. 1934-1935] (6)



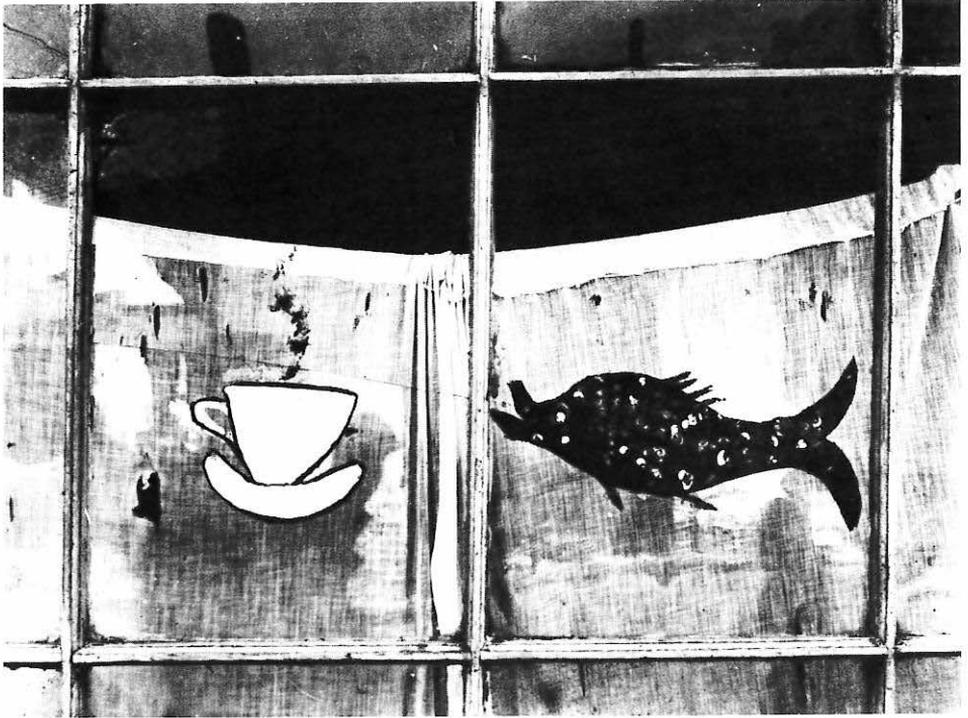
Peter Sekaer: "Gammelt hus i Fredericksburgh, Virginia." [ca. 1935-1936] (23)
Peter Sekaer: Old house in Fredericksburg, Virginia. [c. 1935-1936] (23)



Peter Sekaer: "Bonde. (Dalton, Georgia)." [ca. 1935-1936] (31)
Peter Sekaer: Farmer (Dalton, Georgia). [c. 1935-1936] (31)



Peter Sekaer: "Hotel kammerpige. Atlanta, Georgia" [ca. 1935-1936] (38)
Peter Sekaer: Hotel chambermaid. [c. 1935-1936] (38)



Peter Sekaer: "Skilt paa vindue. Neger restauration, S. Carolina" [ca. 1935-1936] (51)
Peter Sekaer: Sign on a window. Negro restaurant, S. Carolina. [c. 1935-1936] (51)



Peter Sakaer: "Gadeparti med automobil. Vicksburgh, Miss. Neger quarteret. (Dørene lidt skæve stå)" [ca. 1935-1936] (54)

Peter Sakaer: Street scene with a car. Vicksburg, Miss. Negro neighbourhood. (The doors hang a bit crooked). [c. 1935-1936] (54)



Peter Sekaer: "Scene foran tre barberstuer (!) i samme gade." [Vicksburg, Mississippi] [ca. 1935-1936] (55)

Peter Sekaer: *Street scene in front of three barbershops (!) in the same street.* [c. 1935-1936] (55)



Peter Sekaer: "I de nordlige stater er der love mod at gøre forskel i behandlingen af hvide og sorte. Disse love overtrædes imidlertid som reglen. I syden er der derimod love som forbyder Negre at spise i samme cafe'er o.s.v. som hvide. De maa ikke sidde i Biografen undtagen paa Galleriet. Et billed af en neger-galleri-indgang i Anniston, Alabama." [ca. 1935-1936] (57)

Peter Sekaer: In the northern states there are laws against differential treatment of blacks and whites. These laws are generally violated. In the south there are laws that forbid Negroes from eating in the same cafes, etc. as whites. They are not allowed to sit in the movie theatres except in the balcony. A picture of a Negro balcony entrance in Anniston, Alabama. [c. 1935-1936] (57)



Peter Sekaer: "Neger moder. Macon, Georgia." [ca. 1935-1936] (60)
Peter Sekaer: Negro mother. Macon, Georgia. [c. 1935-1936] (60)



Peter Sekaer: "Neger fanger bruges til at bygge landeveje. Megen uret gøres dem. Naar der begaas tyveri og det menes at en neger har gjort det, saa arresteres der en neger. At det ikke er den samme neger gør intet - i fængslet gaar han alligevel! Dette system er hurtigere samt billigere! læg mærke til manden med riflen, fire saadanne er paa vagt til 10-20 fanger." [ca. 1935-1936] (62)

Peter Sekaer: Negro prisoners are used to build roads. They are unjustly treated. When a theft occurs and it is thought that a Negro did it, a Negro gets arrested. That it isn't the same Negro doesn't matter - he goes to prison anyway! This system is quicker and cheaper! Notice the man with the rifle, four of these guard 10-20 prisoners. [c. 1935-1936] (62)



Peter Sekaer: "Gadescene i New Orleans." [ca. 1936] (64)
Peter Sekaer: Street scene in New Orleans. [c. 1936] (64)



Peter Skaer: "Jærn arbejde. Et typisk gammelt hus i det gamle franske kvarter i New Orleans." [ca. 1936] (74)

Peter Skaer: Iron work. A typical old house in the old French quarter in New Orleans. [c. 1936] (74)



Peter Skaer: "Hjørne bisser. Søndag eftermiddag. New Orleans." [ca. 1936] (80)
Peter Skaer: Corner toughs. Sunday afternoon. New Orleans. [c. 1936] (80)



Peter Sekaer: "Hvert aar er der holdt i New Orleans en enorm fest - Mardi Gras. (Byen er endnu tildels fransk). Da negerene selvfølgelig ikke maa deltage holder de deres egne Mardi Gras. De sorte maler sig endnu sortere!" [ca. 1936] (81)

Peter Sekaer: Every year in New Orleans they have a gigantic festival - Mardi Gras. (The city is still partly French). Since the Negroes are, of course, not allowed to participate, they hold their own Mardi Gras. The blacks paint themselves even blacker! [c. 1936] (81)

BILLEDFORTEGNELSE

(Teksterne er Sekaers egne; de er oprindelig skrevet på dansk, da de var henvendt til Peter Sekaers familie i Danmark. Tallene i parentes er den oprindelige nummerering Peter Sekaer gav sine billeder).

- 1: (1) Højbane Station (og kanon) på 14de Gade. N.Y. (Søndag).
- 2: (2) Valgplakater 10de Avenue. N.Y.
- 3: (3) Gadeparti. N.Y.
- 4: (4) Under højbanen. N.Y.
- 5: (7) Foran en Skrædder forretning. N.Y.
- 6: (13) En typisk New Yorker lader sig veje og maale.
- 7: (90) Arbejdsløse samt Skyscrabere
- 8: (9) Arbejdsløse. N.Y. (hjemløse) ved havnen.
- 9: (10) Arbejdsløse barberer sig. N.Y. ved havnen.
- 10: (11) Arbejdsløse soler tæerne. N.Y. ved havnen.
- 11: (92) En statue til en Catolsk præst (før afsløringen) (paa Broadway, New York).
- 12: (84) Hvid mand sover til middag. Washington.
- 13: (97) Typisk sortering af amerikanske børn. Læg mærke til de forskellige racer og typer. Boston.
- 14: (36) Denne værdige dame er 73. Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.
- 15: (52) Neger børn. Washington. DC.
- 16: (16) For 100 [år] siden var der her i landet en bygnings epidemi af gammel græske huse. Denne gamle mødesal - eller kirke - er nu brugt til Danse sal. Nær Hartford, Connecticut.
- 17: (17) Gammel kirke i græsk stil. Connecticut.
- 18: (15) Jærnbanestation i en typisk smaaby. (Patterson, N.Jersey).
- 19: (103) Arbejder på en hejse maskine (?) W. Virginia.
- 20: (94) En fabrik paa landet. I baggrunden arbejderhjem. W. Virginia.
- 21: (22) Fra neger quarteret i Roanoke, Virginia.
- 22: (113) Vindu skilt i en Smaaby. Virginia.
- 23: (18) Gammelt hus i Fredericksburgh, Virginia.
- 24: (53) Neger børn. Charlottesvill. Virginia.
- 25: (95) Flooddamper. Pittsburgh. Pennsylvania.
- 26: (19) Ved Mississippi Floden.
- 27: (114) Slagter skilte. Neger quarteret. Savannah, (Georgia)
- 28: (41) Foran Slagterbutik. Atlanta, Ga.
- 29: (98) Bønder kommer til bys on Lørdag Eftermiddag. (Dalton, Ga.)
- 30: (99) Bønder kommer til bys on Lørdag Eftermiddag. (Dalton, Ga.)
- 31: (100) Bonde. (Dalton, Georgia).
- 32: (23) Neger quarter i Vicksburgh, Mississippi.
- 33: (24) Negerinder kommer hjem fra arbejde i Vicksburgh.
- 34: (25) Neger quarter. Vicksburgh, Mississippi.
- 35: (26) Neger quarter. Vicksburgh, Mississippi.
- 36: (27) Neger quarter. Macon, Georgia. (Hist hvor vejen slaar en bugt).
- 37: (39) Neger bonde dreng. Vicksburgh, Miss.
- 38: (37) Hotel kammerpige. Atlanta, Georgia.
- 39: (111) Restauration for negre. Charleston, S. Carolina
- 40: (64) En neger butik i Charleston, Syd Carolina.

- 41: (46) Neger Jærmmine arbejder. Bessemer, Alabama.
- 42: (93) Fint gammelt hus i Syden (Vicksburgh).
- 43: (82) Hvid mand. Charleston. S: Carolina.
- 44: (96) To mænd som tisser. Atlanta, Ga.
- 45: (77) Naar pigen bli'r gammel saa bliver hun sær, og melder sig da ind i Frelsens Hær.
- 46: (74) Skiltet siger "møblerede værelser"! Savannah, Ga.
- 47: (105) Børn paa landet køres til - og fra - skole i en omnibus (Georgia).
- 48: (110) Butik og Cafe i en landsby (N. Carolina).
- 49: (29) Neger quarter. Tupelo, Mississippi. I baggrunden Amtsædet - i forgrunden et andet sæde.
- 50: (30) Et hyggeligt W.C. i neger quarteret - ret typisk. Det er i udkanten af byen Tupelo som blev ødelagt af en Cyclone (Hurricane? - Typhoon?) siste aar; saa dette stakkels lokom staa vel ikke længere.
- 51: (112) Skilt på vindue. Neger restauration, S. Carolina.
- 52: (106) Foran en heste forretning. (Mississippi).
- 53: (107) Seletøj til Muldyr. (Mississippi).
- 54: (32) Gadeparti med automobil. Vicksburgh, Miss. Neger quarteret. (Dørene lidt skæve staa).
- 55: (33) Scene foran tre barberstuer (!) i samme gade.
- 56: (56) "Kærlighed er Ung" staa der paa Biograf plakaten. Vicksburgh.
- 57: (21) I de nordlige stater er der love mod at gøre forskel i behandling af hvide og sorte. Disse love overtrædes imidlertid som reglen. I syden er der derimod love som forbyder Negre at spise i samme cafe' er o.s.v. som hvide. De må ikke sidde i Biografen undtagen paa Galleriet. Et billed af en neger-galleri-indgang i Anniston, Alabama.
- 58: (58) Sorte havne arbejdere venter paa en dampers ankomst. Charleston, Syd Carolina.
- 59: (20) Det forbydes negre at drikke hvor de hvide drikker, saa der anskaffes dem en særlig vandpost. (Ordet "colored" betyder "farvet" og er et høfligt navn for neger! N.B. Dette gælder i de sydlige stater.
- 60: (28) Neger moder. Macon, Georgia.
- 61: (35) Et forholdsvis stort negerhjem. - De fleste har kun et værelse. Tupelo, Mississippi.
- 62: (43) Neger fanger bruges til at bygge landeveje. Megen uret gøres dem. Naar der begaas tyveri og det menes at en neger har gjort det, saa arresteres der en neger. At det ikke er den samme neger gør intet - i fængslet gaar han alligevel! Dette system er hurtigere samt billigere! læg mærke til manden med riflen, fire saadanne er paa vagt til 10-20 fanger.
- 63: (55) Monumented er til ære for soldaterne der sloges for borgerkrigen imod de nordlige stater.
- 64: (70) Gadescene i New Orleans.
- 65: (45) Neger par. Han er skopudser. New Orleans.
- 66: (40) Moder og datter. New Orleans.
- 67: (117) Zigøjner frenologist's skilt. (Stavelsen er fuldkommen forkert). New Orleans.
- 68: (71) Bag vindu skærmen (?) sidder en højst uartig pige og tilbyder sig til passerene herrer! New Orleans.
- 69: (73) Denne sidder og venter paa sømænd - ja, eller landmænd! New Orleans.
- 70: (72) Til venstre en beværtning (knejspe?), til højre en anden pige er engageret i uhellig forretning.

- 71: (68) Gamle fine huse i New Orleans.
 72: (69) Gamle fine huse i New Orleans.
 73: (66) Napoleon's amerikanske venner byggede dette hus for ham og havde netop arrangeret med Søroveren La fitte at befri Napoleon fra St. Helena da der kom ord at Kejseren var død.
 74: (65) Jærn arbejde. Et typisk gammelt hus i det gamle franske quarter i New Orleans.
 75: (80) Chemisk rensning. New Orleans.
 76: (67) Neger quarteret i New Orleans.
 77: (83) Neger kvinde New Orleans.
 78: (49) Gadescene. New Orleans.
 79: (50) Neger kælling. New Orleans.
 80: (81) Hjørne bisser. Søndag eftermiddag. New Orleans.
 81: (59) Hvert aar er der holdt i New Orleans en enorm Fest - Mardi Gras. (Byen er endnu tildels fransk). Da negerene selvfølgelig ikke maa deltage holder de deres egne Mardi Gras. De sorte maler sig endnu sortere!
 82: (60) Perlemoders knapper staver Z. Det er for Zulu kongen!
 83: (61) En af Zulukongens mænd. Læg mærke til Whisky flasken om hans hals!
 84: (62) Tilskuere.
 85: (63) Store festligheder i Neger byen. Her spises iskager.
 86: (78) Zigøjnere i New Orleans.
 87: (86) Familie ved Mardi Gras. N. Orleans.
 88: (87) Tilskuere ved Mardi Gras (Nonner).
 89: (88) Tilskuere ved Mardi Gras (Kontor piger).
 90: (89) Tilskuere ved Mardi Gras (Skolebørn ser efter flyver)
 91: (uden for nummer) Veranda med børn og voksne (hvide + en negerdreng). Opklæbet på karton. På bagsiden står der: Please (pay and) return to Peter Sekaer. Photographic mount United States Department of Agriculture.

Picture captions

(The captions are Sekaer's own; they were originally written in Danish, because they were written for Sekaer's family in Denmark. The numbers in parentheses are the original numbering that Peter Sekaer put on his pictures.)

- 1: (1) *Elevated Station (and canon) on 14th Street. N.Y. (Sunday).*
 2: (2) *Election posters 10th Avenue. N.Y.*
 3: (3) *Street scene. N.Y.*
 4: (4) *Under the elevated. N.Y.*
 5: (7) *In front of a tailor's shop. N.Y.*
 6: (13) *A typical New Yorker gets weighed and measured.*
 7: (90) *Unemployed and skyscrapers.*
 8: (9) *Unemployed, N.Y. (homeless) by the harbour.*
 9: (10) *Unemployed shaving themselves, N.Y. by the harbour.*
 10: (11) *Unemployed sunning their toes. N.Y. by the harbour.*

- 11: (92) *A statue of a Catholic priest (before unveiling) (on Broadway, New York).*
- 12: (84) *A white man takes a nap. Washington.*
- 13: (97) *Typical assortment of American children. Notice the different types and races. Boston.*
- 14: (36) *This worthy lady is 73. Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.*
- 15: (52) *Negro children. Washington. D.C.*
- 16: (16) *One hundred years ago there was a construction epidemic of old Greek houses. This old meeting house - or church - is now used as a dance hall. Near Hartford, Connecticut.*
- 17: (17) *Old church in Greek style. Connecticut.*
- 18: (18) *Railroad station in a typical small town. (Patterson, N. Jersey).*
- 19: (103) *Worker on a hoist (?) W. Virginia.*
- 20: (94) *A factory in the country, in the background workers' homes. W. Virginia.*
- 21: (22) *From the Negro neighbourhood in Roanoke, Virginia.*
- 22: (113) *Window sign in a small town. Virginia.*
- 23: (18) *Old house in Fredericksburg, Virginia.*
- 24: (53) *Negro children. Charlottesville. Virginia.*
- 25: (95) *River steamer. Pittsburgh. Pennsylvania*
- 26: (19) *By the Mississippi River.*
- 27: (114) *Butcher sign. Negro neighbourhood. Savannah. (Georgia)*
- 28: (41) *In front of a butcher's shop. Atlanta, Ga.*
- 29: (98) *Farmers coming to town on Saturday afternoon. (Dalton, Ga.)*
- 30: (99) *Farmers coming to town on Saturday afternoon. (Dalton, Ga.)*
- 31: (100) *Farmer. (Dalton, Georgia.)*
- 32: (23) *Negro neighbourhood in Vicksburg, Mississippi.*
- 33: (24) *Negro women coming home from work in Vicksburg.*
- 34: (25) *Negro neighbourhood. Vicksburg, Mississippi.*
- 35: (26) *Negro neighbourhood. Vicksburg, Mississippi.*
- 36: (27) *Negro neighbourhood. Macon, Georgia. (There where the road curves).*
- 37: (39) *Negro farm boy. Vicksburg, Miss.*
- 38: (37) *Hotel chambermaid. Atlanta, Georgia.*
- 39: (111) *Restaurant for Negroes. Charleston, S. Carolina.*
- 40: (64) *A Negro shop in Charleston, South Carolina.*
- 41: (46) *Negro iron miner. Bessemer, Alabama.*
- 42: (93) *Fine old house in the South (Vicksburg).*
- 43: (82) *White man. Charleston. S. Carolina.*
- 44: (96) *Two men peeing. Atlanta, Ga.*
- 45: (77) *When she gets old then she gets barmy, and then she joins the Salvation Army.*
- 46: (74) *The sign says "furnished rooms"! Savannah, Ga.*
- 47: (105) *The children in the country are driven back and forth to school in a bus (Georgia).*
- 48: (110) *Shop and cafe in a village (N. Carolina).*
- 49: (29) *Negro neighbourhood. Tupelo, Mississippi. In the background the county seat - in the foreground a seat of another kind.*
- 50: (30) *A cozy outhouse in a Negro neighbourhood - typical. It is on the edge of the city of Tupelo, which was destroyed by a cyclone (hurricane? - typhoon?) last year; so the poor outhouse probably isn't standing any longer.*
- 51: (112) *Sign on a window. Negro restaurant, S. Carolina.*
- 52: (106) *In front of a horse dealer's (Mississippi).*

- 53: (107) *Harness for mules. (Mississippi).*
- 54: (32) *Street scene with a car. Vicksburg, Miss. Negro neighbourhood. (The doors hang a bit crooked).*
- 55: (33) *Scene in front of three barbershops (!) in the same street.*
- 56: (56) *"Love is Young" is playing at the movies. Vicksburg.*
- 57: (21) *In the northern states there are laws against differential treatment of blacks and whites. These laws are generally violated. In the south there are laws that forbid Negroes from eating in the same cafes, etc. as whites. They are not allowed to sit in the movie theaters except in the balcony. A picture of a Negro balcony entrance in Anniston, Alabama.*
- 58: (58) *Black dock workers waiting for the arrival of a steamship. Charleston, South Carolina.*
- 59: (20) *Negroes are forbidden to drink where the whites drink, so there is a special pump for them. (The word "colored" means "farvet" and is a polite name for Negro. N.B. This is in the southern states.*
- 60: (28) *Negro mother. Macon, Georgia.*
- 61: (35) *A relatively large Negro home. - Most have only one room. Tupelo, Mississippi.*
- 62: (43) *Negro prisoners are used to build roads. They are unjustly treated. When a theft occurs and it is thought that a Negro did it, a Negro gets arrested. That it isn't the same Negro doesn't matter - he goes to prison anyway! This system is quicker and cheaper! Notice the man with the raffle, four of these guard 10-20 prisoners.*
- 63: (55) *The monument honors the soldiers who fought in the Civil War against the North.*
- 64: (70) *Street scene in New Orleans.*
- 65: (45) *Negro couple. He is a shoe shine. New Orleans.*
- 66: (40) *Mother and daughter New Orleans.*
- 67: (117) *Gypsy phrenologist's sign. (The spelling is completely wrong). New Orleans.*
- 68: (71) *Behind the window screen sits a naughty girl and offers herself to the passing gentlemen! New Orleans.*
- 69: (73) *This one sits and waits for sailors - or farmers! New Orleans.*
- 70: (72) *On the left a saloon, on the right another girl engaged in unholy business.*
- 71: (68) *Fine old houses in New Orleans.*
- 72: (69) *Fine old houses in New Orleans.*
- 73: (66) *Napoleon's American friends built this house for him, and had just arranged with the pirate La fitte to liberate Napoleon from St. Helena when word came that the Emperor was dead.*
- 74: (65) *Iron work. A typical old house in the old French quarter in New Orleans.*
- 75: (80) *Dry cleaning. New Orleans.*
- 76: (67) *Negro quarter in New Orleans.*
- 77: (83) *Negro woman. New Orleans.*
- 78: (49) *Street scene. New Orleans.*
- 79: (50) *Negro woman. New Orleans.*
- 80: (81) *Corner toughs. Sunday afternoon. New Orleans.*
- 81: (59) *Every year in New Orleans they have a gigantic festival - Mardi Gras. (The city is still partly French). Since the Negroes are, of course, not allowed to participate, they hold their own Mardi Gras. The blacks paint themselves even blacker!*
- 82: (60) *The mother-of-pearl buttons spell Z for Zulu King!*

- 83: (61) *One of the Zulu King's men. Notice the whisky bottle around his neck.*
- 84: (62) *Spectators.*
- 85: (63) *Partying in the Negro town. Eating ice cream.*
- 86: (78) *Gypsies in New Orleans.*
- 87: (86) *Family at Mardi Gras. New Orleans.*
- 88: (87) *Spectators at Mardi Gras (nuns).*
- 89: (88) *Spectators at Mardi Gras (office girls).*
- 90: (89) *Spectators at Mardi Gras (school children watching airplanes).*
- 91: *(no number) Porch with children and adults (whites + one Negro boy). Glued onto cardboard. On the back it says: Please (pay and) return to Peter Sekaer. Photographic mount United States Department of Agriculture.*

INTET AT FOTOGRAFERE HER!

Peter Sekaer, denne artikels forfatter, er stabsfotograf hos Rural Electrification Administration. Bedre kendt i regeringens bogstavsystem som REA. Som den fotograf og kunster han er, påstår Sekaer, at det for ham er langt vanskeligere at skrive om fotografiet end at tage et billede. Redaktørerne på U.S. Camera synes, at Sekaers enkle, men alt for ofte upåagtede råd og vink på disse par sider, er en af de bedste artikler, vi nogensinde har bragt. Således kommer den til at udgøre den første artikel af en serie forfattet af fotografer. Vore dages journalistiske krav gør fotografer til top-reportere. De løser deres opgave med både billeder *og ord*.

“Det er let nok for sådan en som dig at finde gode motiver. Du rejser, du har hele USA, du kan tage billeder af.” Således sagde en ven til mig, en fotograf, som jeg kørte igennem en gade i en by i Midtvesten med. “Jeg, derimod, *bor* i denne kedelige by, hvor der er absolut intet at fotografere. Jeg har været i hver eneste gade igen og igen, og på hver eneste vej i en omkreds af 50 *miles*. Ikke andet end kedelige mennesker, kedelige huse og en kedelig omegn.” Mens han talte, passerede vi en uendelig række af mulige motiver: Folk på fortove, små mørke unger der legede på gaden, siddende mennesker på verandaer, hunde, huse, skilte, træer osv. Jeg sagde noget om alt dette. “Sludder”, sagde han, “Hvem har lyst til at fotografere dét!” Han led af kunst med stort K og var blevet ramt af Dokumentar-feberen. Hvad han ledte efter var skudklare stilleben. Fornemme victorianske huse; udgåede, vejrbidte træer; jødiske rabbinere i fuld ornat; eller kasserede voksfigurer. Han fandt aldrig noget, han kunne rette søgeren mod; hans synsvinkel var altid blokeret af utallige ting og personer - alle i høj grad fotogene, men for ham uvedkommende og i vejen.

Jeg var blevet sendt til hans by af United States Housing Authority, fordi regeringen planlagde et beboelsesprojekt her, og jeg skulle tage billeder af de slum-områder, der skulle rives ned. Min ven var taget med for at hjælpe mig med at finde de rette gader. Jeg var især på udkig efter motiver, der kunne illustrere den typiske mangel på legemuligheder i et overfyldt slum-område, og da vi kom forbi en gyde, hvor nogle børn stod omkring en purk, der reparerede en klapvogn, parkerede jeg bilen. Rollingerne holdt inde med legen og hengav sig til at betragte de fremmede med kameraet. Uden at se direkte i deres retning rettede jeg vinkelsøgeren på plads. Altimens vedblev min ven at præke om selvrealisering indenfor fotografi og om kunst. Jeg ved ikke, om der findes noget sådant. Jeg har hørt, at du kan opnå det ved en udløsning med en blænde, der ikke er større end $f/128$. Hvorom alting er, mit arbejde er fotografering og ikke kunst.

Da intet hændte, blev ungerne trætte af os og genoptog deres forehavende. Jeg eksponerede (1/100 sekund, ved blænde $f/8$, eller deromkring), og vi kørte videre. Et par gader længere henne stødte vi på en klynge huse, der hældte ned mod et jernbaneterræn. Et typisk eksempel på dårlig byplanlægning. USHA kunne bruge sådan et billede, så jeg tog det. For hvis du fotograferer for regeringen, skal det kunne bruges; og hvert eneste billede du tager skal indeholde information om sit emne.

Som jeg ser på det, er Verden sammensat af fotografiske motiver. Hvad du ønsker at fotografere, er et spørgsmål om en smule iagttagelse og om at have en klar idé om, hvad det er du vil sige. Og hvad du vil sige er et spørgsmål om, hvad du ønsker at viderebringe i dit billede. For med billeder kan du sige, hvad du ikke kan sige med ord. Med et billede præsenterer du direkte for beskueren de følelser, der gjorde at motivet fængslede dig. En forfatter eller en reporter, derimod, er kun i stand til gennem ords sammenstilling

tilnærmelsesvis at oversætte det levende motiv, som hans læser dernæst selv må oversætte tilbage i en 'tilnærmelsesvis tilnærmelse'. Og det er i orden, for hvis det var muligt at sige med ord, hvad der kan siges med billeder, så ville du og jeg spilde tiden, uanset det er rent maleriske eller dokumentariske billeder, vi tager.

På det seneste er ordet 'dokumentar' ved at blive lige så misbrugt som ordet 'kunst'. Oprindeligt, tror jeg, at det optrådte på Eugene Atgets dør i Paris. Han havde et lille skilt, hvorpå der stod: "Documents pour Artistes". Og i sine nu så berømte fotografier, som han solgte til samtidens kunstnere, var der detaljeret fotografisk information om ting, mennesker og steder. Malere som Utrillo, Bracque og Picasso var blandt hans kunder; og de henholdt sig til hans fotografier, når de skulle lave autentiske detaljer i deres malerier - så på den måde *var* fotografierne dokumenter. Og se, hvad der nu er sket med ordet 'dokumentar'! Et hvilket som helst deprimerende fotografi, enhver fattigdomsscene (for ikke at tale om enhver film med den mest firkantede propaganda) er nu 'dokumentarisk'. Der er stor forskel på at illustrere menneskers liv og levned og på at prædike det dokumentariske evangelium. Ens arbejde ville være fuld af banaliteter, hvis man forsøgte at få sine billeder til at sige noget, de ikke sagde. Hvis man vil fremføre et dogme, bør man stille sig op på sin kamerataske. Kameraet selv kan aldrig overtage talerstolens plads.

De tilsyneladende begrænsninger regeringsfotograferne er underlagt, er ikke begrænsninger i sig selv, men rettere begrænsninger i udtryksmåde. Visse ting *skal* fremhæves fremfor andre. Her ligger landet - tag for dig af motiverne. Man skal selvfølgelig bruge sin sunde fornuft. Nøgenmodeller på divaner, f.eks., siger ikke meget om brandfælder i slumbebyggelser, elektrificering af landdistrikterne eller afgrødekontrol.

At fotografere for de forskellige organer i Washington er på ingen måde normgivet. Edwin Lockes fremragende artikel i forårsnummeret af U.S. Camera fortalte, hvad der ligger til grund for FSAs total-engagement. Selv den mest stivnakkede, billedforbrugende tjenestemand lærer af FSA, at de eneste billeder der fortæller *om* mennesker er billeder *af* mennesker. FSA-fotografernes spillerum er ikke desto mindre enestående. De fleste andre regeringsorganer må mere eller mindre begrænse deres fotografiske aktiviteter til øjeblikkets behov. Der skal skaffes billeder til en bestemt udstilling, en bestemt pjece eller i forbindelse med offentliggørelsen af et nyt projekt. Af den ene eller anden grund skal særlige emner illustreres nu og her: øget undervisning af indianerbørn; behovet for elektricitet i de mindre jordbrug; eller den tætte slums betydning for folkesundheden. Alt dette forudsætter et målrettet arbejde fra fotografens side - og det er kun godt. Det er f.eks. utroligt, hvor mange måder hvorpå man kan fotografere de dybereliggende årsager til ungdomskriminalitet. Det målrettede arbejde giver også en større fortrolighed med selve emnet. Og fortrolighed med emnet er ligeså vigtigt for fotografen som hans objektiv. Desto mere man forstår emnet, desto mere holder man af det (eller hader det), og desto lettere bliver ens job.

Netop derfor var min ven galt afmarcheret. Det er ikke lettere at få gode billeder ved altid at rejse nye steder hen. Det er sværere. Hvis f.eks. Luke Swank fotograferede Californiens ørken eller udsigten fra Alfred Stieglitz' vindue, kunne han ende med et hæderligt stykke arbejde. Men det ville ikke være noget i sammenligning med, hvad han kunne lave hjemme i Pittsburgh. Ligeledes med Edward Weston - formoder jeg, som aldrig ville modtage Guggenheim-prisen for nogle billeder, han tog på en weekend-tur i Pittsburghs mørke baggårde. På mit første job for USHA fik jeg en liste over 20 byer, som skulle have fotograferet deres slum; samt en oversigt over hvilke ting der skulle fokuseres på. Se, Washington og Baltimore har noget af landets fineste slum-sceneri. Så hvorfor tage til 20 byer? For at få det samme sæt billeder 20 gange? Nej, ikke på den måde, selvom USHA insisterede på, at de 20 byer hver især skulle skildres. Når alt kom til alt, var det her, der

skulle opføres tyve nye boligområder. Det betød, at jeg på meget kort tid skulle lære mest muligt om hver eneste by. Først skulle jeg have nogle data og statistiske facts. Hvor gammel var byen, hvordan havde den udviklet sig, hvad foregik der i den, og hvordan var den på disse områder forskellig fra alle de øvrige byer? Noget af dette kunne findes i guide-bøger og et enkelt værk om kultur-geografi. Men det meste af det måtte læres ved i nogle dage at gå og køre i gaderne og tale med alle mulige - borgmesteren, politimesteren, forretningsfolk, ekspedienter, kunstnere, betjente, bartendere og repræsentanter for den lette garde. På denne måde var det muligt at få de ting frem, der gjorde hver enkelt by enestående. Disse forskellige kan aldrig findes ved at studere størrelsen og formen på posthuset, banegården eller mindeparken. Sommetider er forskellene små, men de er der. De kan ses på indbyggerne og deres hjem. Af en eller anden grund gælder dette specielt for fattigfolk. Det blev muligt at vise med billeder, at selvom megen slum har mange ting til fælles, så er der ikke to ens slumområder i Amerika. Alle har deres egne karakteristika. Alt efter hvilken slags industri, topografi, byggeskik og grundprismiveau (som hvis det er højt tvinger folk og huse tæt sammen; og hvis det er lavt forårsager at rønnerne spreder sig ud) osv så har en bys beboere et specielt livsmønster, som er forskelligt fra alle andre. I det omfang det var mig muligt af fordøje alle disse forhold, fik jeg taget billeder, der retfærdiggjorde besøgende til de forskellige byer. Men hvis jeg nu havde boet i en by længe nok til at kende den som min egen bukselomme, ville mine billeder have været meget stærkere.

Hvis du holder af det boligområde, du bor i, og gi'r dig tid til at se på det og kigge på dets huse, mennesker, træer, trafik, baggårde og sollysets måde at falde på i gaden og regnens måde at løbe på i rendestenen, så vil du aldrig løbe tør for motiver. Du vil opdage, at de begrænsninger du sætter ved ikke at se ud over det velkendte, vil få dig til at tage bedre billeder. Hvadenten du tager dem for regeringen eller til en fotoklub-konkurrence.

Og hvis du ikke bryder dig om dit boligområde? Tja, måske kan du lide floden, der løber igennem i den anden ende af byen. Fabrikkerne? De gamle huse? Menneskene på parkens bænke? Din mor? Din datter der boltrer sig i haven? OK, men find så ud af, hvorfor du ikke bryder dig om dem. Tag billeder af dem, og fortæl os andre hvorfor. Hvis det stadig ikke har din interesse, så bør du måske tage ud og rejse - men lad kameraet blive derhjemme.

- Peter Sekaer

(Fra: U.S.Camera, august 1941)

Nothing to Photograph Here!

Editor's note - Peter Sekaer, author of this article is staff photographer for the Rural Electrification Administration, better known in the government alphabet system as the R.E.A. An artist and photographer Sekaer contends that writing about photography is for him a far more difficult task than taking a picture. The editors of U.S.Camera feel that Sekaer's simple but too often unheeded advice on these two pages is one of the best articles we have ever published. As such it becomes the first of a series of features in words by photographers. Today's journalistic demands are making photographers ace reporters. They are meeting their responsibility with pictures and words.

"It's easy enough for you to get subject matter. You travel, you have the whole United States to take pictures of." I was being addressed by a friend, a photographer with whom I was driving along a street in a midwestern town. "Me, I have to live here in this dull town where there's absolutely nothing to photograph. I have been on every street in it time and again, and every road in a fifty-mile radius. Nothing but dull people, dull houses, dull country." We passed, as he was talking, an infinite succession of picture possibilities: people along the sidewalks, piccaninies playing in the street, sitters posing on porches, dogs, houses, signs, trees, etc. I said something about all this. "Oh, nuts", he said, "Who wants to photograph that!" He had Art disease, was all broken out in a Documentary rash. He was looking for still-lifes all set up ready for the camera, for fancy Victorian houses, dead weather-bleached trees, Jewish rabbis in regalia, or discarded wax figures. He never found anything to aim his camera at; his view was always obstructed by countless things and people - all thoroughly photogenic, but, to him, irrelevant and in the way.

I had been sent to his town by the United States Housing Authority, because a government housing project was being planned there, and I had to get pictures of the slum areas which were to be demolished. My friend had come along to help me find the right streets. I was, in particular, looking for subjects to illustrate the lack of children's play-space typical of crowded slums, and when we passed an alley where some children were centered around a kid repairing a go-cart, I parked the car. The urchins stopped playing and gave themselves over to watching the strangers with the camera. Without looking directly their way, I worked close to the group and slipped and angle view finder in place. My friend continued to hold forth on self-expression in photography and on Art. I don't know if there is such a thing. I have heard say you can get it by shooting through nothing larger than f/128. Anyway, my work is photography and not Art.

When nothing happened the kids got bored with us and went back to what they had been doing. I made the exposure (1/100 sec. at f/8, or something), and we drove off. A few streets farther on we came upon a group of houses slanting toward a railroad yard; a typical example of bad city planning. The USHA could use a picture of this, so I took it. For if you are photographing for the Government, you are photographing for use; and every picture you take must convey information about its subject.

As I see it, the world is made up entirely of photographic subject matter. What to photograph is a matter of a little observation and of having a clear idea of the statement you wish to make. By statement I mean whatever it is you wish to get across in your picture. For with pictures you can say what you can't say with words. In a picture you present directly to the spectator's eye and emotions the object that excited you; whereas an author or reporter is able to offer only the arrangement of words into which he has translated an approximation of the original object and which his reader must then re-translate into an "approximate approximation." And that's a good thing, for if it were possible to say in words what can be said in pictures, you and I would be wasting our time, whether it is pictorial or documentary pictures we are taking.

Recently that word "documentary" has begun to take as much abuse as the word "Art." Originally, I believe, it appeared on Eugene Atget's door in Paris. He had a little sign which said, "Documents pour Artistes", and through his now famous prints he sold to contemporary artists detailed photographic information about things, people, and places. Such painters as Utrillo, Braque, and Picasso were among his customers; they referred to his prints for authentic details in their paintings, so the prints were in that sense documents. And now look what has been done to the word "documentary"! Any depressing photograph, any scene of poverty (not to mention every motion picture with a steamroller of propaganda) is now a "documentary". There's a great difference between illustrating the activities of

people or recording their conditions, on the one hand, and preaching a "documentary" sermon, on the other. Your portfolio will be full of banalities if you try to make your subjects say things they weren't saying. If you have a doctrine to expound get up on your camera case; the camera itself will never take the place of a soapbox.

The apparent limitations imposed on government photographers are really not that at all, but rather limitations of statements. Certain things have to be said and not any other things. Here's the whole country - help yourself to subject matter. Of course, you must use your judgment. Nudes on divans, for instance, tell very little about slum fire traps, rural electrification, or even crop control.

The procedure in photographing for the various agencies in Washington is by no means standardized. Edwin Locke's excellent article in the spring issue of U.S. Camera told what is behind the credit line FSA. The most timid "picture user" in Civil Service is learning from FSA that the only pictures that tell about humans are pictures of humans.

The broad scope of the FSA photographic unit is, nevertheless, unique. Most other Government agencies must limit their photographic activities more or less to the needs of the moment. Pictures must be had for a certain exhibit, illustrations for a pamphlet, coverage of a new project for news releases. For this or that reason specific points must be illustrated now: progressive education of Indian children, the need for electric power on small farms, or the effect of slum crowding on public health.

All this makes for a narrower focus of attention on the part of the photographer - and that is all to the good. It is amazing how many ways there are, for instance, to photograph the underlying causes of juvenile delinquency. The narrower scope also makes for closer familiarity with the subject matter. And familiarity with the subject matter is as important to the photographer as his lens. The better you understand your subject, the more you love it (or even hate it), the easier is your job.

That is just why my friend was wrong. It is not easier to get good pictures if you travel always to new places. It is harder. If, for instance, Luke Swank were to photograph the California desert or the view from Alfred Stieglitz's window, he might do a creditable job, but it would not come up to what he can do at home in Pittsburgh. Likewise Edward Weston would - chances are - never get a Guggenheim on the strength of pictures he might take during a weekend in Pittsburgh's back alleys.

On my first assignment for USHA I was given a list of twenty cities that were to have their slum pictures taken, and an outline of the points to be illustrated in these pictures. Now, Washington and Baltimore have some of the finest slum scenery in the country. Why, therefore, go to twenty cities? To get the same set of pictures over again twenty times? That would hardly do, yet the Housing Authority insisted that the twenty towns be covered individually; after all, that was where the twenty new housing projects were being built. This meant that in a very short time I must learn as much as possible about each town. First I had to get some dates and statistics. How old was the town, how did it develop, what went on in it, how did it differ in these respects from all other towns? Some of this could be crammed from guide books and a volume on economic geography, but most of it had to be learned through a couple of days of riding and walking the streets, and talking with everybody possible - the mayor or police chief, business men, store clerks, artists, cops, barkeeps, and bordello representatives. Through this procedure it was possible to uncover the things that set each town apart from every other town. And those differences are never to be found in the size and shape of the post office, the railway depot, or the memorial park. They are sometimes slight, but they are there. They can be seen in the people and in their homes. For some reason, this is especially true of the poor people, and it became possible to demonstrate in pictures that while our slums have certain things in common, no two

American slums are alike. All have distinguishing characteristics. Depending on the chief industries in a town, on its topography, on its traditions in housing, on real estate values (which, if high, force the crowding of houses and people, and if low, allow shacks to sprawl), and depending also on many other factors, the people develop characteristic living habits that differ from those of people elsewhere. Insofar as I was able to digest these factors, I got pictures which justified the visits to the various towns, but had I stayed in one town long enough to learn it by heart, my pictures would have been very much stronger.

If you like the block you live in and spend some time looking it over and thinking about the houses of it, the people, the trees, the traffic, the alley cats, the way the sun falls across the street, or the rain runs in the gutter, you need never lack subject matter. You will discover that the limitations you put on yourself by not looking beyond what you are familiar with will certainly help you get better pictures, whether you are taking them for the Government or for a camera club contest.

And if you don't like your own block? Well, you may like the river that runs through the other side of town. The big industrial plants? The old architecture? The people on park benches? Your Mother? Your daughter romping in the garden? You don't like any of these? All right, tell yourself why you don't like them. Then photograph them and tell the rest of us. If you still aren't interested, maybe you'd better take a trip - but leave your camera at home.

- Peter Sekaer

(from: U.S.Camera, August, 1941)

LITTERATUR

Der er - både gennem tekst og billeder - rig mulighed for at stifte nærmere bekendtskab med USA's sociale og politiske historie i 1930'erne.

Et godt, bredt historisk værk om perioden er f.eks.:

Arthur S. Link & William B. Catton: American Epoch. A History of the United States Since 1900. Volume 1, 1900-1945. (5th edition, N.Y. 1980).

Mere detaljeret information om de forskellige regeringsorganer, der blev oprettet under præsident Roosevelts New Deal-politik, kan man f.eks. få i:

Donald R. Whitnah (ed.): The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Institutions and Government Agencies (USA 1983).

Henry Steel Commager (ed.): Documents of American History (N.Y. 1973), og -

The Annals of America. The Bicentennial Edition (1976), er begge historiske kildesamlinger. I førstnævnte er der gengivet de forskellige love, der blev vedtaget under New Deal, og i sidstnævnte kan man bl.a. læse præsident Roosevelts taler til Kongressen. *Jacob A. Riis'* bog: *How the Other Half Lives*, fra 1890, findes i dag i en udvidet udgave med gengivelsen af de originale fotografier (N.Y. 1971).

Et af de mest omfattende værker om Lewis W. Hine, der bl.a. redegør for hans immigrant- og børnearbejde-fotografier, er: *Alan Trachtenberg et al.: America and Lewis Hine. Photographs 1904-1940 (N.Y. 1970).*

Der er udgivet adskillige antologier om New Deal-fotograferne. F.eks.: *Roy Stryker & Nancy Wood: In This Proud Land. America 1935-1943 (N.Y. 1970)*. Her finder man bl.a. to af Roy Strykers 'shooting scripts', som var de 'drejebøger' fotograferne skulle forholde sig til, når de blev sendt i marken. Ligeledes findes der mange retrospektive biografier om de enkelte New Deal-fotografer. Men også i deres samtid fik mange af fotograferne selv udgivet fotobøger. F.eks. *Walker Evans: American Photographs (N.Y. 1938)*. American Photographs stammer fra en udstilling med Walker Evans' billeder i Museum of Modern Art. (Genoptrykt 1962). *Berenice Abbott: New York in the Thirties (N.Y. 1967)*, er ligeledes et genoptryk. Hendes bog hed oprindeligt: *Changing New York* og var fra 1939.

Amerikansk fotografi er andet end social-dokumentarisk fotografi:

Alan Trachtenberg et al.: The American Image. Photographs from the National Archives 1860-1960 (N.Y. 1979), og -

Kestner-Gesellschaft Hannover: 1920 Amerika 1940. Zwischen Hollywood und Harlem (Bern 1980), viser den høje kvalitet der også fandtes indenfor portræt- og landskabsfotografi.

Beskrivelsen af omstændighederne omkring produktionen af *Joris Ivens'* dokumentarfilm for REA: *The Power and the Land (1940)*, stammer fra: *Richard Dyer MacCann: The People's films. A Political History of U.S. Government Motion Pictures (N.Y. 1973)*. Filmen findes i øvrigt i kopi på Det Danske Filmmuseum.

Interessen for Peter Sekaers billeder har i USA igennem de senere år været stærkt stigende. *Michael G. Sundell* har således beskæftiget sig indgående med Peter Sekaers arbejde for USHA i artiklen: *Peter Sekaer : Slum Conditions in America (i: Prospects, Volume 13, 1988)*.

Også *Peter Sekaer* selv beskriver i artiklen: *Nothing to Photograph Here! (i: U.S. Camera, August 1941, pp 66-67)*, hvorledes han greb arbejdet for USHA an.

Peter Sekaer fik hvert år fra 1939-1948 (undtagen i 1940) offentliggjort fotografier i *U.S. Camera Annual*. *U.S. Camera* er endvidere en interessant kilde til belysningen af det skift i det fotografiske udtryk, der sker med USA's indtræden i 2. verdenskrig.

Oplysningerne om Peter Sekaer i denne katalog stammer fortrinsvis fra en omfattende brevveklings med forskellige arkiver, kunstmuseer og biblioteker i USA (Se side 26). F.eks. er konkurrencebetingelserne til Image of Freedom-konkurrencen stillet til rådighed af Museum of Modern Art i New York, og Peter Sekaers brev til Mrs. Roosevelt fremskaffet i kopi gennem University of Louisville, Photographic Archives. Desuden har Peter Sekaers familie i såvel USA som Danmark været meget behjælpelig med supplerende materiale og oplysninger om Peter Sekaer.

Literature

There is a wealth of opportunities by which a closer acquaintance - both through pictures and text - can be acquired with the social and political history of the United States in the 1930s.

A broad introductory history of the period is found in:

Arthur S. Link & William B. Catton: American Epoch. A History of the United States since 1900. Volume I, 1900-1945 (5th edition, N.Y. 1980).

More detailed information on the various governmental organs set up under President Roosevelt's New Deal can be found in:

Donald R. Whitnah (ed.): The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Institutions and Government Agencies (USA 1983).

Henry Steel Commager (ed.): Documents of American History (N.Y. 1973), and - The Annals of America. The Bicentennial Edition (1976), are both collections of historical sources. The first reproduces the various laws passed under the New Deal, and in the latter are found Roosevelt's speeches to the Congress.

Jacob A. Riis: How the Other Half Lives (1890) (N.Y. 1971) is available today in an enlarged edition with reproduction of the original photographs.

One of the most extensive works on Lewis W. Hine, which also covers his immigrant and child labor photographs, is:

Alan Trachtenberg et al.: America and Lewis Hine. Photographs 1904 - 1940 (N.Y. 1970).

Numerous anthologies on the New Deal photographers have been published. E.g.:

Roy Stryker & Nancy Wood: In This Proud Land. America 1935 - 1943 (N.Y. 1970). Here are included two of Roy Stryker's 'shooting scripts', the 'screenplays' for the photographers' fieldwork.

Many biographies exist on the individual New Deal photographers. But also during the period many of these photographers published their own work in book form. E.g.:

Walker Evans: American Photographs (N.Y. 1938). The photographs in this book come from an exhibit of Evans' pictures at the Museum of Modern Art. (Reprinted 1962).

Berenice Abbott: New York in the Thirties (N.Y. 1967) is also a reprint of her book, the original title of which was Changing New York, published in 1939.

American photography is other than social documentary photography:

Alan Trachtenberg et al.: The American Image. Photographs from the National Archives 1860 - 1960 (N.Y. 1979), and -

Kestner-Gesellschaft Hannover: 1920 Amerika 1940. Zwischen Hollywood und Harlem (Bern 1980) illustrates the high quality also found in portrait and landscape photography.

The description of the circumstances of the production of Joris Ivens' documentary film for the REA: The Power and the Land (1940), comes from: Richard Dyer MacCann: The People's Films. A Political History of U.S. Government Motion Pictures (N.Y. 1973).

The film is found at the Danish film Museum.

Interest in Peter Sekaer's pictures has grown in recent years in the U.S.A. Michael G. Sundell has written in detail on Peter Sekaer's work for the USHA in his article: Peter Sekaer: Slum Conditions in America (in: Prospects Vol. 13, 1988).

Sekaer himself described his working style for the USHA in an article: Nothing to Photograph Here! that appeared in U.S. Camera, August 1941, pp 66-67.

Peter Sekaer published photographs every year from 1939 to 1948 (except 1940) in U.S. Camera Annual. This magazine is also an interesting source for the shift in photography that occurred with America's entrance into World War II.

The information in this catalogue on Peter Sekaer has been gathered primarily through extensive correspondence with archives, art museums and libraries in the U.S.A. (see p. 38). For example, the conditions of the Image of Freedom photo competition were provided by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and a photocopy of Peter Sekaer's letter to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt was sent through the help of the University of Louisville, Photographic Archives. In addition, Peter Sekaer's family, both in the U.S. and in Denmark have been most helpful with supplemental material and information about Peter Sekaer.