

## CONCLUSION

The narratives presented in this study reveal the complex ways in which photography sought to further the public housing movement in Los Angeles in the 1940s. They also reveal that the public housing program was a vital impetus for photographic activity. Public housing proponents both in front of and behind the camera affirmed photography's social and political value in their private writings, annual reports, and the creation of collections. The material output of these practices was much like public housing itself—modest in form, but meaningful in the functions it performed.

Focusing on photography as meaningful work, this study took on the challenge of investigating a scattered institutional collection. It found that the photographs of public housing and low-income neighborhoods in Los Angeles were part of a history of collection building that included the famous work of the United States' Farm Security Administration and connected Los Angeles with international housing reform efforts of the 1930s and 1940s. Private letters and news articles alike chart the movements and currency of housing photographs from the 1930s to the present day. The Housing Authority's photographs still circulate beyond library reading rooms in both new digital forms and, in the exceptional case of one remarkably preserved copy of a fragile wartime annual report, via interlibrary loan.<sup>1</sup> Following Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart's assertion that "an object cannot be fully understood at any single point in its existence but should be understood as belonging in a continuing process of production, exchange, usage and meaning," this book shows that the photographic objects that the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles acquired in its earliest years continue to inspire art and scholarship and in turn activate other objects, like the photographs of Esther Lewittes Mipaas, that long remained out of circulation.<sup>2</sup>

The second finding of this study is that local housing photography in Los Angeles was part of a global conflict. Photographs of public housing in Los Angeles illuminate ties between the First and Second World Wars in both their formal similarities and in the figure of the World War I veteran, businessman, and photographer Arthur Luckhaus. As Robin Kelsey argues in *Archive Style: Photographs and Illustrations for U.S. Surveys, 1850–1890*, nineteenth-century survey photographers and illustrators “left evidence not only of their ingenious accommodation of vague institutional directives but also of their recalcitrance.”<sup>3</sup> A similar understanding of the complex motivations behind the formal choices Luckhaus Studio made in producing photographs of sites of slum clearance and public housing construction in 1941 and 1942 shows how this approach to photography applies to survey images made almost a century later. It also illustrates how past photographic practices complicate these readings. During the Second World War, the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles compared photographers to legionnaires and deemed the public housing movement a “housing front.” Shaped by this metaphor, this new reading of Arthur Luckhaus’s wartime photography for the Housing Authority advances scholarship on the histories of both housing and photography in Los Angeles by bringing into sharper relief the lessons learned from World War I in both these disciplines.

The third finding is that Catherine Bauer and the contributors to the *Journal of Housing* developed a cogent concept of housing photography during World War II and the early postwar years in their writings on housing reports and exhibits. Reports and exhibits were integral tools of political and cultural work for many public institutions. The National Association of Housing Officials and the American Institute of Graphic Arts held report competitions to encourage better designs by local authorities. As evidenced in the short-run housing reports and exhibits produced by the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles in its first decade, photography was an important material and tool in creating thrifty displays. A comparison of surviving reports with written commentary and grainy halftone installation views reveals strategies of enlarging report pages to create exhibit panels, the circulation of these panels, and practices of combining multiple exhibits into larger ones. By the 1940s, these adaptive methods were nothing new, but responded to new imperatives in an understudied context.<sup>4</sup> Looking to but also away from the research on the Museum of Modern Art’s innovations in exhibit design affords a far more nuanced understanding of photographs and exhibits in their broad circulation at events like the National Orange Show in San Bernardino or the Los Angeles County Fair in Pomona. These cases proffer for study instances of design for a general public—popular exhibits that remain largely overlooked by historians of photography, but from

which we can nonetheless learn much about popular applications of the medium by a large number of anonymous designers.

The fourth conclusion is that color slides and specifically Kodachrome slides of housing for migrant workers, war workers, and low-income families played a distinctive educational role starting in the early 1940s. Previously associated by scholars with postwar instruction in global citizenship, Kodachrome and color slides figured prominently in the efforts of the internationally-recognized housing expert, Catherine Bauer. Although historian Daniel T. Rodgers's landmark research on transatlantic progressivism recognizes Bauer as a collector of housing photographs that were important for the establishment of a public housing program in the United States, Bauer's collection of color slides, and her status as a photographer, are new subjects in the study of her work.<sup>5</sup> Starting in the early 1940s, Bauer adopted Kodak's still relatively new 35-millimeter color slide technology in taking and exchanging photographs for her research and teaching of housing topics at the university. After the war, she also turned to color slide technologies as efficient media for addressing broader US audiences on housing's transnational history and democratic promise. This campaign at home coincided with one to collect and send US housing reports to her colleagues abroad. Physically light and small, easy to make and use, and capable of clearly reproducing and conveying visual information, photography, in short, allowed Bauer to create and manage a public housing image in a decade defined by national borders and dreams of a better life—of living as One World.

These “micro” histories of photographic and housing practices certainly unfolded against the background of a greater historical narrative we already know. But a closer look at the strategies that photographers employed and the hopes they voiced offer new facets to this history. The fifth finding of this book is that the housing movement's promise of belonging carried personal meaning for local photographers as they pursued their professional and social aims. The film student Louis Clyde Stoumen saw in a combination of his photography and writing a form of art for representing postwar Los Angeles to the world. The draftsman, art historian, and photographer Esther Lewittes Mipaas extolled the social function of photography while revealing intimate views of the social life of Los Angeles's low-income neighborhoods. Her FBI dossier offers a painful reminder of the material and political challenges she faced and the persistence of art as a reference for her in confronting these challenges. A closer study of the photographs she made, even if it cannot fill the gaping void between the ideals of public housing and the historical facts of its injustices and failures, holds viewers accountable, to borrow this apt phrase from Blake Stimson and Robin Kelsey, to the people who lost their homes to slum clearance and to the

photographers who found their actions stifled by McCarthyism or prejudice and whose collections await the attention they deserve.<sup>6</sup>

Housing, citizenship, and the role of photography in responding to questions about each remain pressing issues in the present day. The recent work to house people who have migrated to Hannover, Germany, is just one local manifestation that awaits further theoretically rigorous historical contextualization. How far back in the nineteenth century this pursuit may go promises a challenge and a better understanding of the overlaps between the histories of housing and those of medicine or labor. More pressing and directly related to specifically the history of housing in Los Angeles, however, is indeed a broader investigation of housing photography's geography in the tumultuous decade of the 1940s.

In taking Los Angeles as a point of departure, this study brought the photographic practices of the local housing authority into dialogue with those in nearby defense centers and traced the circulation of Los Angeles's housing photographs abroad. Still needed here, however, is a more even-handed comparison. How might housing groups outside the United States have looked to photography in undertaking their local efforts? What processes defined their photographic programs? What concepts of photography guided their practices? How did these photographs resonate with the viewers they reached? A closer look at local initiatives in housing and city planning and the photography that formed around them indeed promises to continue the current photohistorical task of investigating processes, networks, and narratives that remain mired in the gaps between disciplines. But more importantly, it promises to show the subtle ways in which photography worked to provide everyone with one of the most basic human needs—a place to call home.