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Public Versus Private:
Portrayals of Government Housing Interventions
in the *Los Angeles Times*, 1940-1945

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Urban and Regional Planning

by

Shawn Marie Watson

2019

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Public Versus Private:
Portrayals of Government Housing Interventions
in the *Los Angeles Times*, 1940-1945

by

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Master of Urban and Regional Planning
University of California, Los Angeles, 2019
Professor Paavo Monkkonen, Chair

This thesis analyzes the portrayals of the federal government's role in public and private housing of the *Los Angeles Times* from 1940 to 1945. Further, it examines how these portrayals influenced the perceptions of the *Times* readers. The context of Los Angeles during World War is crucial because it was one of the few places in the country where home building, and the debates over it, continued during the war. Because of the city's status as a critical defense area, both public and private housing were seen as viable options for addressing the city's housing shortage.

I examine four salient narratives from the discourse that provide insight into the paradoxical relationship between the private housing industry and the federal government. First, the *Times* provided descriptive examples of the city's public housing program that were relatively neutral in tone although this was a relatively small subset of all the articles examined. Second, the paper attempted to limit the perceived scope of public housing by focusing on a narrative about competition between public and private housing. Although the *Times* portrays

varying arguments as to whether the two were actually competitors, it does reveal how the private housing industry requested or demanded government assistance to put them at a competitive advantage. Third, the *Times* portrayed the role of government in ways that both obscured it, especially agencies that benefitted private industry, and were critical of it, which included arguments from the private industry for decentralizing government control of housing. Last, the newspaper portrayed an extensive argument during the war years about whether private or public housing would fill the postwar landscape. Ultimately, I argue these portrayals worked to limit readers' perceptions about government involvement in the private housing industry while simultaneously presenting a case for the elimination of public housing.

The thesis of Shawn Marie Watson is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2019

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CHA	City Housing Authority
DDHC	Division of Defense Housing Coordination
FHA	Federal Housing Administration
FPHA	Federal Public Housing Authority
FWA	Federal Works Agency
HOLC	Home Owners' Loan Corporation
LIHTC	Low-Income Housing Tax Credit
MHC	Municipal Housing Commission
NAHB	National Association of Home Builders
NAREB	National Association of Real Estate Boards
NHA	National Housing Administration
NIMBY	Not-in-my-backyard
OPM	Office of Production Management
OWI	Office of War Information
PHIMBY	Public housing-in-my-backyard
PWA	Public Works Administration
USHA	United States Housing Authority
VA	Veterans Administration
WMC	War Manpower Commission
WPA	Works Projects Administration
WPB	War Production Board
YIMBY	Yes-in-my-backyard

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Federal intervention enabled the growth of private suburban housing across the United States beginning during the New Deal.¹ These government interventions benefitted the private housing industry and white homeowners, which implore us to shift our perspective of the government's crucial involvement in private housing production. Private housing should be characterized as government-subsidized.² In this thesis, I engage with arguments about New Deal housing policies to analyze how the *Los Angeles Times* portrayed the government's role in public and private housing in Los Angeles from 1940 through 1945. Further, I contend with how these articles, although from a single source, would have influenced readers' perceptions of the role of the government in housing.

The search for "public housing" in the *Los Angeles Times*, during this time period, resulted in a majority of articles not about public housing in and of itself but rather about the private housing industry's view of public housing. The *Los Angeles Times* in the 1940s was a conservative newspaper and often represented private interests in the housing industry.³ It is important to analyze articles from the *Times* to reveal the relationship between private industry and government involvement in housing. The discourse put forth in its articles would have

¹ See Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*; Rothstein, *The Color of Law*; Radford, "Government and Housing During the Depression"; Szylvian, "The Federal Housing Program During World War II"; Checkoway, "Large Builders, Federal Housing Programs, and Postwar Suburbanization"; Hanchett, "The Other 'Subsidized Housing': Federal Aid to Suburbanization, 1940s-1960s"; Freund, "Marketing the Free Market."

² See Hanchett, "The Other 'Subsidized Housing': Federal Aid to Suburbanization, 1940s-1960s"; Freund, "Marketing the Free Market"; Howard, *The Welfare State Nobody Knows*.

³ Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt, *Thinking Big: The Story of the Los Angeles Times, Its Publishers, and Their Influence on Southern California* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), 260.

reached many readers, especially homeowners, and approximates their views since it was the dominant newspaper in Los Angeles.⁴

I find four salient narratives from the discourse that provide insight into the complex, often paradoxical, relationship between officials from the federal government and the private industry, which influenced readers' perceptions about the subject. During World War II, the *Los Angeles Times* portrayed federal interventions in public and private housing in nuanced ways—matching national narratives at times and conflicting at others. First, the newspaper occasionally presented relatively neutral, descriptive articles about public housing but more often reflected a discourse that attempted to limit the perceived scope of public housing. It did this by focusing on the competition between public and private housing—the second theme I explore. Within the discourse about competition, some articles argue that private and public housing belonged to separate markets and, thus, were not competitors. Others suggest that private officials did perceive public housing to be competition. Further, they reveal how the private housing industry requested or demanded government assistance to put them at a competitive advantage. Third, the *Times* portrayed the role of government in ways that both obscured it, especially agencies that benefitted private industry, and were critical of it. They include arguments for decentralizing government control of housing. Lastly, the *Times* portrayed an extensive argument during the war years about whether private or public housing would fill the postwar landscape, often appealing to broader ideals of democracy to make a case for property ownership.

Los Angeles serves as an illustrative case study for analyzing these portrayals because it represents a conjuncture during World War II where both private and public housing were solutions to address the housing shortage and, thus, complicate the narrative about the

⁴ Gottlieb and Wolt, *Thinking Big*, 235.

inevitability of private housing. Los Angeles is a particularly salient case study because, as a critical defense area during the war, the building of both private and public housing continued to occur. In most other cities across the country, the federal government suspended housing construction activities to funnel resources toward the war effort.⁵ Because public and private home building continued in Los Angeles, the debate between public and private housing persisted throughout the war, which ultimately contributed to the ongoing national discourse once the war ended. The *Los Angeles Times* portrays this intense debate between public and private housing during the war years and demonstrates that the private industry continued to attack public housing even when it housed war workers, which exemplified their broader concern with the institution itself. Some of the articles explicitly claimed that public housing was a threat to the private industry. The discourse from the *Times* illustrates that the private housing industry vigorously opposed public housing and, more generally, government involvement in housing. Further, it reveals how federal government officials working for both the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Federal Public Housing Authority (FPHA) emphasized private enterprise as the solution to the debate between public or private housing.

Many of the articles report from conferences or association meetings. The focus of these centralized on the debates about the building of private or public housing not only as a means to address the contemporaneous lack of supply for war workers but also what kind of housing would be supplied in the postwar years. In addition, the majority of articles report on national housing policies and reflect the views of national-level private and government officials, often on visits to Los Angeles. This would have provided readers with information about many of these policies and debates, although it often would have been from the viewpoint of the private

⁵ Lawrence J. Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 236.

industry and filtered through the conservative *Times*. Nonetheless, readers would have had intimate knowledge of the debates and rhetoric reported on in the newspaper.

Significance

The broader question that informs this thesis, then, is how homeowners and the private industry escape the label of government involvement when government actions produced benefits that unequally accrued to them. It is through this question that I analyze the *Los Angeles Times* articles as a way to understand portrayals and perceptions. Scholars have spent decades detailing federal interventions in the private housing market, but this literature appears to be disconnected from the public perceptions of the government's role. I turn to historic newspapers to understand how this discourse began, with the hope of addressing current misunderstandings.

I assume that the discourse in newspapers, such as the *Los Angeles Times*, influences the perceptions of readers. I acknowledge that perceptions are shaped through myriad influences, including through other newspapers representing different points of view and other forms of media. Nonetheless, the discourse from the newspaper allows me to examine how readers' perceptions were shaped. As Hall and colleagues argue:

In societies where the bulk of the population has neither direct access to nor power over the central decisions which affect their lives, where official policy and opinion is concentrated and popular opinion is disbursed, the media plays a critical mediating and connecting role in the formation of public opinion, and in orchestrating that opinion together with the actions and views of the powerful. The media do not only possess a near-monopoly over 'social knowledge', as the primary source of information about what is happening; they also command the passage between those who are 'in the know' and the structured ignorance of the general public.⁶

⁶ Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan Press, 1978), 63-64.

In 1940s Los Angeles, this near-monopoly over social knowledge would have been particularly salient for newspapers since forms of news media were limited primarily to newspapers and radio. Holding that this is true, it would follow that readers would have known little of the government's involvement in the private industry since both government and private industry officials were rarely forthcoming about the government's role in these newspaper articles.

The discourse from the articles reveals the irony of portrayals of government involvement in public and private housing—that is, the articles often fail to acknowledge the government benefits accrued to the private industry and homeowners while purposely focusing on the government benefits accrued to public housing tenants. Taken together, this works to portray an unbalanced view of exactly who benefits from government involvement. For white buyers, FHA loan guarantees made widespread homeownership possible, and for public housing tenants, subsidized rents created affordable housing opportunities. White homeowners disproportionately benefitted since the opportunity gave them access to build equity in their homes.⁷

The private industry was intimately aware of the role of government, especially that of the Federal Housing Administration. Each article from the newspaper presents nuanced arguments about the relationship of the private industry and federal government, but when understood together, these portrayals work to reinforce an argument that promotes private housing to the detriment of public housing. In this way, the story is unremarkable because it matches the original policy intentions. However, it is also enlightening because it exemplifies how the conservative *Times* acted as a conduit for private industry and their supporters in government, thus shaping perceptions of readers with a bias toward the plight of private industry. This is important because it shows how the influences of policymakers and lobbyists pass

⁷ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 185.

through their policies and through media. In Los Angeles, the *Times* introduced and reinforced these national arguments to their readers.

Our current conjuncture in Los Angeles is similar to that of the war years in that a housing shortage, accompanied by an affordability crisis, has renewed debates over what type of housing can best address the issue. Los Angeles currently faces a housing shortage with widespread conditions of homelessness and rent-burdened households. The current percentage of renters is similar to the start of the war with 54.1 percent renting in 2017 and 60 percent in 1940.⁸

A debate rages about how to best address this crisis in Los Angeles and throughout the nation.⁹ The current debate has been predominately waged between those who would prefer to see their private suburban, low-density neighborhoods unchanged—that is, the not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) contingent— and those who favor tactics such as up-zoning in these neighborhoods to accommodate more dense, multi-family dwellings—colloquially known as the yes-in-my-backyard (YIMBY) group. The latter group advocates for more building to increase the overall supply of housing with occasional calls for subsidized units for the low-income market. A third contingent has more recently started advocating for building the traditional form

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau. Tenure, American Community Survey (ACS) 2013 – 2017 (5-Year Estimates). Prepared by Social Explorer. https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/ACS2017_5yr/R12191193 (accessed June 11, 2019). U.S. Census Bureau. Tenure, 1940. Prepared by Social Explorer. <https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/C1940TractDS/R12190461> (accessed June 11, 2019).

⁹ Jessica Placzek, “Forget YIMBY vs. NIMBY. Could PHIMBYs Solve the Housing Crisis?” KQED News, March 11, 2019, <https://www.kqed.org/news/11731580/forget-yimby-vs-nimby-could-phimbys-solve-the-housing-crisis>. Peter Gowan and Ryan Cooper, “Social Housing in the United States,” People’s Policy Project, April 5, 2018, <https://www.peoplespolicyproject.org/wpcontent/uploads/2018/04/SocialHousing.pdf>.

of municipally owned and operated public housing. Similar to their counterparts, this group is known by the acronym PHIMBY or public housing-in-my-backyard.¹⁰

Currently, groups such as the Los Angeles Tenants Union and the Los Angeles chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America have renewed arguments in favor of public housing in Los Angeles similar to the Leftist coalition that advocated for public housing in the 1940s. There has also been some current political support from the City of Los Angeles, Mayor Eric Garcetti, and State Senator Ben Allen in an attempt to repeal Article 34 of the California Constitution that requires voter approval of public housing when public funds are used.¹¹ Article 34 began as Proposition 10 on the state ballot in November 1950 that “indicated the antagonism felt by the electorate toward public housing as the private housing market was beginning to boom.”¹² Although both conservative and liberal politicians statewide opposed Proposition 10, voters narrowly passed it through. In Los Angeles, public housing still had the support of city councilors to the chagrin of some homeowners and business groups.¹³

Looking to the past teaches us how these struggles played out between public and private housing during World War II. Today, we see the lasting legacy of the vast private suburbs of Los Angeles through its imprint on the physical landscape. Many homeowners continue to be complacent about the benefits bestowed upon them by the federal government. Conversely, we

¹⁰ Benjamin Schneider, “Meet the PHIMBYs,” CityLab, April 13, 2018, <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2018/04/nimbys-yimbys-and-phimbys-oh-my/557927/>.

¹¹ “Senators Ben Allen and Scott Weiner Propose Bill to Repeal Constitutional Roadblock to Affordable Housing,” California Senator Scott Weiner, Senate District 11, December 3, 2018, <https://sd11.senate.ca.gov/news/20181203-senators-ben-allen-and-scott-wiener-propose-bill-repeal-constitutional-roadblock>.

¹² Don Parson, *Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 104.

¹³ Parson, *Making a Better World*, 104.

see the condition of public housing throughout the city—physically disintegrating for decades without investment. The historical record lays plain how public housing policies failed at the local, state, and national levels while those benefitting private industry flourished.

Private building has continued to dominate throughout the 20th century and into the 21st in Los Angeles and throughout the country. Building rates have gradually slowed in the decades since the war years in Los Angeles. Nearly half of the population in Los Angeles live in homes built before 1959.¹⁴ On the public housing front, major development of new projects ceased in the 1950s. Since then, federal policy has emphasized vouchers and new construction for subsidized, low-income units using the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program. LIHTC incentivizes private investment in exchange for tax credits, with construction and management by a non-profit or for-profit entity, in place of the traditional public housing model.

Ultimately, the discourse from the newspapers, as well as our current landscape, exemplify the strength of privatism in U.S. housing policy, including the efforts of real estate lobbying power and government officials at each level who support these interests. In this way, it is most certainly a story relevant to our time. Private housing interests, in fact many of the same lobbying organizations as when officials first passed New Deal legislation, continue to dictate the building of private housing, and public housing has long been removed as an alternative in the mainstream conversation. The government has created and upheld these systems that allow for private industry to thrive, thus obscuring its own central role. In all of this, homeowners fail to recognize the government's role in their private housing even as they benefit greatly from it.

¹⁴ For all census tracts in Los Angeles County, forty-six and a half percent of all occupied housings units were built in or before 1959. U.S. Census Bureau. Occupied Housing Units by Year Structure Built, American Community Survey (ACS) 2013 – 2017 (5-Year Estimates). Prepared by Social Explorer. https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/ACS2017_5yr/R12191175 (accessed June 11, 2019).

However, the dominance of private interests in housing should not indicate their inevitably. Both then and now, advocates fight for housing alternatives to profit-driven interests.

It is important to bring these nuanced stories to bear on current debates. I write with an intention similar to Ira Katznelson's in *When Affirmative Action was White*. He writes, "As a citizen, I wish to present these understandings in order to alter our misconceptions and reposition the direction of how we think, talk, and act about affirmative action."¹⁵ In this thesis, I seek to present this history in order to alter our misconceptions and reposition the direction of how we think, talk, and act about the role of government in housing.

¹⁵ Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), xi.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND

The portrayals of private and public housing in the *Los Angeles Times* during the war should be understood within the greater context of the New Deal, the emphasis on privatism in US housing policy, and World War II since these circumstances reveal the origins and contemporaneous conditions that shaped the articles. Further, the theories and process of news-making exemplify how and why people do not know about government involvement and guides our understanding of how portrayals from the *Times* influenced perceptions. Finally, the conditions existing in Los Angeles in the early 1940s provide context for the portrayals and perceptions by describing the housing shortage that triggered many of these arguments over public and private housing.

Privatism and Policy

Privatism was integral in the formation of US housing policy during the New Deal. The beliefs that informed these policies had long influenced American governance although it was not until the 1930s that the United States had a coherent set of housing policies. Bauman writes of the centrality of privatism in US housing policy: “One [theme] is the persistence of the so-called Lockean tradition—the fervent, deep-seated national belief in the supremacy of homeownership and the sovereignty and inviolability of the private housing market brought to America and nurtured here in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.”¹⁶ This belief in the

¹⁶ John F. Bauman, “Introduction: The Eternal War on Slums,” in *From Tenements to the Taylor Homes: In Search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. by John F. Bauman, Roger Biles, and Kristin M. Szylvian (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2000), 2.

sanctity of the private market with a focus on ownership informed the work of both private and public housing officials in creating federal policies and has persisted into the 21st century.

The New Deal, led by the Roosevelt coalition, was a response to the Great Depression and the laissez-faire capitalism that induced it. I rely on Katznelson's definition of the New Deal era as the period from 1932 to 1953 marked by federal rule of the Democratic Party.¹⁷ During this period, President Roosevelt sought to employ a new state form although the New Deal revived the theories of liberalism that existed since the beginning of nation.¹⁸ The Keynesian interventionist state had varying goals, including "the effort to revive capitalism to the struggle to incorporate the working class and contain dangerous features of a mass society."¹⁹ To the working class, this state intervention translated into a welfare state where the government would provide protection from capitalism in the forms of education, housing, and collective bargaining.²⁰ The ironic dichotomy of simultaneously protecting capital and shielding Americans from the extremes of capitalism informed most aspects of the New Deal, including its housing program that focused on both stimulating the real estate and home building industries while also providing public housing to low-income tenants, then to war workers during World War II.

The New Deal housing program responded to the housing shortage in addition to addressing the many foreclosed homes from the Depression. Private construction slowed during the 1920s, which left many cities lacking adequate housing accommodations. In addition to the

¹⁷ Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation 2013), 4, 38.

¹⁸ Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 6.

¹⁹ Katznelson, 5.

²⁰ Parson, 2.

shortage, construction workers remained unemployed.²¹ Gail Radford argues that the housing program was a two-tiered system. Policies beneficial to the private market, such as the mortgage guarantees, were the first tier while public housing, as formulated in the Housing Act of 1937, was the second tier. Radford argues that this tiered system informed US housing policies for many decades beyond the New Deal.²²

The New Deal policies favoring homeownership and suburban home building were intended to stimulate the economy both through the production of housing as well as the creation of jobs. They built upon the “long tradition of land speculation as a central economic activity.”²³ Municipalities invested in public infrastructure to support these growing regions, and private builders and banks invested capital into these new suburban projects.²⁴ Private industry efforts were encouraged by the federal government who sought to stimulate the economy specifically by increasing capital in mortgage markets. The federal government stimulated these markets by creating a new market for credit early on during the New Deal with the Federal Home Loan Bank Act of 1932, which connected lenders to credit.²⁵ The government insured this market, which protected private industry lending activities. Further, these new regulations had the dual effects of “stabilizing the economy and fueling a debt-driven economic growth” which “fundamentally transformed the operations of American banking and credit markets, a

²¹ Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects*, 155.

²² Gail Radford, “The Federal Government and Housing During the Great Depression,” in *From Tenements to the Taylor Homes: In Search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. by John F. Bauman, Roger Biles, and Kristin M. Szylvian (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2000), 118.

²³ Radford, “The Federal Government and Housing During the Great Depression,” 117.

²⁴ Barry Checkoway, “Large Builders, Federal Housing Programs, and Postwar Suburbanization,” in *Critical Perspectives on Housing*, ed. by Rachel G. Bratt, Chester Hartman, and Ann Myerson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 129.

²⁵ Radford, 107.

transformation necessary to make possible both the fiscalist state and the stunning rates of postwar growth.”²⁶

However, the early intervention of the Federal Home Loan Bank Act of 1932 did not have an immediate influence on effects of the Depression because by the following year, nearly half of the national mortgage debt was in default and foreclosures were commonplace. In response, Roosevelt created the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) in 1933 to purchase the mortgages in default.²⁷ In the following year, the Housing Act of 1934 sought to remove the federal government from directly acquiring mortgages and created the Federal Housing Administration to stimulate the origination of mortgages from the private industry with the full assurance of the backing of the federal government.²⁸ This meant mortgage lending became far less risky for private lenders since the government guaranteed the mortgage if owners defaulted, which created a new market for ownership that would begin growing during the 1930s and boom in the postwar years.²⁹

However, the federal government and private interests created a market that was not equally accessible to all Americans. The HOLC created residential security maps that graded neighborhoods primarily based on their racial composition and dictated where lending was “safe” for private mortgages insured by the federal government—a process known as redlining. The FHA also required property appraisals before insuring mortgages. Based on the agency’s

²⁶ David M.P. Freund, “Marketing the Free Market: State Intervention and the Politics of Prosperity in Metropolitan America,” in *The New Suburban History*, ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 15.

²⁷ Radford, 107.

²⁸ Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 40.

²⁹ Radford, 108.

Underwriting Manual, “the FHA judged that properties would probably be too risky for insurance if they were in racially mixed neighborhoods or even in white neighborhoods near black ones that might possibly integrate in the future.”³⁰ In addition to the single property appraisals, FHA discrimination was implemented on an even broader scale when the agency funded construction and insured mortgages up-front for new suburban developments with the requirement that they would be restricted to whites-only. “By 1948, most housing nationwide was being constructed with this government financing.”³¹ Additionally, after the war, the Veterans Administration (VA) adopted the FHA’s policies in lending mortgages to veterans.³²

Although the New Deal housing program favored private enterprise, public housing did emerge as another option to address the dual crises of the national housing shortage and unemployment during the 1930s. “Public housing thus emerged as an uneasy alliance among housing reformers, settlement workers, architects, labor unions, and construction companies who could all agree that the first priority was putting the nation back to work.”³³ However, public housing policies from the Housing Act of 1937 assigned it to the role of specifically addressing the needs to low-income tenants—those who the private industry argued they could not house.

In November 1940, President Roosevelt gave a speech that reiterated his focus on privatism in New Deal policies but suggested it should work to benefit the most people. The president stated “...we were determined to make our system of private enterprise and private

³⁰ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 65.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

³² *Ibid.*, 70.

³³ Vale, 155-156.

profit work more efficiently and democratically to fill the demands and needs of all the people of America.”³⁴ He continued:

I am a firm believer in private enterprise and in private property. I am a firm believer in the American opportunity of men and women to rise in private enterprise. Of course, if the private opportunity is to remain safe, average men and women must be able to have it as a part of their own individual satisfaction in life and their own stake in democracy. With that in view we have pushed ahead with social and economic reforms, determined that this period in American life should be written down as a heroic era – an era in which men fought not merely to preserve a past, but to build a future.³⁵

The New Deal shifted its political emphasis in the early 1940s with the country entering into World War II, but the values Roosevelt espoused would continue to shape policies through the war and beyond.

During the New Deal, Roosevelt and his coalition gave the state a greater role than it had in the past. However, during World War II, the president centralized power to an even greater degree. In part, the American people supported this centralization because the government made appeals to unity and patriotism, which many Americans subscribed to.³⁶ Legally and politically, these powers culminated in the First and Second War Powers Acts, which “delegated to President Roosevelt more power over American capitalism than he had achieved even during the New Deal’s radical moment.”³⁷ The First War Powers Act of December 1941 began to consolidate executive power, but the Second War Powers Act of March 1942 gave President Roosevelt even more control over the wartime economy. The Second Act gave him the power “to allocate resources for defense purposes ‘in such manner, upon such conditions and to such

³⁴ “Complete Brooklyn Address by President Roosevelt,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 2, 1940, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

³⁵ “Complete Brooklyn Address by President Roosevelt.”

³⁶ Katznelson, 318.

³⁷ Katznelson, 343.

extent as he shall deem necessary in the public interest.”³⁸ While this centralized power over capital gave the private industry some cause for concern about their role during the war, Roosevelt continued to support and implement policies that subsidized private industries, including in housing.

World War II centralized power in the federal government, and the executive branch in particular, which enabled federal officials to establish a strong wartime economy. However, many officials were fearful about how this would translate after the conclusion of the war. They were concerned that the economy might return to its decline of the immediate pre-war years, when unemployment spiked after it had declined throughout the 1930s. “These challenges facing capitalism, labor, and the direction of American democracy returned to front and center as the war wound down. Tense, fearful uncertainty in the midst of unpredictable political horizons raised huge questions about the shape, and management of U.S. capitalism.”³⁹

The Dominant *Los Angeles Times*

The reach of the *Los Angeles Times* as the producer of these portrayals is central to understanding their ability to influence the perceptions of their readers. Multiple newspapers existed in World War II-era Los Angeles, including the *Daily News*, *Examiner*, *Mirror*, *Sentinel*, and *Eagle*.⁴⁰ However, the *Times* was the dominant paper in Los Angeles under the long reign of the Chandler family. Although the *Times* had competitors, “the Hearst papers [like the *Examiner*] provided little political and issue-oriented competition.”⁴¹ Its power in the city was unrivaled,

³⁸ Katznelson, 343.

³⁹ Katznelson, 369-370.

⁴⁰ Parson, 279.

⁴¹ Gottlieb and Wolt, 235.

and its approval all but assured victory for candidates in local elections, including the crucial mayoral election in 1953 that decided that fate of public housing in Los Angeles.⁴²

During the early 1940s, the paper transitioned from the leadership of Harry Chandler to his son, Norman Chandler, in 1941. During the elder Chandler's time as publisher, "the *Times* became a classic example of the newspaper as a servant of its publisher's interests, with both editorial writers and news reporters reflecting the publishers viewpoint in their writings."⁴³ This did not change immediately under the tutelage of Norman Chandler, and his anti-Communist views were central to the paper, much to the detriment of public housing proponents.⁴⁴ About housing, the paper favored private enterprise solutions to the shortage, specifically suburban single-family homes where "the *Times* and its business allies reasoned, working people would stay away from radical or union activities."⁴⁵ This viewpoint informed many of the articles during the war years about private and public housing.

News-making

Stuart Hall and colleagues describe the process of news-making. They argue that the news is created, and news-making is a layered process which begins by selecting stories that become newsworthy through this process.⁴⁶ The process is dictated by what Hall calls news values, which inform which stories get selected for publication.⁴⁷ Through the production of

⁴² Ibid., 257.

⁴³ Ibid., 232.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 244.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 260.

⁴⁶ Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 53.

⁴⁷ Hall et al., 54.

news, the media decide which events to present to the public and dictates how to understand them. However, the authors argue that this process cannot simply be attributed to ideas dictated by capitalist ownership since this ignores the power of the news staff to shape stories.⁴⁸ Instead, they argue that news stories reflect the views of the those in power because “two aspects of news production—the practical pressures of constantly working against the clock and the professional demands of impartiality and objectivity—combine to produce a systematically structured over-accessing to the media of those in powerful and privileged institutional positions” from which the newsmakers reproduce these points of view.⁴⁹ In other words, the media do not simply craft news stories or pass along the views of the powerful but rather do some combination of the two where they have the autonomy to select stories and code it using language specific to their readers but from a limited pool of information often dictated by those in power.⁵⁰ Ultimately, “the media thus help to reproduce and sustain the definitions of the situation which favour the powerful, not only by actively recruiting the powerful in the initial stages where topics are structured, but by favouring ways of setting up topics, and maintaining certain strategic areas of silence.”⁵¹

Another crucial part of the newsmaking process is its consumption. Thomas Huckin writes that readers comprehend texts differently, often depending on constraints such as time or purpose for reading. He then notes two different ways of processing: central and peripheral; the first allows for critical analysis and the second does not. Huckin argues that most readers process

⁴⁸ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 58.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 59-61.

⁵¹ Ibid., 65.

text peripherally “which makes them vulnerable to manipulation by text producers.”⁵² Further, people who do not have time to process critically will adopt the position of the producer. Similarly, Hall et al. argue that the reader is more likely to side with the actors presented in the story.⁵³ When this occurs multiple times, “it leads to a naturalization of the ideas presented; that is, they come to seem ‘natural’ or commonsensical. This is especially so if the ideas conform to widely-accepted cultural models and myths such as the American Dream or the US as exporter of democracy.”⁵⁴ Hall et al. similarly write: “Many of these structured forms of communication are so common, so natural, so taken for granted, so deeply embedded in the very communication forms which are employed, that they are hardly visible at all, as ideological constructs, unless we deliberately set out to ask, ‘What, other than what has been said about this topic, *could* be said?’ ‘What questions are omitted?’ ‘Why do the questions—which always presuppose answers of a particular kind—so often reoccur in this form? Why do certain other questions never appear?’”⁵⁵

From Hall et al., the step in the process that creates meaning for the news story is “the moment of the *construction* of the news story itself”—that is, when the reader consumes it and gives it meaning.⁵⁶ The meaning comes from the identification and contextualization of the story. Hall, et al. writes, “If the world is not to be represented as a jumble of random and chaotic events, then they must be identified (i.e. named, defined, related to other events known to the

⁵² Thomas Huckin, “Critical Discourse Analysis and the Discourse of Condensation,” in *Discourse Studies in Composition*, ed. by Ellen L. Barton and Gail Stygall (New York: Hampton Press, 2002), 11.

⁵³ Hall et al., 57.

⁵⁴ Huckin, “Critical Discourse Analysis and the Discourse of Condensation,” 11, underlining original.

⁵⁵ Hall et al., 65, italics original.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 54.

audience), and assigned to a social context (i.e. placed within a frame of meanings familiar to the audience).”⁵⁷

Shaping Perceptions in the Submerged State

From the news-making process, we can begin to understand how newspaper portrayals play a role in shaping readers’ perceptions. However, privatism in US housing policy has long obscured the crucial role of federal interventions in creating and maintaining a system supportive of private interests. The federal government has crafted a narrative since the New Deal that removed itself from the view of the public.

Scholars such as Thomas Hanchett argue that suburbanization should be conceptualized not only as the emphasis of early federal housing policies but also as subsidized by the federal government. Hanchett states:

In the decades following World War II, suburbanization, not slum clearance and low-income apartments, emerged as the twentieth century’s most sweeping change in the American metropolis. Beginning in the 1930s and blossoming after World War II, Washington launched major programs that aided middle- and upper-income citizens, particularly in the suburbs. It can be said with considerable truth that the vast landscape of suburban ranch houses and apartment complexes that sprawled outward from every U.S. city during the late 1940s, 1950s, and beyond was—no less than the grimmest public housing project—‘federally subsidized housing.’⁵⁸

Hanchett details three forms of federal interventions—first, direct incentives such as FHA and VA mortgage guarantees; second, indirect actions that aided suburban development, such as investment in highways and tax incentives for owners and builders; third, government actions

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Thomas W. Hanchett, “The Other ‘Subsidized Housing’: Federal Aid to Suburbanization, 1940s-1960s,” in *From Tenements to the Taylor Homes: In Search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. by John F. Bauman, Roger Biles, and Kristin M. Szylvian (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2000), 163-164.

that dictated who could live in these suburbs.⁵⁹ Similarly, Freund argues, "...public housing was not the only form of government subsidy in the postwar era. Selective credit programs actively subsidized the market for private housing, and thus suburban growth."⁶⁰

Freund argues that during the New Deal, the federal government, especially through the policies and programs of the Federal Housing Administration, "actively promoted the story that it was not interfering with the free market for homes."⁶¹ In the decades after the war, this mythology entrenched the idea for white homeowners that the government should not interfere with the private market since they were unaware that it not only intervened in the past but created the market for widespread homeownership.⁶² Further, newspapers perpetuated the hidden role of the state by "describing the postwar housing boom as the fruit of free enterprise and describing public housing as an unwarranted strain on the market."⁶³ These views would have been discussed and passed along through local newspapers and networks.

Hanchett explains how homeownership Americans benefitted indirectly from other programs around the mid-20th century in addition to policies like FHA mortgage insurance. He explains that property owners have long benefitted from tax policies like the ability to deduct mortgage interest and local property taxes, which in effect lower income taxes for homeowners. These benefits do not extend to renters and disproportionately benefit wealthy homeowners.⁶⁴ Hanchett explains that the deductions did not gain traction until after World War II because

⁵⁹ Hanchett, "The Other 'Subsidized Housing': Federal Aid to Suburbanization, 1940s-1960s," 164.

⁶⁰ Freund, "Marketing the Free Market," 32.

⁶¹ Freund, 21.

⁶² Ibid., 14.

⁶³ Ibid., 29.

⁶⁴ Hanchett, 171.

before the war, not many Americans had to pay income taxes. However, as the government increased taxation during and after the war, these deductions became increasingly appealing to the growing number of taxpayers who owed money.⁶⁵

This “submerged state” has persisted as exemplified by a 2008 survey of government benefits. The Social and Governmental Issues and Participation Study reveals that 60 percent of people who benefitted from the Home Mortgage Interest Deduction did not conceptualize the income tax deduction as a government social program.⁶⁶ Suzanne Mettler argues about the influence of privatism in the submerged state: “Our government is integrally intertwined with everyday life from health care to housing, but in forms that often elude our vision: governance appears ‘stateless’ because it operates indirectly, through subsidizing private actors.”⁶⁷ This paradox is representative of the continuance of the hidden role of government. The submerged nature of our understanding of federal interventions in housing creates a disconnect that results in people not being able to see the massive amounts of government involvement supporting the private housing industry and individual homeowners. These owners receive benefits from the federal government do not perceive themselves as beneficiaries of government assistance.

1940s Los Angeles

In Los Angeles, and California more broadly, workers came for employment in the booming wartime defense industry in the early 1940s. Jobs in the shipbuilding and aircraft

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Suzanne Mettler, *The Submerged State: How Invisible Government Policies Undermine American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 37-38.

⁶⁷ Mettler, *The Submerged State*, 6.

production industries attracted many of these workers by the end of 1940.⁶⁸ The *Times* quoted a federal official about Los Angeles: “The war certainly seems nearer when you get out here; that is that first thing I sensed when I arrived.”⁶⁹ A July 1944 report from the California Reconstruction and Reemployment Commission wrote about the population increases in the state during the war. The report stated that since 1940, the last official census, the population grew by 1.5 million, which included new residents as well as children born during this time. California also experienced “the highest annual growth rate ever recorded in the United States” in the year of 1943 with an increase of 600,000 people.⁷⁰ The population of Los Angeles County increased by 49 percent between 1940 and 1950.⁷¹

The influx of workers exacerbated the existing housing shortage. Even as new housing was developed during the war, especially near defense facilities, the Los Angeles region continued to lack the needed supply.⁷² Southern California had “supplied about 10 per cent of the entire national volume of privately financed war housing and 6 per cent of the government-financed units” as reported by John B. Blandford Jr., the head of the National Housing Administration, in a *Times* article from 1943.⁷³ In testimonies from the Naval Affairs

⁶⁸ Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles*, 8. Parson, 46.

⁶⁹ “Housing Chief Tells Need,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 1942, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

⁷⁰ Hise, 154.

⁷¹ U.S. Census Bureau. Total Population, 1940. Prepared by Social Explorer. <https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/C1940CompDS/R12170438> (accessed May 24, 2019). U.S. Census Bureau. Total Population, 1950. Prepared by Social Explorer. <https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/C1950CompDS/R12170429> (accessed May 24, 2019).

⁷² Hise, 124.

⁷³ Charles C. Cohan, “War Housing Strides in Southland Disclosed,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 1943, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

Subcommittee hearings in the same year, people reported on the housing shortage conditions and “asked, pleaded, or demanded that the federal government assist in alleviating the situation.”⁷⁴

Supporters of public and private housing, both nationally and locally, disagreed on how to address the housing shortage beginning in the 1930’s, but Los Angeles had strong local contingents representing both public and private housing.⁷⁵ In 1940’s Los Angeles, Mayor Fletcher Bowron supported the construction of public war housing and housing activists argued that private building efforts could not meet the needs of defense workers and civilians in search of housing.⁷⁶ However, local private builders and real estate industry officials emphasized private housing as the solution to the shortage during the war. Local builders like Fred Marlow and Fritz Burns had connections to national organizations like the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) and leveraged this power to build in Los Angeles.⁷⁷ Ultimately, the conditions of the war combined with the existing housing shortage created an opening for a rivalry between private and public housing in Los Angeles, much of which played out on the pages of the *Los Angeles Times*.

⁷⁴ Parson, 67.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 33, 67.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 46.

⁷⁷ Hise, 135.

CHAPTER THREE

DESCRIBING THE PUBLIC HOUSING PROGRAM

This section introduces the public housing program in Los Angeles, including the transition from low-income housing to defense worker housing during World War II. Some of the rhetoric about public housing, as presented in the *Los Angeles Times*, reflects a relatively neutral, explanatory viewpoint about the city's public housing program. Although rare, a few articles present specific housing developments positively, especially after they were converted to public war housing projects.

Public housing, although not prioritized like private suburban housing, did have some traction during the New Deal. On a national scale, the Public Works Administration (PWA), created in 1933 as a part of the National Industrial Recovery Act, built some of the first public housing. The Housing Division of the PWA intended to address high levels of unemployment from the Great Depression by constructing low-cost public housing.⁷⁸ These units were popular early on and were not means tested as public housing would later be. Income ceilings on buildings built and owned by the PWA were instituted with the George-Healey Act of 1936, only three years after the beginning of this public housing program. These PWA public housing units were considered competition for the private market as people began moving in to them even when they were able to afford other housing options.⁷⁹ As I will address in the following section, the discourse in the *Times* reflected differing viewpoints on whether or not the public housing units built during the war to house defense workers were considered competition for the private housing industry.

⁷⁸ Parson, 14.

⁷⁹ Radford, 105.

In 1930s Los Angeles, housing conditions were dire. Some parts of the city suffered from extreme overcrowding while others remained unoccupied due to an affordability crisis. The Municipal Housing Commission (MHC), which oversaw housing conditions in Los Angeles, worked with the Housing Division of the PWA in 1934 to develop public housing in the city. Three projects were planned but never came to fruition because the PWA shifted funding away from construction to direct relief.⁸⁰ While Mayor Frank Shaw encouraged involvement in federal programs, the MHC lacked funding to build its own housing.⁸¹ The shortage of adequate dwellings continued, and a 1938 survey from the Works Projects Administration (WPA) on the housing conditions in Los Angeles stated that the worst housing was along Central Avenue, a predominantly African American neighborhood, and in the eastside of the city. These locations of concern from the WPA housing survey also reveal the racialized perspectives of government officials interested in addressing what they perceived to be slum conditions in neighborhoods predominately consisting of people of color. Like in other cities, the original intention of the public housing program was to replace slum housing.⁸²

Leftist activists in Los Angeles were interested in addressing these housing conditions through public housing. This group of local activists that Parson refers to as the “left-liberal popular front” wanted to use the momentum from the National Housing Act of 1937 to bring public housing to the city. While this group strongly advocated for a public housing program in Los Angeles, they contended with wavering support from local government officials in the years to come, including Mayor Fletcher Bowron who replaced Shaw in 1938. During the war years,

⁸⁰ Parson, 20.

⁸¹ Parson, 19.

⁸² Vale, 230.

those advocating for public housing realized that it was not only crucial to the war effort but could also be used to expand upon the welfare state protections provided earlier in the New Deal.⁸³

As the defense build-up began, the government's priorities for public housing changed. The federal government viewed it as a crucial piece of the larger war effort, which meant that public housing would prioritize defense workers instead of low-income people as it had in the immediate years prior. This shift would be guided using rhetorical appeals to public housing's importance as a national duty. As the war progressed, "the public purpose of public housing could be measured not by its eradication of public housing health hazards and unemployment but by its patriotic contribution to the war effort."⁸⁴ Indeed, a 1942 article reflected this appeal to patriotism.

In October 1942, the *Times* reported on Mayor Bowron's perspective about the soon-to-open Aliso Village. The mayor, as relayed through the *Times*, stated the importance of the public housing program as a part of the broader war effort. The article quotes Bowron: "It is a healthy sign for democracy to be able to complete a public housing program while most of the world is wrapped up in thoughts of death and destruction."⁸⁵ Bowron's claim equating the construction of public housing with democracy was rare in the overall discourse put forth by the *Times*. Rather, it was far more common for the newspaper to appeal to these ideals of democracy in relation to private enterprise. Nonetheless, in this rare advocacy of public housing reported by the *Times*, Bowron continued to focus on public housing. Further, the article quotes Bowron stating: "I

⁸³ Parson, 13, 18, 20, 45.

⁸⁴ Vale, 230.

⁸⁵ "Wartime Housing Work Cited as Proof of Democracy," *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1942, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

would like to see this community establish the policy that democracy must continue to develop through service to its people in times of peace as well as war. ... Public housing is one social movement which can make Los Angeles the servant of future generations.”⁸⁶ Mayor Bowron’s statement, considering public housing as a solution to future housing needs beyond the war, was uncommon compared to the usual rhetoric that favored private enterprise.

Similar to the early years of the New Deal, this period saw extensive government intervention into the housing market. At the national level, Congress authorized the United States Housing Authority (USHA) in June 1940 to use funds originally intended for the low-income public housing program to construct twenty public housing projects nationwide for those involved in the defense industry.⁸⁷ This continued in October 1940 when President Roosevelt signed the Lanham Act, which authorized the Federal Works Agency (FWA) to continue the effort of building public housing for defense workers and their families by building 700,000 public housing units across the country.⁸⁸ Exactly one year after the president signed the Lanham Act, it is estimated that approximately forty-four thousand defense workers were living in public housing across the country.⁸⁹

Government funding increased during World War II in Los Angeles, including federal housing funds that were intended to address the shifting conditions due to the war effort. The City Housing Authority (CHA), which replaced the MHC in 1938, oversaw the defense housing

⁸⁶ “Wartime Housing Work Cited as Proof of Democracy.”

⁸⁷ Kristin M. Szylvian, “The Federal Housing Program During World War II,” in *From Tenements to the Taylor Homes: In Search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth-Century America*, edited by John F. Bauman, Roger Biles, and Kristin M. Szylvian (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2000), 123.

⁸⁸ Szylvian, “The Federal Housing Program During World War II,” 124. Parson, 47.

⁸⁹ Szylvian, 122.

program.⁹⁰ The CHA began prioritizing defense workers in October 1941 in nine of ten projects that were originally funded to house low-income people through the Housing Act of 1937. Ramona Gardens was the first public housing completed in 1941 with the remainder finished the following year.⁹¹ It was the sole project not to be converted to defense housing. The *Times* reported the following year that Ramona Gardens was not designated as a defense project because families moved in before the start of the war. The article states, “The authority did not feel those families should be required to move. Since then more than 100 of the family heads have obtained jobs in war industries.”⁹² In addition to nine developments that were converted, the Housing Authority oversaw five permanent public war housing projects and twenty-one temporary public housing war projects, which included portable units and trailers, during the war.⁹³

In 1942, the *Times* reported that the City Housing Authority would be opening Pico Gardens, which was the second development completed after Ramona Gardens. The article emphasizes the slum clearance purpose dictated by the Housing Act of 1937. The author writes, “Officials of the Housing Authority declare that construction of Pico Gardens has resulted in eliminating what had been one of the worst slum districts in Los Angeles.”⁹⁴ However, because of the new purpose of public housing for the war, defense workers had priority access to public

⁹⁰ Parson, 19, 45.

⁹¹ Ibid., 32, 47.

⁹² “Vast Housing Program Begun on \$22,900 Loan,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1942, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

⁹³ Parson, 47.

⁹⁴ “City Housing Authority to Open Project Today,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 2, 1942, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

housing. The article reports that Pico Gardens was “designed for occupancy by war plant workers in the low income brackets.”⁹⁵

The *Times* rarely wrote articles about specific public housing developments during this period, but Aliso Village got more coverage than others. On October 23, 1942, the newspaper ran four separate pieces about Aliso Village. Two articles used the opening of the development to reflect on the history and importance of the public housing in Los Angeles thus far. Another article and a supplement took a congratulatory tone about the upcoming dedication of the program. During the war, this was their most positive portrayal of public housing. Aliso Village was the last of nine developments completed in 1942 and the last funded through monies appropriated through the Housing Act of 1937 originally intended for low-income public housing.⁹⁶

The first article details the 4-year history of the Los Angeles Housing Authority. It reported on the trajectory of the public housing program from its original prioritization to the change during wartime: “The original program, launched in peacetime, was designed to clear the slums and provide adequate homes for low-income families living in sub-standard buildings. ... Not long after Pearl Harbor the Housing Authority ordered that all of its developments be made available to war workers and the families of Army and Navy personnel.”⁹⁷ The article also stated that although the units at Aliso Village were converted for wartime use, the Housing Authority intended to return them occupancy by low-income people once the war was over.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ “City Housing Authority to Open Project Today.”

⁹⁶ Parson, 32.

⁹⁷ “Vast Housing Program Begun on \$22,900 Loan.”

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Another article from October 23, 1942 focused on the dedication that would take place at Aliso Village and reflected on the public housing program in Los Angeles to date. The article begins, “Crowning four years of intensive work on one of the nation’s largest public housing programs, the Los Angeles City Housing Authority will celebrate the completion of its \$16,000,000 low-rent war-housing program with colorful public dedication ceremonies Sunday at Aliso Village.”⁹⁹ The rare, jovial tone of the article noted that there would be a musical program as well as multiple guests speakers and ended by extending an invitation to the public to attend the dedication ceremony on behalf of the Housing Authority.¹⁰⁰

Parson writes that even the conservative *Times* ran a congratulatory insert on the same day addressing the opening of Aliso Village.¹⁰¹ The newspaper published the insert but did not author it. Rather, the general contractor of the project, R.E. Campbell General Contractors, used the page to thank the City Housing Authority as well as the Federal Public Housing Authority, successor agency to the USHA. Specifically, the contractor congratulates these agencies “particularly for the vision that lies behind this and similar Government-supported housing developments.”¹⁰² The *Times* acted as the publisher instead of author in this case, but an analysis of multiple articles spanning the war period reveals that the circumstances of the war did not, ultimately, reflect a sympathetic tone toward public housing.

⁹⁹ “Huge Aliso Village Housing Project Will Be Dedicated Here Sunday” *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1942, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

¹⁰⁰ “Huge Aliso Village Housing Project Will Be Dedicated Here Sunday.”

¹⁰¹ Parson, 45.

¹⁰² “Our Congratulations,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1942, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

CHAPTER FOUR

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HOUSING COMPETITION

This section, and those to follow, will present the rhetoric about public housing that was much more common in the *Los Angeles Times*. I first introduce the ongoing debate over public housing and private housing during the war years and argue that the portrayals in these articles worked to limit the perceived scope of public housing. The paper frequently relied on the narrative that public housing was only for the low-income section of the market, which was supposedly the section that private housing could not reach. However, this narrative is complicated through other articles that argue that the two industries were indeed competitors in an overlapping market. Finally, I detail discourse from articles that reveal private industry expectations of assistance from the government to allow them to compete with public housing.

Private Industry First, Public Housing Second

One of the most common portrayals from the *Times* worked to limit the perceived scope of public housing by invoking the narrative that public housing was only built where private industry could not supply it. Multiple articles repeated this discourse through the war years. However, the articles also reveal a counternarrative that suggested that the private industry did think of public housing as competition, specifically for the low-income market.

National policies intentionally formulated this system to suppress competition to the private industry from government housing. This policy tension was evident in the Housing Act of 1937. The Act created a public housing program beyond the smaller program that the PWA had previously developed, but conservatives and private industry lobbyists limited the scope of the new program. Under this Act, the United States Housing Authority was created to oversee

public housing at the national level, but the bill put most of the power in the hands of local authorities, which meant that localities decided where to site their public housing and even whether to build at all. Local level control purposely meant public housing was less likely to be built. Other provisions that weakened the bill included limited funding for construction, requiring means testing which limited public housing to the poorest Americans, and the “so-called equivalent elimination clause” which “formally linked public housing to slum clearance” which dictated that for every new unit of public housing constructed, one unit of slum housing had to be destroyed.¹⁰³

In October 1940, Congress approved the Defense Housing and Community Facilities and Services Act of 1940, better known as the Lanham Act. Lanham carefully crafted the Act to limit the scope of public housing and protect the interests of the private building industry, much like the Housing Act of 1937. To pass the Act, Fritz Lanham had to gain the support of liberals who wanted to see the expansion of public housing through the building of wartime public housing as well as the support of conservatives. He appealed to the latter by addressing private industry fears that the government would not become their competitor. This generally meant that the federal government would not supply housing other than for the low-income market. Conversely, public housing activists operated on the premise that the private industry could not supply the necessary amount of rental housing.¹⁰⁴

Lanham’s personal disfavor toward the public housing program created through the Housing Act of 1937 not only led him to protect private industry interests in his bill but also led him to create provisions that would stunt the growth of future public housing programs. Lanham

¹⁰³ Radford, 111.

¹⁰⁴ Szylvian, 124.

did this in two ways; he did not put the new war-time housing program under the administration of the USHA, which oversaw the local public housing authorities, but rather the Federal Works Agency, and he added an amendment that would not allow for public war housing to be converted back to low-income public housing without Congressional approval.¹⁰⁵

Further, a change in personnel shifted the role of public housing in the larger defense housing program. John M. Carmody, FWA Administrator, had originally sought to use the Lanham Act as a way to reinstate confidence in public housing after the Housing Act of 1937 and use it as a model for housing in the postwar years.¹⁰⁶ However, Carmody resigned from his position in October 1941 due to health reasons and, along with other liberal officials, was replaced by John B. Blandford Jr. of the National Housing Administration (NHA). Blandford did not share the same vision for public housing. Under Blandford, the agency shifted its focus to building temporary housing “unless a demonstrated and ongoing need for permanent housing existed in a particular community.”¹⁰⁷ Blandford’s decision had the support of the private industry who were concerned that permanent public housing would be their competition and have an effect on real estate values. Further, this emphasis on temporary housing coincided with a decline in the quality of housing produced. “Organized labor and housing activists did not support the shift to temporary housing because they feared that trailers and other forms of temporary housing were potential postwar slums that would discredit all public housing.”¹⁰⁸

Articles from the *Times* relied on the temporary nature of public war housing to limit its

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 125.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 130.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 131.

perceived scope. However, they also reveal an irony. Federal legislation had enacted a permanent public housing program in 1937, but private industry did not distinguish between the original low-income housing program and the wartime program. The lack of specificity in the discourse on housing built before and during the war indicated that private industry did not want a public housing program to last regardless of who it was built for.

Critical Defense Area

The Lanham Act appropriated \$1.3 billion in funding to critical defense areas. The federal government deemed Los Angeles a critical defense area, which meant that part of the federal funding would go toward the construction of public and private housing in cities crucial to the defense effort. This system limited where defense housing could be built by including a vague section in the Act that noted that this funding could be used in areas where “private builders could not leverage the necessary capital and construction materials.”¹⁰⁹ This caused a national debate between public housing activists and the private home building industry. In the *Times*, the effects of this provision were a source of contention in the discourse about public and private housing.

The Division of Defense Housing Coordination (DDHC) was the first agency to regulate the supply of needed wartime housing. Similar to the Lanham, Defense Housing Coordinator Charles F. Palmer also favored private industry solutions to address the shortage of housing. He “consistently ignored or denigrated the concerns of left-leaning public housing proponents, especially their contention that the project might form the nucleus of postwar communities.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Hise, 121. Szylvian, 124.

¹¹⁰ Parson, 66.

The DDHC was succeeded by the National Housing Agency who made it their policy that temporary public housing would be built when the private industry was not able. Executive Order 9070, establishing the NHA, also created the Federal Public Housing Authority, which was one of three main divisions of the NHA. The FPHA controlled the operations of both permanent and temporary public housing during the war created through the Lanham Act.¹¹¹

The National Housing Agency controlled the supply of housing in critical defense areas by using building quotas to control the use of limited materials. The NHA worked with other wartime agencies, such as the War Manpower Commission (WMC) and the War Production Board (WPB), to decide where to construct public and private housing necessary for addressing local shortages.¹¹² In September 1941, the Priorities Division of the Office of Production Management (OPM) implemented restrictions on construction materials for defense housing and the rate of construction began to slow.¹¹³

A *Times* article ran in October 1941 reporting that Howard Holtzendorff, executive director of the City Housing Authority, assured that the public housing program would continue despite the recent mandate that banned non-essential construction. The article explains, “The Office of Production Management has approved the granting of blanket priorities on public housing projects located in defense areas, according to Holtzendorff.”¹¹⁴ Further, it detailed for readers the breakdown of who would be prioritized for these new public housing units: “Under the new program first choice in rentals will be given defense workers in substandard homes,

¹¹¹ Ibid., 47.

¹¹² Hise, 126.

¹¹³ Hise, 142.

¹¹⁴ “Public Housing Here Unchanged,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 1941, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

instead of to slum dwellers in general, as in the earlier plan. Defense workers in general will receive second choice, and the normal market of low-income groups will be third.”¹¹⁵ Further, the article concludes by reporting that under federal order, “there will be no new slum-clearance housing program as such for the duration of the emergency, but that there will be additional defense housing projects.”¹¹⁶ Although subtle, the intentional language does make clear to the reader the difference between public housing for low-income tenants and that built as a part of the war effort. Two months later, the *Times* reported that an official with the City Housing Authority, back from Washington DC, received notification that “the more than \$13,000,000 government-sponsored public housing program here would not be halted by the new Federal order limiting nonessential construction work” and notes that government would give priority to “defense workers in sub-standard homes instead of to slum dwellers in general, as in the earlier plan.”¹¹⁷

In 1942, the WPB banned all non-essential construction, but “the building materials priority system sustained the volume of low-cost private residential construction in defense-housing critical areas.”¹¹⁸ An article from August 1942 reported that the 10,000-unit quota for Los Angeles had been reached by completed units or those under construction. Further, it reiterates the narrative that the government builds public housing where private housing cannot supply it. *Times* real estate editor Charles C. Cohan writes, “Where private industry cannot supply requisite housing, public housing facilities in the form of dormitories and other such

¹¹⁵ “Public Housing Here Unchanged.”

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Charles C. Cohan, “Fact and Comment By the Real Estate Editor,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1941. <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

¹¹⁸ Hise, 143.

structures are provided.”¹¹⁹ Cohan’s vague language fails to inform readers why private industry cannot build but does note the temporary nature of public war housing.

However, *Times* articles reveal this competition narrative was perpetuated by the government officials themselves. A September 1942 article reported on the events at the California Housing and Planning Association’s conference in Los Angeles and detailed the regional FHA director’s stance on the issue. “To the extent that the National Housing Agency will permit, private industry will build houses for purchase or rent by war workers, Capt. W.G. Bingham, Southern California director of the Federal Housing Administration, said, but believes public housing should provide rental units that private industry cannot construct.”¹²⁰

Three months later, in December, the *Times* focused on the opinion of Herbert Emmerich’s, commissioner of the Federal Public Housing Authority. Emmerich, speaking at the Biltmore Hotel, assured that public housing was not taking away private competition and instead presented a stance that suggested there was no rivalry between public and private housing:

‘I see no conflict between the two,’ he said at the Biltmore. ‘And I think that private property owners over the country now realize the situation. The law forbade any competition. We are employing public housing only where private housing cannot possibly meet the demands of war industries. Many of the projects are for low-income groups or for temporary housing that would not be at all inviting to private investment.’¹²¹

Similar to Cohan, Emmerich also notes that public war housing is temporary but also says that the private industry is not interested in the low-income housing market.

¹¹⁹ Charles C. Cohan, “Home Quota Rise Hinted,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 1942, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

¹²⁰ “War Housing Speed Sought,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 1942, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

¹²¹ “Housing Chief Tells Need.”

The *Times* reported on Emmerich again in September 1943 when he reiterated many of his thoughts from his speech at the Biltmore. In Los Angeles on an inspection trip, he noted the Federal Public Housing Authority was devoting all of its resources toward a public housing program strictly for war workers. He argued that the public housing program “helps to meet housing emergency [needs] and saves times and essential materials while at the same time not jeopardizing community planning or real estate values.”¹²² Similar to his 1942 speech, he explained that real estate values were not threatened since private industry “gets first call in providing warworker homes” but went on to assert “where it cannot do the job, public housing must do it.”¹²³ Emmerich’s rhetoric upholds the ongoing narrative about the absence of competition, but his language also suggests that public housing still performs an important function, whereas others often used this narrative in an attempt to belittle public housing.

An Associated Press article, published in the *Los Angeles Times* in March 1944, reflects the same intentions for limiting the scope of public housing by another government official. The article states that Senator Allen J. Ellender, the chairman of the Senate subcommittee overseeing low-income housing, suggested that public housing advocates should “join hands with private enterprise in a comprehensive approach to the national housing problem.”¹²⁴ Senator Ellender’s assertion uses positive rhetoric to suggest that the two should simply work together to solve the nation’s housing shortage. However, Ellender does not hide his preference for private industry when he states, “Public housing should do only the part of the job that private housing cannot

¹²² “Federal Housing Chief Here on Inspection Trip,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 8, 1943, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

¹²³ “Federal Housing Chief Here on Inspection Trip.”

¹²⁴ “Private Housing Urged by Ellender,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1944, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

accomplish. ... Private enterprise should be encouraged and facilitated to do as much of the job as possible; in fact, to the limit of its capacity.”¹²⁵ His statement continued to reflect the discourse from many government officials that asserted that the private industry had a right to do the job of providing housing first and that public housing should always be a secondary option.

Complicating the Narrative

The guiding policy and common narrative put forth by private and public officials was that public housing was only necessary to address the low-income part of the market. However, some of the articles suggest that private industry officials saw private housing as a competitor for the low-income housing market. This ongoing debate is notable in the context of the war since public war housing was not only for the low-income market during this period. This shows that the private industry, and often their supporters in government, did not want public housing to exist in any form and did not let up with their rhetorical attacks, even when public housing prioritized war workers.

In the late 1930s, national policies began to facilitate this shift to allow private industry to reach, at least a portion, of the low-income market. While Congress formulated public housing policy, the FHA expanded their reach so that the private housing industry could serve more people.¹²⁶ They did this by supporting community builders who were developing large tracts of suburban housing, which, in Los Angeles, occurred predominately near defense facilities. These builders relied on Title I, Class 3 loans, which was a new FHA mortgage insurance program specifically for smaller homes. The program, developed in 1938, was in essence means-tested as

¹²⁵ “Private Housing Urged by Ellender.”

¹²⁶ Radford, 115.

it was only intended for homes under \$2500. A second program also aided private industry in targeting the low-income market for ownership. Section 203 allowed mortgages to be underwritten for 90 percent of the value instead of 80 percent and lengthened the repayment period on homes valued at \$4500 dollars or less.¹²⁷ These policies continued into the war and were upheld by the War Production Board and National Housing Administration, and they enabled private builders to produce over 1 million homes during the war years.¹²⁸ Ultimately, federal policies that allowed for the private industry to target the low-income market caused both “a marketing conflict with and an antipathy to public housing.”¹²⁹

The private industry reinforced these policies with campaigns to promote widespread homeownership. In early 1940, “the FHA launched a ‘concerted campaign’ to promote homeownership among the ‘mass of modest-income families’ with twenty-five hundred dollars in annual earnings, sufficient to own a dwelling on a budget of twenty-five dollars a month.”¹³⁰ Congress passed Title VI of the Housing Act in March 1941. This legislation provided home builders additional incentives for concentrating on the small-house market. Title VI was restricted to 146 industrial areas where the defense housing coordinator forecasted critical housing shortages. The stated objective was to stimulate private construction proximate to defense manufacturing. Under Title VI, home builders in critical housing areas could apply for direct guaranteed loans up to 90 percent of a project’s appraised value. These loans reduced developers’ up-front costs and assigned risk to the federal government. Only defense workers

¹²⁷ Hise, 133.

¹²⁸ Hise, 126.

¹²⁹ Parson, 9.

¹³⁰ Hise, 41.

employed in certified industries and earning less than three thousand dollars a year were eligible for these units, which had to be purchased or rented for under fifty dollars a month. During the first year, California accounted for over one-quarter of the Title VI loans guaranteed nationwide.¹³¹ “In the Los Angeles office, FHA-insured loans for new home construction reached 27,680 in 1941. Twenty-seven percent of these were commuted under Title VI. The following year, this increased to 85 percent.”¹³²

Los Angeles home builder Fritz Burns, as a part of the National Association of Home Builders, undertook his own campaign from 1942 to 1944 “to mobilize his fellows in the industry against the possible preference within national policy for public over private war housing.”¹³³ In a September 1943 *Times* article, Burns, addressing the Chicago Real Estate Board and Metropolitan Chicago Home Builders’ Association, is quoted as follows: “Postwar efforts to catch up on the building of homes in the over-\$6000 bracket will go hand in hand with a continuous program on the part of private homebuilders to reach further down the scale into the lower-income type of home, to lessen, if not entirely eliminate, the necessity of public housing, except that of the institutional type.”¹³⁴ Burns asserts to other private industry officials that by continuing to target the low-income market in the postwar years, they will be able to diminish or even possibly remove any need for public housing since they would control the entire housing market. The *Times* again reflected the sentiments of the NAHB when it wrote about the opinions of Robert Gerholz, the president of the NAHB who succeeded Burns. The February 1944 article

¹³¹ Ibid., 142.

¹³² Ibid., 245.

¹³³ Parson, 67.

¹³⁴ “Angeleno Tells Need for Million Homes Annually,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 1943, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

reads: “Emphasizing that the organization he heads does not want the government to be a competitor in the building or real estate business, Gerholz said that the private building industry is second only to agriculture in national economic importance and if properly safeguarded can be expected to provide work from 6,000,000 to 8,000,000 persons after the war.”¹³⁵ The rhetoric reinforces the notion that the private industry does not want competition from the government in home building and elevates the work done by private industry suggesting it will employ millions. Similarly, in October 1944, Charles C. Cohan reported on various discussions from California Real Estate Association’s conference in Los Angeles. Cohan states that John W. Galbreath, president of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, “described the national organization’s activities in aiding in solving the national realty problems” including “furtherance of low-cost housing construction by private enterprise” and “introduction of legislative measures aimed at alleviating urban taxation.”¹³⁶

The newspaper introduced rhetoric that explicitly stated that public and private housing did compete against each other. An article from January 1945 argues, “Federal housing projects compete directly with private business and should have no special privileges.”¹³⁷ This statement conflicts with the narrative commonly put forth by private and public housing officials who suggested that public housing only did the work private housing could not. The article focuses on the issue of taxation and argues that public housing receives unfair treatment in light of a Supreme Court ruling that said units under the auspices of the Federal Public Housing Authority

¹³⁵ “Private Housing Champion Gives View on Future,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 8, 1944, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

¹³⁶ Charles C. Cohan, “Realty Men Praise No. 12; Oppose ’60 at 60’ Plan,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1944, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

¹³⁷ “Need for a Change,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1945, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

were not subject to local taxation. It argues, “While, as the court points out, the Housing Authority may make agreements for payments ‘in lieu’ of taxes, such a provision is not sufficient protection as it gives the Housing Authority the final say as to how much taxes shall be paid. Private housing has no such option and it is at a competitive disadvantage as a result.”¹³⁸ This article complicates the discourse that was otherwise put forth, but it reveals the sentiments hidden within the other articles and the policies themselves. While those in the private housing industry received direct government benefits, they perceived public housing as their competition and thus something that needed to be eliminated.

Expectations of Assistance

Amidst the argument about whether or not the two modes of housing were competitors, a set of articles show how the private industry expected or requested various forms of assistance from the federal government. These requests, or occasional demands, included lists to Congress about conditions that need to be addressed, including limiting property taxes for private builders and a repeal of the capital gains tax; wanting more building materials allocated to the private industry and arguing they should have as much as public housing; and wanting the FHA to adjust cost allowances. The private housing industry officials may not have explicitly stated as such, but these were expectations of assistance that allowed them to compete against public housing during the war in Los Angeles. The newspaper reveals that the private industry was well aware of the federal government’s importance in its control over resources as it made appeals or demands of assistance throughout the war.

¹³⁸ “Need for a Change.”

During the war, the executive branch rapidly consolidated power, more so than had been done in other wars or even at the beginning of the New Deal, which raised concerns about the relationship between the federal government and private markets.¹³⁹ President Roosevelt appealed to Americans in multiple speeches during the war to convince them of the purpose of consolidating power. From a speech given February 23, 1942, Roosevelt, as quoted in Katznelson, proclaimed: “We Americans will contribute unified production and unified acceptance of sacrifice and of effort. That means a national unity that can know no limitations of race or creed or selfish politics.”¹⁴⁰

The federal government used its centralized authority to control the economy with “the clear understanding that war needs and defense production must come first.”¹⁴¹ Specifically, it controlled the allocation of materials and regulated production operations, outlined in policies such as the Lanham Act. It also controlled where this funding would be invested and influenced the migration of people to seek out jobs in places with defense facilities.¹⁴²

As a critical defense area, the Los Angeles economy benefitted from the federal government’s wartime influence, especially from defense facilities and home building. Mike Davis explains:

First, the inter-regional capital flows that had been the source of Southern California’s prosperity were now institutionalized in national defense appropriations that shifted tax resources from the rest of the country to irrigate the Los Angeles area’s aircraft plants and military bases: a huge regional subsidy that in later years was estimated to average \$17-\$20 billion per annum. Secondly, the land-conversion process, already raised to an

¹³⁹ Katznelson, 353.

¹⁴⁰ Katznelson, 324.

¹⁴¹ Katznelson, 344.

¹⁴² Katznelson, 371.

economy of scale by prewar syndicates and developers, was now transformed into a true mass production industry.¹⁴³

The state intervention in these two key industries was backed by earlier New Deal policies supporting the banking industry and guaranteeing home mortgages. Private home builders utilized these beneficial policies to develop suburbs like Westchester, in west Los Angeles, despite their concerns about government control. An article from October 1941, shortly after the federal government enacted construction limitations, reported on the status of home building in Los Angeles, from the perspective of Earl S. Anderson of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. The article states that Anderson thought “that although public construction probably will be hit in varying degrees by the government edict, home building will not fare badly since the county has been designated as a defense area.”¹⁴⁴ However, the article concludes that it was still too soon to know the exact effects of the new federal controls.¹⁴⁵ An article the following year reminded *Times* readers of the centrality of home building to the war effort. Cohan writes that Eugene Weston Jr., regional representative for the NHA, emphasized the importance of home building in the war effort: “War production is threatened where shortage of needed houses occurs.”¹⁴⁶

The federal government further imposed control on the city when, in July 1942, the NHA “restricted residential construction in Los Angeles County to the area south of Manchester and Firestone Boulevards.”¹⁴⁷ A *Times* article from 1942 questioned the decision to restrict building

¹⁴³ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 2006), 120-121.

¹⁴⁴ “Public Housing Here Unchanged.”

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Cohan, “Home Quota Rise Hinted.”

¹⁴⁷ Hise, 143.

to this area. Cohan notes that local industry officials wanted an explanation as to why applications to fill the quota were only being approved for this part of the city. Cohan writes, “The explanation was that the purpose of the order is to conserve critical materials and to concentrate war-worker housing construction in what are deemed acute spots. Weston amplified this with the statement to the effect that 30,000 vacancies in this region available for war-worker occupancy was partly responsible for the order.”¹⁴⁸

The shortage of materials would prove to be a great concern for builders, and the *Times* editorialized their fears. This began with an article from August 1941 written by W.O. Harris, secretary-manager of the Southern California Chapter of Home Builders Institute of America. Harris begins the article by stating the crucial role of building materials for the status of home building in Los Angeles. The piece reads, “‘Available building material and priorities,’ may be magic words for home builders and contractors in the Southern California area very shortly and ‘material costs and F.H.A. valuations’ may be the words which indicate the difference between doing business and looking for a job. There are no two ways about it, these things are upper-most in the minds of every subdivider and home builder in Southern California today.”¹⁴⁹ Harris levels that if the government does not address these two key issues, builders may not be able to develop in the area.

Further, Harris argues that even though government officials, including President Roosevelt, claim that private industry must do the job of home building for the defense efforts, the government must provide the resources to be able to do so. He argues:

Private builders have indicated a willingness and an ability to produce homes now in every area where it is economically sound for them to do so. The big volume of

¹⁴⁸ Cohan, “Home Quota Rise Hinted.”

¹⁴⁹ W.O. Harris, “Priorities Raise Building Problems.” *Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 1941, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

residential permits in Los Angeles County is ample proof of that. However, with the increase in the building business has come the rising price of materials and with the volume and other defense requirements has come the shortages.¹⁵⁰

He goes on to restate that a home builder, facing so many uncertainties about availability of materials and costs, knows when he should no longer develop because “it would be folly to do otherwise.”¹⁵¹ Harris lists four conditions for government officials necessary for home builders to continue operations: building materials should be made available, the prices of those materials must be fixed, home builders should receive priority over any building not related to the war, and that the FHA keep its cost estimates up-to-date. Again, he argues that if the government cannot meet these conditions, it “will force private builders and private capital out of the building business.”¹⁵² Lastly, Harris suggests that if the government cannot meet these demands and private building ceases, they would be left with the dismal option of public housing, which he asserts is less economical than private housing.¹⁵³ The expectations of that Harris repeats throughout the article reflect not only the battle over limited supplies during the war but also the gentle threat from private industry officials that the government should give them what they need or else be left solely with public housing—an unthinkable tradeoff for those in the private industry.

Other articles reflected Harris’s concern over the shortage of materials and their allocation. A piece from September 1942, reporting on the California Housing and Planning Association’s conference in Los Angeles, states that the association requested a “wider scope of

¹⁵⁰ “Priorities Raise Building Problems.”

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

authority for local war production boards in allotment of materials” to “speed construction of essential war housing projects.”¹⁵⁴ A month later, the *Times* relayed the concerns of David B. Simpson, president of the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB), as he addressed an event for the California Real Estate Association and Los Angeles Realty Board. The author prefaces Simpson’s statement by noting, “The private building industry faces a critical situation due to inability to get materials.”¹⁵⁵ The author goes on to write, “He [Simpson] demanded that war worker home building by private builders be given priority rating on a par with that of public housing projects. ‘If the government can supply materials to government it can supply them to private industry,’ he declared.”¹⁵⁶ Simpson argues that the private industry cannot compete with public housing if they are not allocated the same materials. In his last statement, he explicitly requests government assistance to address the matter.

Some months after these articles articulated private industry demands, the *Times* questioned whether or not the private industry would be able to “accomplish its 1943 war housing assignment.”¹⁵⁷ This article, written by the real estate editor Cohan, shares the opinion of Cortwright, executive secretary of the NAHB, who argued that the answer to the question depended on the allocation of materials by the War Production Board. Cohan writes of the production numbers,

We’re told Housing Administrator Blandford’s plan says 178,000 housing units must be built this year by private industry. Cortright states that ‘the production of planes, ships, tanks and guns cannot be kept up to schedule unless this minimum amount of critically

¹⁵⁴ “War Housing Speed Sought.”

¹⁵⁵ “Realty Leader Urges Aid to Private Builders,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1942, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

¹⁵⁶ “Realty Leader Urges Aid to Private Builders.”

¹⁵⁷ Charles C. Cohan, “Fact and Comment By the Real Estate Editor,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 1943, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

needed housing is erected by private builders in addition to the quantity of temporary shelter which the Federal Public Housing Authority will be able to construct.¹⁵⁸

This article, like others, centers the importance of private housing to the larger war effort. Cohan quotes Cortwright in the article: “In view of the fact that only 1 per cent of the critical materials now being produced in this country would be required for this housing, it is indeed unfortunate that the green light is not given.”¹⁵⁹ Like Harris’s article, this suggests that the private industry’s argument was that it was capable of producing housing so long as the government supplied them the necessary materials. Cohan shifts his tone toward the end of the article. He laments, “So while one governmental authority sees the need for home building, another socks the idea in the midriff. There wouldn’t be so much bedeviling of the building industry if there weren’t so many cooks to spoil the broth.”¹⁶⁰ In other words, Cohan thinks that the conflicting purposes, and sheer number, of federal agencies lead them to be unsupportive of the private home building industry.

Private officials had additional expectations of government. In October 1943, Cohan reported from the California Real Estate Association’s 39th annual convention in San Francisco. He writes that the discussions from the final day of the conference reflected a number of requests to the federal government including: limiting property tax rates and assessments; petitioning Congress to investigate public housing and its costs; a postwar cap on federal income taxes; modification of the Federal Rent Control Board’s restrictions on the sale of homes; and a repeal of capital gains taxes.¹⁶¹ Similarly, an April 1944 article argues that “a program of Congressional

¹⁵⁸ Cohan, “Fact and Comment By the Real Estate Editor,” January 10, 1943.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Charles C. Cohan, “Realtors Urge Public Housing Investigation,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 8, 1943, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

action” is “needed for assuring maximum employment in the building industry after the war.”¹⁶² Requests from this program included revising “tax laws to permit deduction of funds spent for advance construction planning as current expense” as well as “planning of local improvements without waiting for Federal assistance, furtherance of the private mortgage insuring facilities, [and] discontinuance of the use of Federal funds for the construction of new public housing, with reliance on existing structures for housing of needy families through local welfare expenditures.”¹⁶³ Like the others before, these private industry demands for government assistance suggest that they did view public housing as their competition, despite initial arguments that they served separate markets.

¹⁶² “Producers Urge Fostering Work When War Ends,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 1944, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

¹⁶³ “Producers Urge Fostering Work When War Ends.”

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN PRIVATE HOUSING PRODUCTION

The *Los Angeles Times* represented government involvement in its articles in conflicting ways. One set of articles obscured the government's role in private housing production. Specifically, these pieces either entirely remove the label of government from discussions of the FHA or they present the agency's purpose as one of facilitating private housing production. The absence of an acknowledgment of government intervention would have skewed the understanding of *Times* readers. They would have likely believed the myth that the private industry was successful on its own with the absence of the government acknowledgment. Another set of articles, however, did acknowledge the role of the government in housing but portrayed a critical view of it. These articles often rebuked federal housing bureaucracy and opined that the government should not be involved in housing at all. Taken together, these themes present a paradoxical view of government involvement from the private industry—publicly minimizing or discrediting the government's role while benefitting from the interventions.

Obscuring the Government's Role

The federal government not only created and maintained a system that benefitted the private housing industry and individual homeowners, often to the detriment of people of color who were shut out from these institutions, but it also managed to convince “the public that its interventions in no way disrupted American capitalism. Mortgage programs, officials insisted, merely ‘unleashed’ existing, but latent, market forces.”¹⁶⁴ The influence of private industry

¹⁶⁴ Freund, 13.

officials who shaped these New Deal policies and the government officials who supported the ideals of privatism crafted the system in a way that hid the benefits bestowed on the private industry and homeowners. As early as the Housing Act of 1934, Congress intentionally focused on private housing. Writing about the reflections of Marriner S. Eccles, chairman of the Federal Reserve from 1934 to 1951, Radford states, “Eccles described the mechanism of federal guarantees for commercial loans as a device that ‘avoided any direct encroachment by the government on the domain of private business, but which used the power of the government to establish the condition under which private initiative could feed itself and multiply its own benefits.’”¹⁶⁵

The changing role of the state during the New Deal required government officials “to convince business groups and fiscally conservative congressmen—and, perhaps, even themselves—that the governments unprecedented interventions in the U.S. economy were not cutting a path toward ‘state control’ of private enterprise.”¹⁶⁶ They had to work to assure the private industry that the new system they created for mortgage guarantees would be successful. For if the private industry questioned it, the program would not meet its intended goal of reviving the economy.¹⁶⁷

The Federal Housing Administration embarked on a nationwide campaign during the 1930s to persuade private officials across the country that they had a worthwhile program. They promoted their mortgage products to those in real estate, home building, and banking and

¹⁶⁵ Radford, 108.

¹⁶⁶ Freund, 23.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

reinforced their messaging through newspaper advertisements, pamphlets, and radio spots.¹⁶⁸ In each of these activities, “the rhetorical refrain holding the campaign together was a celebration of the ‘free market for homes’ and that market’s untapped curative powers” with “a consistent reminder that federal mortgage programs were wholly compatible with free enterprise, and that American consumers and businessmen held the keys both to national recovery and sustained economic growth.”¹⁶⁹ Audiences were reassured that that government did nothing to interfere with private enterprise except to reinvigorate it by getting private capital into the mortgage market.¹⁷⁰ These FHA promotional campaigns persisted throughout the 1930s but were halted during World War II.¹⁷¹

Although the official campaigns were suspended during the war, the rhetoric that they instilled had taken hold. The *Times* published articles throughout the war that removed the government associations with private housing, especially those connected to the FHA. Approximately one year before official US involvement in the war, in October 1940, the *Times* published an article from the Associated Press about 1940 Republican presidential candidate Wendell L. Willkie’s views on housing and its administration. A section of the article reprinted text from a statement the candidate made. In it, Willkie unequally describes the duties of some agencies involved in housing production. Willkie, as quoted in the article, states, “the H.O.L.C. was created to ease the burden of mortgages on homes threatened by the depression. The F.H.A. was established to insure lending institutions against mortgage losses. The U.S.H.A. came into

¹⁶⁸ Hise, 41.

¹⁶⁹ Freund, 23.

¹⁷⁰ Freund, 25.

¹⁷¹ Freund, 27.

being to lend Federal assistance to low-rent housing and slum clearance and to aid in the creation of a network of local agencies for this purpose.”¹⁷² Willkie attributes “federal assistance” to public housing but only highlights the roles of the HOLC and FHA in supporting private industry.

Similarly, a few years later, Cohan reported on Blandford’s, director of the NHA, address to the 40th annual Los Angeles Realty Board banquet. In the piece, Blandford reports on the importance of building activity happening in the Los Angeles area. Cohan prefaces, “Blandford gave startling figures of Southern California’s housing contribution to the nation’s war effort because of the many important war industries located here and elsewhere in the Southland and the heavy influx of workers.”¹⁷³ However, the wording Cohan chooses to report the figures obscures the government’s role in private housing as he states, “that this region has supplied about 10 per cent of the entire national volume of privately financed war housing and 6 per cent of the government-financed units.”¹⁷⁴ The numbers importantly signify Los Angeles’s central in home building efforts during the war, but the language used to describe private and public housing is also crucial in shaping perceptions of both. Cohan’s use of the words “privately financed war housing” compared to “government-financed units” implies that the private housing had no assistance from the government.

Later that year, the *Times* quoted Herbert U. Nelson, executive vice president of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, saying, “The building industry can’t exist half free

¹⁷² “Willkie Says Housing Fails,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 1940, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

¹⁷³ Cohan, “War Housing Strides in Southland Disclosed.”

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

enterprise and half government control.”¹⁷⁵ The article acknowledges the reference to the half slave and half free narrative from the Civil War. Like the other article, Nelson’s assertion that half of the home building industry exists as “free enterprise” also ignores the benefits the private industry from the federal government.

In 1944, two more articles appeared in the *Times* that continued to reflect the rhetoric that attempted to remove traces of government involvement in private home building. In July, real estate editor Cohan wrote about the Federal Housing Administration’s role in home building, especially regarding its postwar role. He describes that the FHA “has had the aspect of a nonpolitical business enterprise formed for insurance loans made by private institutions for financing home building, the buying and refinancing of existent homes and repair of houses.”¹⁷⁶ His description of the agency as a “nonpolitical business enterprise” attempts to completely obscure the central role of the government by suggesting it exists as a private entity. Cohan reinforces this point when reporting, “The F.H.A. has insured a total of around \$7,500,000,000 worth of long-term mortgages representing private and not governmental funds.”¹⁷⁷ He explains that the FHA only set up the system for private industry and did not interfere. Cohan continued to espouse this common narrative from the promotional campaign material in an October about the California Real Estate Association’s 40th annual convention. He reports, “Achievements of the Federal Housing Administration were described by R.C. Willis, Southland F.H.A. production manager. Its ‘entire program,’ he said, ‘has been accomplished through private capital.’”¹⁷⁸ The

¹⁷⁵ “Realty Leader Scores Federal Housing Setup,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 1943, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

¹⁷⁶ Charles C. Cohan, “Fact and Comment,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1944, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

¹⁷⁷ Cohan, “Fact and Comment,” July 16, 1944.

¹⁷⁸ Cohan, “Realty Men Praise No. 12; Oppose ‘60 at 60’ Plan.”

use of Willis's language continues to reinforce the paradoxical idea that the FHA, a federal government agency, accomplished its entire program through private capital.

Criticizing the Government's Role

Whereas the former set of articles obscured the government's role in private housing, other articles highlight the hypocritical critiques that private officials had of government. Agencies like the FHA disproportionately assisted the private industry and thus some officials were forgiving of that agency specifically. However, they made their opinions known about what they saw as government overreach and a bloated housing bureaucracy.

The private home building industry benefitted from government agencies, like the FHA and the Federal Home Loan Bank System, that continued to direct the flow of capital into the private mortgage market.¹⁷⁹ Using loans subsidized by the FHA, home builders continued to develop private housing into the 1940s. Contrary to perceptions, most of the homes erected during the war were permanent, not the temporary public war housing discussed in the *Times*. Private housing production accounted for "80 percent of the nonfarm housing starts recorded nationally, and home ownership rates climbed significantly."¹⁸⁰

Unsurprisingly then, the *Times* reflected approval of the FHA from private industry officials. In October 1943, a piece reported the opinion of Herbert U. Nelson, executive vice president of NAREB. A section of the article reads, "Nelson approves, for the most part, of F.H.A. and such proposals as giving ex-servicemen \$1000 credit on the purchase of a home or farm after the war. But he opposes the type of group public housing Federally financed for

¹⁷⁹ Radford, 110.

¹⁸⁰ Hise, 121.

perpetual rental, as some have advocated, at the rate of 1,000,000 units a year for 10 years.”¹⁸¹

Generally supportive of the FHA and its function in subsidizing private industry home building, Nelson also makes clear that he does not support public housing or any plans for its continuance. Similarly, in an article the following year, Cohan explains the activities of the FHA benefitting the private builders: “To meet war needs the insured construction loans have been for financing war housing under the National Housing Act’s Title VI.”¹⁸² He writes the FHA’s wartime role of processing requests under the War Production Board “is pointed to as argument for its complete administrative independence in order to function to its best possible advantage.”¹⁸³ Cohan argues that the FHA should be free of the limits of other government agencies and operate independent of them.

These articles portrayed a supportive view of the FHA specifically, but the more common narrative portrayed by the *Times* was one of disapproval of the extensive housing bureaucracy. In another section of the Associated Press article about 1940 Republican presidential candidate Wendell L. Willkie article mentioned previously, Willkie describes his views on the New Deal housing program. He argues that it has been “bogged down” in part “due to faulty administration.” He then proceeded to list thirteen unrelated housing agencies that existed in 1940, which included the FWA, USHA, FHA, HOLC, and others, who “compete with and even fight each other to the detriment of housing as a whole.”¹⁸⁴ He recommended consolidating these agencies into a single entity to oversee all housing operations, which did occur in February 1942

¹⁸¹ “Realty Leader Scores Federal Housing Setup.”

¹⁸² Cohan, “Fact and Comment,” July 16, 1944.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ “Willkie Says Housing Fails.”

when President Roosevelt combined sixteen federal housing agencies into a single entity, the National Housing Agency, with Executive Order 9070.¹⁸⁵

Ultimately, Willkie opined, “Any housing program must clearly define the respective responsibilities of Federal, State and local governments. It must not be the purpose of any such program to have the homes of people owned or operated from Washington or state capitals.”¹⁸⁶ Ironically, Willkie advocated for both for a consolidated housing agency and also the decentralization of control.

Two articles from 1943 similarly focused on the argument of a bloated bureaucracy. In the Fact and Comment column, real estate editor Cohan wrote that the National Association of Real Estate Boards asked the Office of War Information (OWI) how many departments had control over matters of real estate. Cohan writes that the OWI answered approximately 96. The author then appeals to his readers by writing, “It’s a good bet that most of them could be knocked off with good results. Surely Washington must be hearing the rising wails of anguish from the taxpayers who can’t see why so much of the national revenue should be diverted to maintaining overstuffed bureaucracy.”¹⁸⁷ Similarly, an article from later that year directly quotes Herbert Nelson stating:

It would be much better... to subsidize families in needy cases than, as at present, to subsidize the building industry and some 20,000 Federal employees in the housing end of government. ... Money would be saved if the government got out of the building picture, and people unable to pay rent could get from local authorities certificates cashable only for rent and backed, if necessary, with Federal money.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Szylvian, 129.

¹⁸⁶ “Willkie Says Housing Fails.”

¹⁸⁷ Cohan, “Fact and Comment By the Real Estate Editor,” January 10, 1943.

¹⁸⁸ “Realty Leader Scores Federal Housing Setup.”

In other words, Nelson thinks there is an excessive amount of bureaucracy and government involvement in both the private industry and within the government agencies. In light of this, he suggests a voucher system be implemented for low-income families in need of housing. Additionally, it should be noted that Nelson's explicit statement regarding the government subsidizing the building industry was a rare admission amongst many other statements by private officials that did not acknowledge this connection.

Other articles criticized government involvement on the basis that housing bureaucracy should be decentralized. In September 1942, an article reflected this theme of decentralization. Reporting on the activities of the California Housing and Planning Association's conference in Los Angeles, the piece states, "The resolution urging decentralization of the W.P.B. declares that 'the urgency of providing housing for war workers is becoming increasingly acute in many areas.' It states that various 'war agencies are being forced to enter the war housing field contrary to the evident intent of the President's executive order establishing the National Housing Agency.'"¹⁸⁹ A 1945 article similarly called for decentralizing housing control. Cohan writes about the comments of Van Holt Garrett, president of NAREB, speaking to a crowd at a luncheon put on by the Los Angeles Realty Board. The article details some of the concerns Garrett listed regarding the government-imposed limitations to building, including "...federal pre-emption of local governmental tax sources and some form of control by 'many government departments.'..." He characterized public housing as 'costly and extravagant' and declared that if any such housing were needed the supplying of it should be a local and not a Federal function."¹⁹⁰ The criticisms favoring decentralization and a smaller housing bureaucracy reveal

¹⁸⁹ "War Housing Speed Sought."

¹⁹⁰ Charles C. Cohan, "Realty Chief Hits Federal Controls on Home Building," *Los Angeles Times*, September 8, 1945, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019)

the paradoxical relationship that the private industry had with the federal government since they continued to benefit from its involvement, especially that of the FHA.

CHAPTER SIX

DEBATE OVER THE FUTURE

The previous sections presented the debates between public and private housing during the war years. This final section turns to the discourse portrayed in the *Los Angeles Times* about the postwar outlook on housing. The articles reveal that while debates ensued about how to address the housing shortage as they were happening during the war, those debates heightened as public and private officials contended over which should be dominant after the war. Multiple articles reflect concerns, from the private industry perspective, about what they saw from public housing as an attack on free enterprise, democracy, and homeownership. Government officials emphasized the importance of postwar housing production and suggested that while private industry should be prioritized, cooperation between the two could occur. Ultimately, the articles exemplified the contentious dispute that questioned the direction of housing after 1945.

Diverging Paths

In July 1944, the *Times* wrote about the opinion of Lee F. Johnson, executive vice-president of the National Public Housing Conference, stating the centrality of the housing: “‘Housing,’ he thinks, ‘will be one of the most important links in the transition between the war and the peace economy.’”¹⁹¹ This focus on the role of housing as a key part of the postwar economy made itself evident as private officials continued to stake their claim for private housing production in local and national legislation. Although private and public officials showed their support for private housing and their contention with public housing during the

¹⁹¹ “‘Slum Housing Quarrel Told,’” *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1944, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

war, hindsight reveals that the paths between the two were quickly diverging. In Los Angeles and in Washington, the private industry continued to lobby for home building and real estate after the war. They were also benefitting from policies that favored large builders in suburban areas, exemplified by the increasingly important role of the FHA in postwar expansion.¹⁹² Like other housing legislation before it, the Housing Act of 1949 perpetuated the two-tier system by focusing on private enterprise and continually reducing funds intended for public housing.¹⁹³ During the 1950s, private home building boomed as construction nearly doubled from its rate in the 1940s.¹⁹⁴

Conversely, public housing faced an uphill battle into the 1950s when accusations of Communism would continue to disgrace it. In Los Angeles, this Red-baiting resulted in the personnel changes at the Housing Authority as well as growing opposition amongst city councilors. The city's Leftist coalition began fracturing between the Left and liberals, the latter of whom started siding with the pro-growth coalition of centrists and those on the Right. This coalition favored urban renewal and private suburban homes over public housing.¹⁹⁵ This reflected national trends of postwar division on the Left as well in the face of conservative wins in Congress that signaled a desire "to eliminate the welfare state and revert to a laissez-faire economy."¹⁹⁶

In Los Angeles, the hope of continuing a strong public housing program ended with the 1953 mayoral election of Norris Poulson. *Times* publisher Norman Chandler encouraged Poulson

¹⁹² Checkoway, "Large Builders, Federal Housing Programs, and Postwar Suburbanization," 127.

¹⁹³ Parson, 98.

¹⁹⁴ Checkoway, 121.

¹⁹⁵ Parson, 6, 123.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 5.

to run for the position, and the termination of the public housing program proved to be the main issue in the race against the incumbent, Mayor Bowron.¹⁹⁷ The *Times* broadcasted, “Public housing ‘is the issue’... ‘on which Los Angeles is rejecting Mayor Bowron in favor of Norris Poulson.’”¹⁹⁸ Poulson officially became the Mayor on July 1 and began dismantling the public housing program. The new mayor proposed to the city council to cut the size of the program in half, which they approved. The changes swiftly occurred as Poulson and other officials travelled to Washington to amend the contract, which Congress approved and the city council adopted in August 1953. With this, Los Angeles was no longer obligated to build public housing units through its contract from the Housing Act of 1949.¹⁹⁹ Similarly, “public housing construction on the national level fell drastically. The expense of the Korean War and Republican control of the White House are oft-cited as influences, but, as Leonard Freedman notes, ‘the local controversies were a significant, if not indispensable, factor in changing the tide of opinion in Congress against public housing.’”²⁰⁰ Of the public housing allocated through the 1949 Act, approximately 25 percent were built nationally in a six-year period. Further, the Housing Act of 1954 continued to limit the number of public housing units that could be built and required them to be constructed only as a part of an urban renewal program.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 127.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 135.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 191.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

Public Housing

Articles during the war reflected the tense feelings about limiting public housing in the postwar period from the viewpoint of private officials. Cohan reported in October 1943 that Herbert Nelson of the NAREB emphatically stated his position on postwar public housing: “Declaring that public housing if unchecked would destroy private building enterprise, Herbert U. Nelson of Chicago, executive vice-president of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, contended that such a housing program in this country should be wiped out and legislation enacted for the disposal of all public housing.”²⁰² The following year, reporting about a meeting with the Building Contractors Association of California, Cohan reported: “Resolutions were approved that aimed at limiting the scope of future public housing construction, a subject fraught with an argument to take the entire time of almost any meeting.”²⁰³ In other words, Cohan emphasizes to readers that private industry concerns over public housing lasting beyond the war continued to be debated amongst their inner circles.

Articles also reflected the opinions of local and national government officials about the future of the public housing program. In October 1943, Bess M. Wilson reported on Arthur Evans’s, civilian service adviser of the City Housing Authority, position toward continuing the public housing program in Los Angeles. Evans stated that public housing “has required some war measures which must be carried over into the postwar period if government keeps faith with the civilian population” but emphasized its connection with slum clearance.²⁰⁴ Wilson relays

²⁰² Charles C. Cohan, “Real Estate War Conference Speakers Flay Public Housing,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1943, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

²⁰³ Charles C. Cohan, “Fact and Comment,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 1944, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

²⁰⁴ Bess M. Wilson, “Postwar Housing Plans Told,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1943, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

Evans's belief that Los Angeles had slums "in which conditions are as bad as in better known slums of eastern cities" for which he thought public housing could be the solution.²⁰⁵ These connections to slum clearance that had been built into the Housing Act of 1937 were perpetuated in the Housing Act of 1949.²⁰⁶

The headline of a 1944 article read "Housing Setup After War Seen as Uncertain" and detailed the status of the public housing program. The article begins, "Whether public housing will be expanded after the war depends on determination of policy and legislation, it was stated yesterday by Roy L. Cochran, assistant commissioner for administration, Federal Public Housing Authority, following his arrival here."²⁰⁷ The article explains that the majority of public war housing in the city "is of temporary character to be removed within two years after the war or longer, according to the dictates of orderly demobilization."²⁰⁸ It also notes that Region X of the FPHA, consisting of California, Nevada, and Arizona, had the most FPHA units in the country with 20,000 units in 21 projects, of which eight were temporary, in both Los Angeles city and county.²⁰⁹ The Lanham Act, as amended, had instructed for the disposition of public war housing, either by converting it to private housing or razing it to eliminate net gain. However, the disposition process turned out to be less straightforward than officials had planned, in part due to the continued housing shortage in the postwar years, which would have required housing

²⁰⁵ "Postwar Housing Plans Told."

²⁰⁶ Parson, 100.

²⁰⁷ "Housing Setup After War Seen as Uncertain," *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 1944, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

²⁰⁸ "Housing Setup After War Seen as Uncertain."

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

authorities to evict the veterans now living in their units.²¹⁰ In Los Angeles, Howard Holtzendorff of the CHA “pledged that no war workers would be evicted from public housing while the crisis continued” and a report to Mayor Bowron requested there be no disposition “until the city’s housing conditions returned to the 1940 level of a 4.8 percent vacancy ratio.”²¹¹

Although the concerns over disposition were apparent in the *Times*, an article from June 1944 reiterated the loyalty of some government officials to the private industry. This article refers to a meeting at Aliso Village with local and national officials. Hyperbolically, the article states:

Describing the national war housing program as the greatest the world has ever known, Klutznick [commissioner of the Federal Public Housing Authority] told the meeting that preparation is essential to meet great housing requirements after the war. He emphasized that private industry should be given every opportunity in such a program and that there is room for co-operation between private industry and public housing activities.²¹²

The continued emphasis on private enterprise as the postwar solution to the housing shortage, even by officials from the Federal Public Housing Authority, was continually reiterated through the war years in the *Los Angeles Times* as the next section details. Although Klutznick suggests the chance for a housing program with both private and public housing, the legislative focus on private housing, as lobbied for by private officials, suggested that cooperation meant public housing would supplement the private industry, if it existed at all.

²¹⁰ Szylvian, 132-133.

²¹¹ Parson, 77.

²¹² “Coast Declared Still Far Short in War Housing,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1944, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

Private Enterprise

The rhetoric in the *Times* that focused on private enterprise as the postwar solution appealed to themes of democracy and ownership. Many of the articles frame the debate as a fight to protect these ideals as they suggest that these institutions were under threat. In October 1943, Cohan reported about the California Real Estate Association's 39th annual convention in San Francisco that focused on the centrality of the real estate industry in the expansion of other industries on the West Coast both during and after the war. Cohan directly quotes John W. Galbreath, president of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, speaking at the convention, about the importance of their associations: "... one has only to think of what has happened to free enterprise in other nations to realize just how important they are."²¹³ Galbreath's appeal to other private officials attempts to emphasize the importance of their industry in protecting, what they perceived as, key American ideals. Similarly, during the same month, the *Times* ran an article that quoted Nelson, of the NAREB, about his view on the future on the private industry. A passage reads, "'As a matter of fact,' he declared, 'if proposed plans are carried out the whole building industry will be wiped out and home ownership, so dear to Americans, destroyed.'"²¹⁴ These dire statements tried to convince readers that the only solution to ensuring America does not turn into one of the countries they were fighting against was to support private enterprise or else witness the entire institution perish. This rhetoric was extreme given the great amount of subsidies the private industry received before, during, and after the war. However, it does indicate that they felt a need to defend their industry.

²¹³ Charles C. Cohan, "Great Gains in Coast Real Estate Forecast," *Los Angeles Times*, October 6, 1943, <https://search.proquest.com/publication/47001> (accessed February 18, 2019).

²¹⁴ "Realty Leader Scores Federal Housing Setup."

This heightened rhetoric continued in 1944. An article titled “Private Housing Champion Gives View on Future” begins with a direct quote from Robert Gerholz, president of the National Association of Home Builders, in Los Angeles “to further a postwar campaign in behalf of the private building industry as the spearhead of private enterprise.”²¹⁵ Gerholz says, “What was regarded as public housing versus private building enterprise has become ‘socialism versus democracy.’”²¹⁶ The statement, like those in other articles, centers housing as the arena that will decide the fate of the country. It also plays on fears of socialism and Communism that had long persisted about public housing.

Private industry officials similarly linked the concern about fate of democracy to that of homeownership. In a September 1945, Cohan directly quotes Van Holt Garrett, president of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, saying, “We have a fight on our hands to preserve the great American tradition of the right to own property.”²¹⁷ Speaking to a crowd at a luncheon put on by the Los Angeles Realty Board, Cohan writes that this quotation “climaxed a stirring attack on government controls on home building.”²¹⁸ Private officials saw their role as the protectors of these ideals and profitted from them greatly since, by the end of 1945, “the FHA had insured mortgages and made other financial commitments for private-sector defense housing totaling \$1.6 billion.”²¹⁹

These investments in private industry continued into the postwar period as the FHA continued lending and the VA similarly began insuring mortgages for returning white veterans

²¹⁵ “Private Housing Champion Gives View on Future.”

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Cohan, “Realty Chief Hits Federal Controls on Home Building.”

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Szylvian, 132.

through the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill.²²⁰ Nationally, the FHA continued to reinforce the rhetoric of the *Times* through its postwar campaigns emphasizing private housing production.²²¹

In postwar Los Angeles, the population continued to grow, and home builders capitalized on their government subsidies.²²² Local builder Henry Kaiser kept abreast of federal housing policies with the help of his personal assistant who had formerly worked in government. Similarly, Fritz Burns, working in collaboration with Kaiser for Kaiser Community Homes, "kept track of the FHA program through his contacts in the district office."²²³ In the postwar years, the company developed homes at Westchester (1946) and Panorama City (1948) among others.²²⁴ All of their homes were developed in accordance with FHA guidelines which allowed home buyers to utilize government-backed FHA mortgages.²²⁵ Similarly, the postwar development of Lakewood utilized FHA funding in the form of "construction loans and mortgage guarantees."²²⁶ This amount was far more than any investment of debt or equity by the developers or their private lenders.²²⁷ Ultimately, sustained building efforts and the federally-backed mortgage market made widespread homeownership a reality for many white Americans. This new housing option meant that they no longer needed to rely on public housing to provide

²²⁰ Szylvian, 132, 134.

²²¹ Freund, 27.

²²² Checkoway, 123.

²²³ Hise, 180.

²²⁴ Ibid., 159, 176, 188, 209.

²²⁵ Ibid., 211.

²²⁶ D.J. Waldie, *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 63.

²²⁷ Waldie, *Holy Land*, 62, 169.

shelter, and public housing proponents had less momentum to continue a strong public housing program.²²⁸ By the late 1940s, “the private housing industry was producing—both locally and nationally—at record levels.”²²⁹ Coupled with the fact that local and national policies continued to emphasize private industry solutions, by the 1950s, the public housing program had lost most of the momentum it had gained over the prior decades. The focus on private enterprise in federal housing policies has persisted into the 21st century.

²²⁸ Parson, 192.

²²⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The historical record lays clear that housing policies continued to favor privatism in the postwar years. However, the thesis, using articles from the *Los Angeles Times*, shows us the contentious debates that reveal that the emphasis on private industry was not inevitable in Los Angeles—instead, it was a highly contested issue that was debated throughout the war years. The search for “public housing” in the *Times* reveals that they rarely focused on portraying that institution but did present a few articles explaining the city’s public housing program and some of its specific developments. However, far more often, the paper portrayed the private industry’s paradoxical, often hypocritical, views about the role of government in housing. The city’s critical defense designation resulted in an increased tension between public and private housing since building could still occur during the war. This resulted in conflicting narratives about whether or not the two were competitors. Ultimately, the private industry expectations of government assistance suggest private officials did characterize public housing as their competition. Further, the discourse reveals that private industry attempted to both obscure and criticize the federal government while accruing a multitude of benefits from its interventions. Finally, the rhetoric during the war about housing in the postwar years reflected the importance of the debate to private industry officials who sought to severely limit the postwar scope of public housing.

Ultimately, these portrayals in the *Los Angeles Times* informed the early contemporaneous understandings of the extent of government intervention in the private housing market. The newspaper shows us that perceptions of the private market as separate and unrelated to the government arose early on as these New Deal programs were created. Conversely, for

readers of the *Times*, perceptions of public housing were primarily limited to the perspective of the private industry. This dichotomy meant that readers were primarily presented a discourse that upheld the sanctity of private enterprise, with little acknowledgement of the government's role in its successes, and criticized public housing, even as it housed war workers.

As for current implications, these discursive origins are important to understand because they begin to shed light on why Americans today often fail to see the government's role in private housing and tend to have negative views toward public housing. Since the 1930s, the private industry and the federal government have created policies and programs that obscure government involvement, more recently through income tax expenditure programs. Learning these origins should help us to problematize current discursive attacks on the role of government in housing. Further, in present day Los Angeles, this history is especially salient since conditions of unaffordability and homelessness largely reflect the conditions of the city in the early 1940s. As we search for alternative solutions to the current housing crisis and as groups contemplate the revival of a strong municipally-owned public housing program, the discourse from the *Los Angeles Times* during the war years teaches us that private housing, while dominant, was not inevitable and that public housing was a viable alternative.

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