

OP-ED

Picturing L.A.

Out of 20,000 photos, one collated, multilayered, continuous image of the 'Wonder City of the West.'

Jim Heimann L.A. ISN'T OUTSIDE ANYONE'S FRONT DOOR. It's a tough city to get ahold of. You have to work to experience, view and enjoy it. You have to roam its endless network of freeways and streets and immerse yourself in its guts to be rewarded. I had two years and 20,000 images when I started editing the book, "Los Angeles: Portrait of a City." A metropolis that emerged in tandem with the advent of photography provides immeasurable documentary possibilities. I attempted to avoid the biases of a hometown boy and focused on telling a visual tale of the "City of the Future" and the "Wonder City of the West."

My personal charge was to uncover images rarely or never seen, without slighting the icons. As I dug through archives and collections, the dusty streets and Victorian facades of the 19th century segued into the development and sprawl that proceeded at warp speed in the 20th century. Hollywood, a potentially two-volume set in itself, had to be integrated so as not to dominate. Agriculture, industry, race, sports, crime, architecture, culture and the arts were considered, as well as the personalities and events that shaped the city.

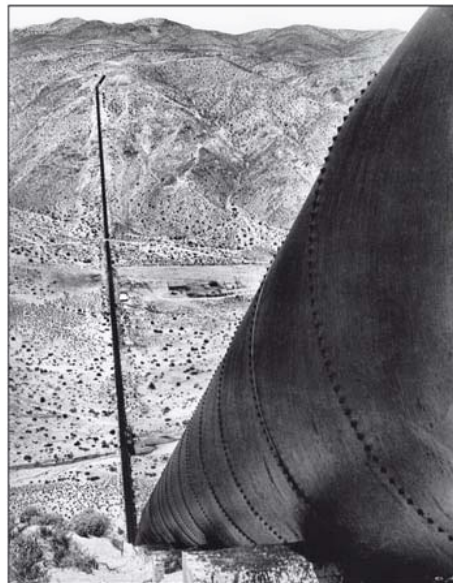
Diluting these elements to 500-plus photos barely brushes the surface. But the result is a continuous picture collated in a single volume for the first time, one tangible portrait of a city of constant change and a million possibilities.

JIM HEIMANN, executive editor of Taschen American, is the editor of the just-published "Los Angeles: Portrait of a City."



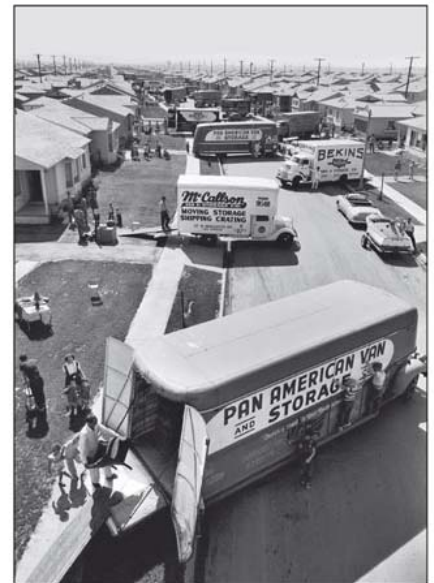
ANONYMOUS Courtesy of USC

1895: The San Fernando Mission; the columned building was used as a hotel.



ANONYMOUS Courtesy of USC

1913: The Los Angeles Aqueduct's siphon at Pine Canyon.



J.R. EYERMAN Time & Life Pictures / Getty Images

1952: A posed Life magazine picture in suburban Southern California.