

## **“American Suburbanization Through the Lens of Margaret Bourke-White”**

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This paper argues that suburban photographs by Margaret Bourke-White play a significant role in mediating between sociological analysis and popular opinion of American suburbs from the 1930's through the 1950's. Bourke-White is best known for her political and wartime photojournalism, however her images of interwar and postwar American suburbs offer an illuminating perspective on the relationship between social documentation and the public reception of suburbia via widespread journals.

Two well-known studies of American towns are the point of departure: “Middletown” and Levittown. Both sites have been the subjects of extensive sociological analysis; as well were photographed by Bourke-White during her employment with Life Magazine. These fundamental town studies, and their visual counterparts, put into question what many critics consider as the embodiment of a larger crisis in American town development in the first half of the twentieth century; problems of economic stratification in Middletown, and consequences of homogeneous architectural and environmental planning in Levittown.

First this research shows that Bourke-White's talents as a photographer, specifically her procedures and compositions, visually emphasize a specific domestic narrative under sociological observation and criticism at that time. Followed by a discussion on the wider repercussions of her visual accounts and how her suburban photographs intercede academic literature and mass circulated journals. Through this study one can further clarify variances in an academic analysis of a place and a generalized public opinion of a growing domestic condition as a means to identify the major informants of American suburbanization.

**Taryn Mudge** is currently a PhD student at Penn Design at the University of Pennsylvania with research interests that engage the history of architectural representation and its relationship to documentary photography from the 1930's through the 1950's. She received a Masters in Architecture from Portland State University in 2012 and a BS in Architecture from University of Texas at San Antonio in 2009. Prior to her doctoral studies, she worked for architectural firms in Texas and Oregon. She was also a part-time professor at Portland State University where she taught Visual Communications and Digital Graphics in architecture.