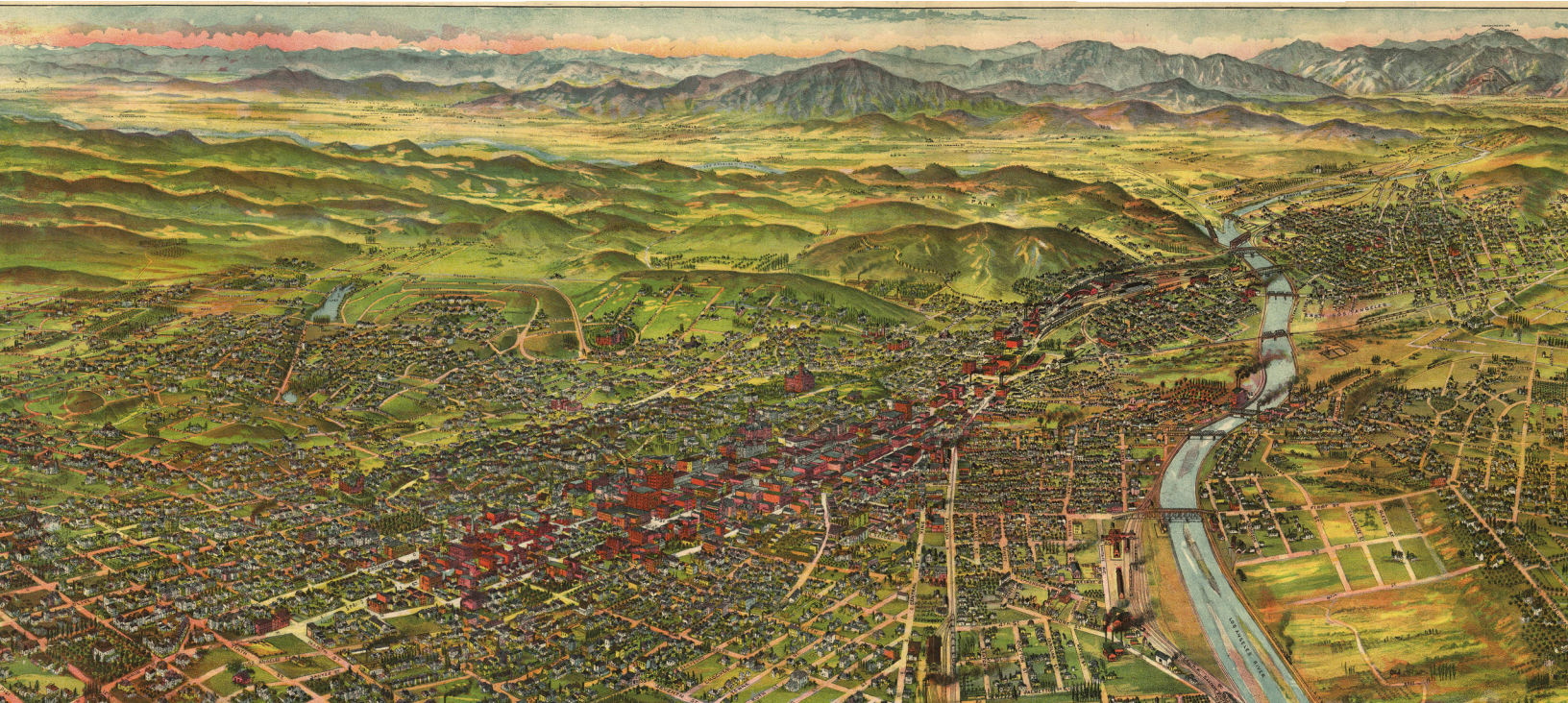




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Conservation



# City of Los Angeles Historical Housing and Land Use Study

*Prepared for*

City of Los Angeles, Department of City Planning

*Prepared by*

Architectural Resources Group

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*Opposite: Los Angeles panorama by the Semi-Tropic Homestead Company, 1894 (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)*

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# Introduction

## Land Acknowledgement

The City of Los Angeles is situated in the ancestral and unceded lands of the Tongva (also known as Yaavitam), the Gabrieleño, the Kizh, the San Fernando Band of Mission Indians, and the Fernandeano Tataviam Band of Mission Indians peoples. We acknowledge their elders, past, present, and future, for their cultural resilience. They are the original caretakers of this land on which the central governing institutions of the City of Los Angeles are constructed. Today, the City of Los Angeles is home to the second largest community of Native Americans in the United States.

## Overview

This Historical Housing and Land Use Study represents an important part of the City of Los Angeles' efforts to address the racial and socioeconomic disparities which have resulted from public policies and private sector actions in the twentieth century. Architectural Resources Group (ARG) was retained by the City of Los Angeles to prepare this Study as part of the update to the 2021-2029 Housing Element of the General Plan (*The Plan to House LA*).

The Study examines the origins of zoning and land use policy in the twentieth century and how these intersected with and were influenced by existing ideas about race and class. The Study also discusses the efforts, most of which occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, to provide fair access to housing and remove the barriers established by housing policy in previous decades. The document draws on extensive scholarship related to the history of Los Angeles, zoning, and housing policy as well as the contributions of scholars whose focus includes zoning, suburbanization, and the development of Los Angeles. It includes a discussion of the *Plan to House LA*, an overview of research sources, a summary of the project objectives,

and explanation of terms used in the document. Following that is the historical overview itself.

The Study aims to provide an understanding of the twentieth century policies that have contributed to Los Angeles' housing shortage and affordability crisis, as well as those which have contributed to unequal access to housing and economic opportunity. In providing a context for the current housing landscape, the Study will help inform future efforts by the City as it seeks to provide housing for Los Angeles' diverse and varied population.

## Background

The impact of the current housing crisis in the City of Los Angeles is hard to overstate. Angelenos pay more of their income on housing, live in more overcrowded conditions, and have the highest rates of unsheltered homelessness of any city in the country. With housing options so limited, many Angelenos struggle to find housing options they can afford. These impacts are experienced differently across the city, often deepening inequality and segregation as well as limiting access to areas with higher resources and opportunities.

While many factors and non-City policies share the blame for present conditions, planning and housing policies implemented by the City of Los Angeles are also intertwined. Understanding them is critical to addressing the current situation. This analysis shows that past planning and housing policies have too often prioritized the concerns of the White middle class over the marginalized, denying communities of color access to resources and excluding them from wealth-building opportunities. Exclusionary policies of the past persist today, perpetuating patterns of segregation, displacement, inequity, and exclusion.

Many experts point to a lack of adequate housing stock, particularly in higher-demand wealthier

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areas, as the root of the local housing crisis. Los Angeles has the second lowest number of homes per adult of all major US cities. This shortage has developed primarily since the 1980s, as population growth outpaced the creation of new housing. This occurred alongside the downzoning of Los Angeles to reduce density or scale - a process that was not equally applied across neighborhoods. Shortages of available homes benefit existing homeowners at the expense of renters and would-be homebuyers through rising prices.

Analysis in the City's recently adopted Housing Element (June 2022) has enhanced the understanding of the relationship between zoning and social indicators of race, class, and access to opportunity. For example, more than 80 percent of the land area determined to offer the best chance for life success (areas of high opportunity) is zoned only for single-family use - the most expensive and least attainable housing type. Single-family homes have historically been, and continue to be, more expensive to own or rent than denser multi-family housing options. Areas found to be both racially concentrated and very affluent were found to be zoned 95 percent for single-family use. Moreover, public investments in single-family neighborhoods were found to be disproportionately higher than denser neighborhoods with higher populations and thus greater needs. Understanding the roots of the current housing crisis as well as the origins of the unequal housing landscape, and how land use and housing decisions contributed to it, are the primary goals of this study.

### Study Objectives and Purpose

In June 2022, the City adopted an update to its Housing Element of the General Plan called the *Plan to House LA*. The update is performed every eight years to reevaluate existing housing needs and establish the goals, objectives, policies, and

programs that form the foundation of the City's housing strategy.

The Housing Element lays out many proactive steps to address those factors that contribute to significant disparities in housing needs and access to opportunity. This involves both fostering more diversity of housing and integrated living patterns in higher resource areas and transforming racially and ethnically concentrated areas of poverty into areas of opportunity. A set of Citywide Housing Priorities were developed to guide future actions. These include addressing the housing shortage, advancing racial equity and access to opportunity, protecting Angelenos from displacement, and promoting sustainability and resilience through housing. A core component of the Housing Element is an equitable Rezoning Program, which will create capacity for at least a quarter million new housing units, focused in higher resource areas of the City.

As Los Angeles moves forward to implement its ambitious housing goals, it is imperative that the City considers its past practices. An understanding of how past land use and housing policies have perpetuated racial exclusion and inequity is crucial to reversing this legacy and not repeating past harms. This study outlines how the history of land use and housing policy has led to inequitable outcomes in order to better inform the development of future housing and land use planning and implementation programs. This will help ensure that future efforts consider and address these historic inequities.

This Historical Housing and Land Use Study has been prepared by Architectural Resources Group (ARG) and a team of subject-matter experts in fulfillment of the City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning's request for a study of the patterns of housing and land use policies that have historically perpetuated racial and socioeconomic disparities in the City of Los Angeles. Funded by a Regional Early Action Planning (REAP) grant from the Southern



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California Association of Governments (SCAG) and the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), the study informs the implementation of the City's 2021-2029 Housing Element Update as well as future planning efforts.

This study explores how housing and land use policies have intersected with segregation, inequity, exclusion, and racialized processes, ultimately redistributing opportunity unequally in the City of Los Angeles. Social science, planning theory and practices, real estate practices, immigration, and popular attitudes toward race influenced the dynamics of land use and housing policies throughout the twentieth century and have continued to wield tremendous influence over the availability and accessibility of decent housing in the twenty-first century. These factors helped establish and reinforce complex patterns of segregation across Los Angeles that have negatively impacted the city's many communities of color and created inequitable housing outcomes.

Land use and housing policies have been influenced and reinforced by attitudes about race, both in explicit and implicit ways. Early twentieth century planners often relied on land use regulations to "protect" White middle- to upper-income neighborhoods from what they saw as negative influences damaging to the social and economic value of these areas. They viewed higher-density housing, certain land uses, and social composition – particularly the presence of people of color – as existential threats to neighborhood social and economic stability. Planning historians note that by separating housing types into different areas and excluding racially marginalized people from land use governance and decision-making, land use planning and zoning have long been an unstated vehicle for accomplishing income, racial, and ethnic segregation. These policies served to create and consolidate wealth and

privilege into the hands of White residents, a trend that intensified throughout the second half of the twentieth century, even as the Civil Rights Movement gained traction and explicit means of segregation were rendered illegal.

This study evaluates how housing and land use laws and policies at the national, state, and local levels contributed to historic and present housing inequities in the City of Los Angeles. It also addresses the varied public and private mechanisms which arose to enforce segregation, and how these changed over the course of the twentieth century in response to organized and unorganized political resistance, including multiple instances of civil uprising. It examines the different policy areas that have impacted the disparate experiences of various racial and cultural groups in Los Angeles, including land use planning, zoning, transportation planning, public housing policy, affordable housing policy, urban renewal, and housing enforcement, among others. Organized chronologically, the narrative charts major periods and land use trends in five chapters, titled as follows: Land Use Management and Segregation: Origins and Context; The Origins of Zoning in Los Angeles, 1908-1932; The New Deal and Housing Policy, 1933-1964; The Homeowner Revolution, 1964-1992; and The Recent Landscape: Zoning and Land Use in Los Angeles after 1992.

### Key Findings

In the early twentieth century, City leaders believed Los Angeles could serve as a model of a different kind of city, one that rejected older urban models in favor of a low-density "city of homes." Developing new city planning and zoning tools was key to balancing the desire for growth and protection of property values, particularly in higher class districts in high income residential districts.

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Los Angeles was a pioneer in developing zoning tools such as base zoning districts, including single-family only zoning and use requirements like parking. However, land use and zoning regulations were rooted in the racist and classist exclusionary practices and prejudices of the time. Early land use and housing restricted access for marginalized communities, and many mostly single-family neighborhoods in Los Angeles were open only to White communities through the use of race restrictive covenants. Many of the same actors who helped spread segregation in Los Angeles worked to develop and promote early Los Angeles exclusionary zoning laws.

Despite pioneering the use of a single-family only zoning district, until the 1930s most land area in Los Angeles allowed dense new multi-family housing, which allowed housing to largely keep pace with the tremendous population growth experienced by the region.

As the legal architecture supporting segregation began to be eroded and migration into Los Angeles County increased significantly in the 1920s, cities more fully embraced another tool for creating legally enforceable rules of population control and segregation: exclusionary zoning laws. In the 1930s, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) was instrumental in promoting these exclusionary zoning laws through its mortgage insurance policies, calling them one of the “best artificial means of providing protection from adverse influences.”<sup>1</sup> Diverse neighborhoods became uninsurable in favor of the largely single-family (and White-only) communities in the San Fernando Valley that were constructed after World War II.

In the 1970s, zoning capacity was cut dramatically from more than 10 million to approximately

4.1 million over the next twenty years, in a way that privileged wealthier, White single-family neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> Planning practices of the late 1970s and 1980s were less explicit in their exclusionary motives but have often continued to perpetuate patterns of exclusion and inequality. The housing market became increasingly unequal due to a variety of forces, including a shifting economy and widening economic inequality, rising regional housing prices, and decreasing availability of low-income housing. The government stepped back from its role of providing low-income housing, and other agencies stepped in to fill the need, with mixed results. Zoning continued to favor low-density housing, which hindered the city’s potential to produce affordable and adequate housing.

Homeowners’ associations continued to exercise power in the planning process in the 1990s through mechanisms such as Community Planning. All of these factors have contributed to a repressed housing capacity which has produced minimal housing development over the last 40 years. As a result, Los Angeles is experiencing its most significant housing crisis, one that has culminated in unaffordable housing costs and epidemic levels of homelessness. Twenty-first century legislation sought to reverse decades of discriminatory housing and zoning policies.

### Project Team

The project team includes Architectural Resources Group (ARG) staff Katie Horak, Principal; Elysha Paluszek, Associate; and Morgan Quirk, Associate; and subject-matter experts Peter Chesney, Ph.D.; Becky Nicolaidis, Ph.D.; Marques Vestal, Ph.D.; and Andrew Whittemore, Ph.D.

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Housing Administration, “Underwriting Manual: Underwriting and Valuation Procedure Under Title II of the National Housing Act,” Washington, D.C., Section 9, paragraph 933.

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<sup>2</sup> Greg Morrow, “The Homeowner Revolution: Democracy, Land Use, and the Los Angeles Slow-Growth Movement, 1965-1992,” (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2013), 55.

## Introduction

Katie Horak is a Principal Architectural Historian at ARG. She has extensive experience related to preservation planning and the built environment in Southern California. Ms. Horak has managed and contributed to numerous projects documenting the history and built environment of Los Angeles, including sections of the *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement* and SurveyLA, the historic resources survey of the City of Los Angeles. Elysha Paluszek is an Associate Architectural Historian and Preservation Planner at ARG. Her specialties include the preparation of historic context statements and historic resources surveys; her work has included researching and writing about the history of communities in Southern California, including Los Angeles. Morgan Quirk is an Associate Architectural Historian and Preservation Planner at ARG. Ms. Quirk works as an Associate Architectural Historian and Preservation Planner on cultural resource documentation and evaluation, preservation planning, and environmental review projects. She also specializes in data and mapping analysis, particularly as it relates to cultural heritage and representation.

Dr. Peter Chesney is a consultant in Silicon Valley. He completed his dissertation, “Drive Time: A Sensory History of Car Cultures from 1945 to 1990 in Los Angeles,” at UCLA in the fall of 2021. Dr. Chesney has been the co-curator on a virtual museum about the history of hunger in the twentieth century US and a visiting professor. His work has appeared in *Critical Planning*, the *L.A. Review of Books*, *FLAT*, and *California History*.

Dr. Becky Nicolaidis is a historian specializing in the history of cities, suburbs, and Los Angeles. Her books include *My Blue Heaven* (2002), *The Suburb Reader*, edited with Andrew Wiese (2016), and *The New Suburbia* (2024). She served on Mayor Eric Garcetti’s Civic Memory task force, and is co-founder of the company History Studio. Working with Stephen Berrey who heads the national Sundown Project, she is developing

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Department of City Planning staff who reviewed and contributed to the document include: Vincent P. Bertoni, Arthi Varma, Nicholas Maricich, Blair Smith, Matt Glesne, Elizabeth Gallardo, Wajiha Ibrahim, in addition to Ken Bernstein, Haydee Urita-Lopez, Faisal Roble, Erick Lopez, Sarah Delgadillo, Cally Hardy, Betty Barberena, Cameron P. Carrasquillo, and staff from the Office of Racial Justice, Equity, and Transformative Planning (ORJETP) and the Office of Historic Resources (OHR).

# Introduction

## Research Sources

This document utilizes the research of subject-matter experts from around the country who have produced groundbreaking work on topics including zoning, suburbanization, public housing, segregation, and the communities impacted by these policies, supplemented by archival sources and data specific to the Los Angeles experience. While not an exhaustive history of housing and land use in Los Angeles, the study serves as a broad overview of the policies which have impacted the city over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and how they have discouraged housing access and opportunity for Angelenos of color.

Key sources utilized in the completion of this study covered a variety of topics, including the history of Los Angeles, such as Robert Fogelson's *The Fragmented Metropolis*, Dana Cuff's *The Provisional City*, and Greg Hise's *Magnetic Los Angeles*.

Information on the history of the city's ethnic communities drew from theme studies prepared as part of the *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement*, available [here](#), and numerous scholarly works, including: Scott Kurashige's *The Shifting Grounds of Race*, Josh Sides' *L.A. City Limits*, Douglas Flamming's *Bound for Freedom*, Charlotte Brooks' *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends*, and Andrea Gibbons' *City of Segregation*.

Notable works covering suburbanization and housing included Kenneth T. Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, Becky Nicolaides' *My Blue Heaven and The New Suburbia: Life in L.A. Suburbs Since 1945*, Todd Gish's "Building Los Angeles," and Marc A. Weiss' *The Rise of the Community Builders*.

For the history of zoning, the project team utilized sources such as Andrew Whittemore's "The Regulated City" and "Zoning Los Angeles: A Brief History of Four Regimes," as well as Richard Rothstein's *The Color of Law*.

A complete list of books, journals, periodicals, dissertations, and other primary and secondary source material used in preparation of this study is included at the end of the report.

## Notes on Language

The terms used to refer to individuals and groups of people carry meaning and power. They can convey positive or negative attitudes towards people or a group of people. Racism and discrimination influence the language used both in the past and today when referring to groups of people, especially those who have been historically disenfranchised.

This document endeavors to talk about race and ethnicity with inclusivity and respect. Several sources related to the usage of inclusive and sensitive language were consulted, including the American Psychological Association's style guide on race and ethnic identity (which can also be found online at [APA Style Guide](#) and in the APA Publication Manual, Seventh Edition) and the Diversity Style Guide (found online at [Diversity Style Guide](#)). The authors also consulted the National Archives' "Statement on Potentially Harmful Content" (found [here](#)), which provides guidance on the presentation of materials or sources that reflect outdated, biased, or offensive views and opinions.

Since this study addresses issues of race, ethnicity, and inequality in planning and land use, as well as historic attitudes towards race and ethnicity, sensitive terminology does appear. This includes language utilized in the past but now regarded as derogatory and offensive, particularly in primary source materials. If such language is used, it is included in quotation marks, either on its own if necessary to provide context or *in situ* within a primary source quotation. It is not included to perpetuate or excuse it, but to honestly convey historic attitudes towards race and ethnicity.

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The APA notes that while care must be taken to avoid perpetuating biases and demeaning attitudes about people, at the same time, “historians and scholars writing analyses of past events or times or of historical figures must be careful not to misrepresent the ideas of the past in an effort to avoid language bias.” Alterations to language may result in changes to the ideas conveyed in a primary source, and “the best approach is to retain the original language and to comment on it in the discussion. Quotations should not be changed to accommodate current sensibilities.”<sup>3</sup>

Below is a discussion of the terms used related to race and ethnicity in this document. Race refers to the “physical differences that groups or cultures consider socially significant” (for example, Black or African American, Asian, etc.). It is a social construct that is not universal. Ethnicity, on the other hand, refers to “shared cultural characteristics such as language, ancestry, practices, and beliefs” (for example, Latino).<sup>4</sup> Terms for racial and ethnic groups are proper nouns and are therefore capitalized. Please note that terminology is highly personal and not uniform across a particular group of people. There are a variety of reasons that people may prefer one identifier over the other.

- African American and Black: Refers to people in the United States whose lineage traces directly or indirectly back to Africa. The terms do not necessarily mean the same thing. Black tends to be a broader term because it encompasses those of African descent who do not identify as American or are not from America. According to the APA,

<sup>3</sup> American Psychological Association, “Historical Context,” accessed October 19, 2022, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/historical-context>.

<sup>4</sup> American Psychological Association, “Race and Ethnicity,” accessed October 19, 2022, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/racial-ethnic-minorities>.

some American people of African ancestry prefer “Black,” and others prefer “African American.” Both are acceptable, and some individuals may prefer one or the other. In this document, the group referred to are generally of African descent and born in America, though it is recognized that this is a generalization. Both terms are used in this study.

- Asian and Asian American: The term Asian refers to people of Asian ancestry from Asia. The term Asian American is appropriate for people of Asian descent from the United States. According to the APA, they are not to be used synonymously, as doing so “reinforces the idea that Asian Americans are perpetual foreigners.” In this document, when both terms are used, it is done to encompass both groups. Its intent is to recognize that historically, both groups existed side by side, not to lump them together as one group. When a specific group is discussed (for example, Japanese or Japanese Americans), that moniker is used.
- Hispanic, Chicano, Central American, Latino, Latinx: The usage of the terms Hispanic and Latino is evolving. Neither is all encompassing, and each has a different connotation. The term Latino may be preferred by people from Latin America. Some use the term Hispanic to refer to Spanish-speaking people, though not all people from Latin America speak Spanish. Since Los Angeles is home to the second largest population of Mexicans and Salvadorans in the nation, the terms Chicana/o and Central American are also popular. The term Latinx is an emerging term that has lately been used as a term to also include gender neutral or gender-nonconforming identity. Various groups use and advocate for different identifiers. This document uses the term Latino.

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- Indigenous Peoples: Terminology related to Native people can vary from person to person and nation to nation. Some Native nations operate with names that they did not choose for themselves but were instead selected by others. As with any group, it is best to consult members of that group for their preference. Therefore, sources written by Native Americans were consulted on the appropriate terminology to use.<sup>5</sup>
- White: This document uses the term “White” for people of European ancestry. While the census defines White persons more broadly, when referenced in this study it is typically referring to people of European descent. The APA notes that “the use of the term Caucasian as an alternative to White or European is discouraged because it originated as a way of classifying White people as a race to be favorably compared with other races.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, this document avoids the use of the term Caucasian unless it is from a primary source quote.

Many media outlets and inclusive language guides now capitalize terms when referring to a race, including both Black and White, though this is not universal and may change. It must also be recognized that language evolves over time and continues to do so. Terms that are regarded as acceptable and inclusive as of the completion of this document may not necessarily remain so in the future.

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<sup>5</sup> For more on appropriate language when referring to Native people, please see the Native Governance Center’s guide “How to Talk about Native Nations,” here <https://nativegov.org/resources/how-to-talk-about-native-nations/>.

<sup>6</sup> American Psychological Association, “Race and Ethnicity,” accessed October 19, 2022, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/racial-ethnic-minorities>.

## Terms and Definitions

Listed below are definitions of the terms related to planning and land use utilized in this study.

- Community Plan: a section of the Land Use Element of the General Plan that establishes goals, objectives, policies, and programs focused on a particular area or community
- Cumulative Zoning: a method of zoning where any use that is permitted in a higher use, less intensive zone is also permissible in a lower use, more intensive zone
- Downzoning: to change the zoning of an area or neighborhood to reduce the density or scale of permitted construction
- Floor Area Ratio (FAR): the ratio of a building’s total floor area to the size of the piece of land upon which it is built
- General Plan: a California city or county’s outline for the overall pattern of future development; a collection of the goals and policies which a municipality will base their land use decisions; in present-day Los Angeles, zoning decisions must be consistent with the General Plan; each General Plan must include seven elements – land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open-space, noise, and safety – but each municipality may adopt additional elements
- Height limit: the maximum height of a building in a particular area or municipality; governed typically by height limit restrictions in the zoning code
- Pro-growth movement: a movement which supports land use regulation that aims to provide more density and growth in a neighborhood or municipality
- Redlining: a discriminatory practice that puts services (financial services, i.e. loans, or otherwise) out of reach for residents of

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certain areas based on race or ethnicity. The term “redlining” originated in the 1930s, when a government-sponsored corporation (the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation, or HOLC) assessed and categorized neighborhoods occupied by ethnic groups and people of color as “declining” or “hazardous” and therefore viewed them as investment risks; the policy discouraged investment in these neighborhoods, the legacy of which is felt to this day

- Rent stabilization: a form of control over housing pricing, originating in the first half of the 20th century, that acts as a form of insurance for tenants against unreasonable rent increases; rent stabilization tends to be more moderate in its restrictions on rent increases, while rent control freezes the cost so it cannot increase
- Restrictive covenant: a clause in a deed or lease that restricts the free use or occupancy of property by forbidding certain uses, types of buildings, or owners/occupants based on race and ethnicity
- Slow-growth movement: a movement in which residents (often of suburban areas) advocate to prevent neighborhood growth or change by limiting development, density or scale, and construction
- “Slum”: a derogatory term used to describe areas or neighborhoods containing substandard housing, unsanitary conditions, and often overcrowding; historically, the term was often associated with neighborhoods in which communities of color lived
- Suburb: the residential area on the outskirts of a city or large town; a smaller community adjacent to or within commuting distance of a city
- Upzoning: policies which aim to increase the density or scale of housing or permitted construction
- Urban renewal: the process of seizing and demolishing a large swath of public and private property for the purposes of “modernizing” and “improving” what was regarded as aging infrastructure; occurred nationwide between the late 1940s and mid-1970s
- Variance: a limited waiver from the property development standards of a zoning ordinance for a building structure that is not otherwise permitted in a particular zone
- Zoning: the process by which a municipality organizes land into areas, or zones, and regulates the allowable uses in each zone; it typically establishes development standards such as lot size, building size, setback, and other features in a particular zone
- Zoning ordinance: a municipal law that defines how property in specific geographic locations can be used; may also regulate lot size, density, building size, and other aspects of construction and land use<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For more on terms related to planning, see “A Citizen’s Guide to Planning,” prepared by the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research, State of California, January 2001.



**Chapter 1.**  
**Land Use Management and Segregation:**  
**Origins and Context**



*Opposite: Bird's eye view of Los Angeles in 1887 looking west towards the Pacific Ocean (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)*

## Chapter 1. Land Use Management and Segregation: Origins and Context



Urban planners sought to avoid the conditions found in places like the tenements of New York's Lower East Side, as documented by urban reformer Jacob Riis. Photo circa 1890. (Photo courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York)

Modern zoning, which dates to the early twentieth century, involves the division of a municipality's land into areas, or zones, as well as the regulation of land use, population and building density, and building scale in each zone.<sup>8</sup> The origins of zoning, however, can be traced further back. Building codes in London as far back as the twelfth century regulated construction materials with the aim of fire safety, and other European cities had similar codes by the seventeenth century. Laws governing the regulation of nuisances, or "noxious" uses, developed as well in both Europe and North America. These served as the primary means of land use regulation until the creation of modern zoning laws.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Sonia Hirt, "Home, Sweet Home: American Residential Zoning in Comparative Perspective," *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 20 (1), 2013, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Hirt, 3.

In the United States, city planning reflected the values of the Progressive Movement at the turn of the twentieth century, which one historian characterized as a "search for order" in a maturing industrial world.<sup>10</sup> City planning could organize a city into distinct areas for industry, residences for different classes, and administrative and commercial activities, with each area's roads and other public facilities specially tailored to the predominant use. City planning, its practitioners believed, would improve the quality of life by reducing the spread of disease, preventing homes' exposure to environmental toxins, designating open space for leisure, and speeding the flow of traffic in people, goods, and ideas along streets, railroads, and communications networks. To accomplish these goals, planners tended to emphasize the

<sup>10</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

## Chapter 1. Land Use Management and Segregation: Origins and Context

organization of urban land into specific land use districts - commercial, industrial, residential, institutional, and mixed. The division of these districts and the desire to separate noxious uses from residential areas came to underlie the goals of early planning efforts.

However, what began as a desire for civic improvement and protecting the residential environment also became “a mechanism for protecting property values and excluding the undesirables.”<sup>11</sup> Early concepts of urban order and planning principles became embedded with then-prevailing ideas about racial and class hierarchies. At the time, decision makers saw communities of color and the working class through a racist lens that inaccurately associated them with characteristics of disease, immorality, and inferiority. They operated according to a belief which historian Carl Nightingale has called the “racial theory of property values,” or the idea that residents of color represented a threat to real estate values and thus must be kept out of their neighborhoods.<sup>12</sup> In towns and cities throughout the U.S., workers of color were separated from their White counterparts in company-provided housing, and legislation dictated the separation of people of color from the White population. Some of the earliest land use legislation impacted Chinese migrants by creating designated districts where laundries could operate – in the late nineteenth century in California cities, laundries were often equated with the Chinese population.

The codifying of racial segregation against Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans set a precedent for urban racial segregationist

zoning in America. Jim Crow legislation began to pass in 1890 in the American South, and cities started to apply its logic to residential neighborhoods. Beginning in 1910, Southern city councils used municipal zoning ordinances to designate separate residential areas for White and African Americans residents in Baltimore, Richmond, Atlanta, Louisville, St. Louis, and Dallas. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) legally challenged the constitutionality of these racial zoning codes, and the U.S. Supreme Court concurred when it struck down the enforcement of Louisville’s racial zoning code in *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917).<sup>13</sup> In the decision, the Supreme Court ruled that such segregationist zoning ordinances interfered with individuals’ property rights. However, land use zoning could also accomplish racial segregation via the separation of housing types and classes in tandem with other mechanisms such as violence, intimidation, racial steering, and restrictive covenants. Planner Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., who had been among the first to promote the use of comprehensive zoning ordinances, admitted in 1918 that divisions by social class were “more or less coincident with racial divisions.”<sup>14</sup> As one historian noted, “the racial zoning ideal remained a mainstay of planners... [and not simply] a manifestation of misguided southern leaders out of touch with the mainstream of urban reform.”<sup>15</sup> For a decade, the constitutionality of land use zoning remained uncertain and widely contested, but its usage continued.

Though the *Buchanan* decision undermined the use of explicit racial zoning, cities found ways to use zoning as a means of segregation by focusing their efforts on its ability to exclude

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<sup>11</sup> Christopher Silver, “The Racial Origins of Zoning in American Cities,” Manning Thomas, June and Marsha Ritzdorf eds. *Urban Planning and the African American Community: In the Shadows*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Carl H. Nightingale, *Segregation: A Global History of Divided Cities* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 305.

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Jones-Correa, “The Origins and Diffusion of Race Restrictive Covenants,” *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 4 (Winter 2000-2001), 548.

<sup>14</sup> Nightingale, 323.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Silver, cited in David Freund, *Colored Property*, 59.

## Chapter 1. Land Use Management and Segregation: Origins and Context

particular uses. At this time, certain land uses and building types, particularly multi-family residences, were equated with people of color or working-class White residents. The presence of multi-family housing was seen as threatening to property values in single-family neighborhoods. In *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.* (1926), the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the right of local governments to employ zoning to separate land uses and population and building densities. The court's decision noted that:

“the development of detached house sections is greatly retarded by the coming of apartment houses, which has sometimes resulted in destroying the entire section for private houses; that in such sections very often the apartment house is a mere parasite, constructed in order to take advantage of the open spaces and attractive surroundings created by the residential character of the district. Moreover, the coming of one apartment house is followed by others [...] until finally the residential character of the neighborhood and its desirability as a place of detached residences are utterly destroyed. Under these circumstances, apartment houses, which in a different environment would be not only entirely unobjectionable but highly desirable, come very near to being nuisances.”<sup>16</sup>

Though unstated, the Supreme Court undoubtedly “understood the discriminatory potential of separating housing types” because the lower court had explicitly made the point years earlier that “colored or certain foreign races” were undesirable in single-family areas.<sup>17</sup> The idea of separating housing types into different neighborhoods – single-family

from multi-family, and even large-lot single-family from small-lot single-family – became integral to planning theory in the first decades of the twentieth century. When combined with prevailing discriminatory ideas that conflated communities of color with both inferiority and multi-family housing, some planners at the time saw zoning as a way “to frame housing type and resulting class, ethnic, and racial segregation as in the public interest.”<sup>18</sup>

The origins of land use management were thus fundamentally shaped by social ideals of racial segregation. Concurrently, ideas of race influenced the private sector real estate market in the early twentieth century. Public and private policy making, in response to popular pressure from empowered White communities, prevented people of color from securing full access to property ownership or long-term tenure in desirable areas. Racist practices and policies would be embedded into many forms of land use management that emerged in the next century, including zoning, real estate appraisal, the location of public housing, urban renewal, and homeowner activism.

<sup>16</sup> *Euclid v. Ambler* 1926, qtd. in Hirt, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Whittemore, “Exclusionary Zoning: Origins, Open Suburbs, and Contemporary Debates,” *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 87 No. 2 (2021), 169.

<sup>18</sup> Whittemore, “Exclusionary Zoning,” 169.



**Chapter 2.**  
**The Origins of Zoning and Segregation**  
**in Los Angeles, 1908-1932**

*Opposite: Los Angeles, 1909, Birds Eye View Pub. Co. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)*

## Chapter 2. The Origins of Zoning and Segregation in Los Angeles, 1908-1932

Los Angeles was built on the ancestral and unceded lands of the First Peoples of Los Angeles. It grew as a small town built upon an existing Indigenous village and later a Spanish and Mexican settlement in the late eighteenth century. Los Angeles did not experience its first wave of significant growth for approximately one hundred years. When it did, however, the city expanded rapidly in a series of development booms between the 1880s and 1920s. This growth coincided with the advent of city planning and zoning, forces which city officials foresaw as being able to shape the vast Los Angeles basin into an ideal version of the American city: one in which decentralized, suburban single-family residential development prevented the congestion, pollution, and other ills they saw plaguing eastern industrialized cities. Prevailing thought at the time also equated the negative effects of industrialization with communities of color. The working-class and communities of color were blamed for the overcrowded conditions of tenements in eastern cities. The “ideal” Los Angeles, therefore, was to be a city of suburban single-family neighborhoods occupied by a White middle-class. A varied contingent, including city leaders, developers, and real estate professionals, sought to use the mechanism of zoning and land use regulation to realize this vision of Los Angeles. In doing so, they confined the city’s communities of color into the less desirable portions of the city. A variety of mechanisms, both public and private, would be used to maintain these discriminatory practices. The influence of racism and discrimination in the early planning process would set the stage for a century in which land use regulation regularly disenfranchised and penalized communities of color.

### Early Development and Land Use Regulation in Los Angeles

The land that would develop as the City of Los Angeles sits on the ancestral and unceded lands of the Tongva (also known as Yaavitam), the Gabrieleño, the Kizh, the San Fernando Band of Mission Indians, and the Fernandeano Tataviam Band of Mission Indians peoples. The Uto-Aztecan ancestors of these tribes entered the Los Angeles basin between approximately 2,000 B.C.E. and 700 C.E., and their descendants have continuously inhabited the area since then, throughout the many phases of the city’s development. By 1500, the first people of Los Angeles had established dozens of villages throughout LA County, often positioned near water sources, and lived in reciprocity with the land, as these watersheds provided food and other key resources that supported the communities’ livelihood.<sup>19</sup>

In the eighteenth century, Spain established a series of missions, pueblos, and presidios as part of a three-pronged approach to colonizing California and making it a self-sufficient entity that would help maintain Spanish power in the region. The missions became the most important aspect of this system, and they helped sustain the region economically.<sup>20</sup> Locally, Missions San Gabriel and San Fernando were founded in 1771 and 1797, respectively. Around the pueblo were the ranchos, or land grants. Much of the area’s Indigenous population was enslaved by the Spanish, forced to convert to Catholicism, and live on mission land. The economy of Spanish California relied on the forced, unpaid labor of Native peoples.

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<sup>19</sup> Geosnytec, Olin, and Gehry Partners, LLP, “LA River Master Plan,” DRAFT, prepared for the County of Los Angeles and County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works January 2021, 70, 74.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Prosser, “Spanish Colonial and Mexican Era Settlement, 1781-1849,” *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement*, February 2016, 2-3.

## Chapter 2. The Origins of Zoning and Segregation in Los Angeles, 1908-1932

The pueblo of Los Angeles, founded in 1781 near the Indigenous village of Yaangna, was multi-racial and multi-ethnic. Its first residents came from Sonora and Sinaloa in what is today Mexico; the group's makeup included European, African, and Indigenous ancestry.<sup>21</sup> The pueblo grew slowly in the early nineteenth century, and most new residents consisted of retired soldiers remaining in Alta California upon completion of their military service.<sup>22</sup> Following Mexican independence from Spain in 1821, Alta California fell under the purview of the Mexican government, and Los Angeles was among its most important settlements.<sup>23</sup> In the 1830s, the missions in Alta California were secularized, and their lands were transformed into large ranchos that were distributed to private citizens. A new social order emerged, which stratified society based upon land ownership, though "at the same time, there was a degree of social flexibility in Mexican California that did not exist elsewhere in Latin America."<sup>24</sup> Slavery was outlawed, the mission system eliminated, and the formal racial caste system which was part of Spanish law was abolished. Land and status could be – and often were – granted based upon wealth and military service rather than ethnic or racial background.<sup>25</sup> However, studies of nineteenth century California have shown that White residents actively worked to maintain their place at the top of the racial hierarchy.<sup>26</sup>

After Los Angeles became a Mexican city, foreigners were welcomed to both encourage trade and to attract new settlers. Americans

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<sup>21</sup> Prosser, 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 22. An example of this is Pio Pico, the last Mexican governor of California, who was of African, Native American, and Spanish descent.

<sup>26</sup> For more on this, see Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, repr 2009).

became the largest group to move to the area. By the 1830s, Los Angeles' population included fifty people of non-Native American or Spanish descent in a city of approximately 1,200 people.<sup>27</sup> In the 1840s, American migration to California increased as a result of the discovery of gold in 1848 in the northern part of the state. Los Angeles remained modest in size at this time and would retain a small population of diverse communities following California's admission to the United States in 1850.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War and made California a United States territory in 1848, also asserted that Mexican-era land claims would be honored by the U.S. government. However, with the admission of California as a state, political pressure increased to open it up for settlement, and Congress passed the California Land Act in 1851. The law created a board that reviewed all Mexican land titles to determine if they were valid; many claims took years to prove – if they could be proven at all under the newly created terms of the law. Many Mexican families in Los Angeles lost their lands in court or sold them to pay the legal costs they incurred while attempting to defend their land titles. The law thus helped concentrate land ownership among newly arrived White Americans.<sup>28</sup>

Following the California Land Act, the subdivision and development of land in Los Angeles became a mostly private undertaking. Although city regulatory bodies imposed minimal requirements, private individuals and companies were the ones who decided where, when, and how to subdivide

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<sup>27</sup> Prosser, 27.

<sup>28</sup> Jeremy Rosenberg, "How Rancho Owners Lost Their Land And Why That Matters Today," KCET, accessed October 4, 2022, <https://www.kcet.org/history-society/how-rancho-owners-lost-their-land-and-why-that-matters-today>.



## Chapter 2. The Origins of Zoning and Segregation in Los Angeles, 1908-1932

real estate.<sup>29</sup> As a result, city growth occurred in a largely unregulated manner, with the earliest development occurring around the Los Angeles Plaza (the town square, near what is today downtown) and later, the downtown commercial district. This is where the earliest residential neighborhoods grew up. The more attractive of these neighborhoods, such as Bunker Hill or Angelino Heights, were occupied by upper- and middle-income White residents in the 1880s and 1890s, while ethnic enclaves developed in small pockets in areas deemed less desirable.<sup>30</sup>

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Los Angeles was notable for its diversity. “No other U.S. city possessed quite the same ethnic mix as Los Angeles did at this time,” and in contrast to the homogenous ethnic or racial neighborhoods of other American cities, Los Angeles’ communities of color were characterized by their heterogeneity.<sup>31</sup> Most people of color arriving in Los Angeles in the latter part of the nineteenth century settled in the vicinity of the Los Angeles Plaza. Beginning with the city’s first major population boom in the 1880s, several small multi-ethnic and multi-racial communities of color grew up around the central city core.

One of the earliest ethnic enclaves was occupied by Chinese laborers along what was called Calle de los Negros, a small alley adjacent to the Los Angeles Plaza. Over the next thirty years, the area expanded to cover approximately twenty blocks and became the center of the Chinese community in Los Angeles. By 1870, approximately 200 Chinese residents lived there. It was also home



Apablasa Street in Old Chinatown, looking east from Alameda Street, circa 1900. (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)



View of Sonora Town in 1890. (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)

<sup>29</sup> Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 107.

<sup>30</sup> Architectural Resources Group, “Central City Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey Report,” prepared for the City of Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources, September 2016, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, eds., *Ethnic Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996), 45.

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to other ethnic groups, including French and Italian immigrants, Mexicans, and Indigenous People.<sup>32</sup> Despite the relatively small size of the Chinese community, racism against them grew in Los Angeles, a trend reflected throughout the Western United States at this time. Racial tension reached a fever pitch after an altercation between two Chinese associations ended in a shooting; a police officer and civilian responding at the scene were shot, resulting in one dead and one wounded. In retaliation, on October 24, 1871, a mob of 500 people descended on the area. Over the course of the night, eighteen Chinese residents were lynched.<sup>33</sup> The Chinatown Massacre was one of the worst incidents of racial violence in U.S. history. Chinese residents sued for damages, though they were unsuccessful, and most of the city's Chinese laundry businesses refused to pay their city license fees the following year in protest.<sup>34</sup> This was part of a larger trend of anti-Chinese sentiment and violence at the time; in addition to being unable to purchase land, Chinese immigrants faced threat of violence, forced evictions, and the prohibition of their businesses (such as laundries) throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

To the north and west of the Plaza and Chinatown, a Mexican enclave which became known as Sonora Town developed.<sup>35</sup> After the

turn of the twentieth century, the Mexican and Mexican American population dispersed out of Sonora Town to the south and east into other multi-ethnic neighborhoods (like South Los Angeles and Boyle Heights, for instance), though recent immigrants continued to settle there for several decades. Part of the Bunker Hill area to the southwest of the Plaza was inhabited by Asian Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans.<sup>36</sup> To the east of downtown, areas along the railroad tracks and the Los Angeles River became diverse neighborhoods home to Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans as well as White ethnic groups kept outside the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant majority such as Jews, Italians, White Catholics, and Russians.<sup>37</sup> These areas were located in proximity to industrial jobs but also typically lacked the race restrictions of other neighborhoods.

At the same time that Los Angeles' early neighborhoods took shape, its industrial development was transitioning away from one primarily based in agriculture; this shift would be felt throughout the city, including its residential areas. The change was driven by several factors, including a connection to the transcontinental railroad in 1876, increased demand for building materials and consumer goods, and the discovery of oil in the 1890s.<sup>38</sup> With this, the trajectory of the city's landscape was fundamentally altered. While much of the land within the city's boundaries remained devoted

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<sup>32</sup> Historic Resources Group, "Chinese Americans in Los Angeles, 1850-1980," *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement*, October 2018, 17.

<sup>33</sup> "Forgotten Los Angeles History: The Chinese Massacre of 1871," Los Angeles Public Library, accessed May 31, 2022, <https://www.lapl.org/collections-resources/blogs/lapl/chinese-massacre-1871>.

<sup>34</sup> Frank Shyong, "History forgot the 1871 Los Angeles Chinese massacre, but we've all been shaped by its violence," *Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-10-24/150th-anniversary-los-angeles-chinese-massacre>.

<sup>35</sup> GPA Consulting and Becky Nicolaidis, "Latino Los Angeles Historic Context Statement," *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement*, September 2015, 8.

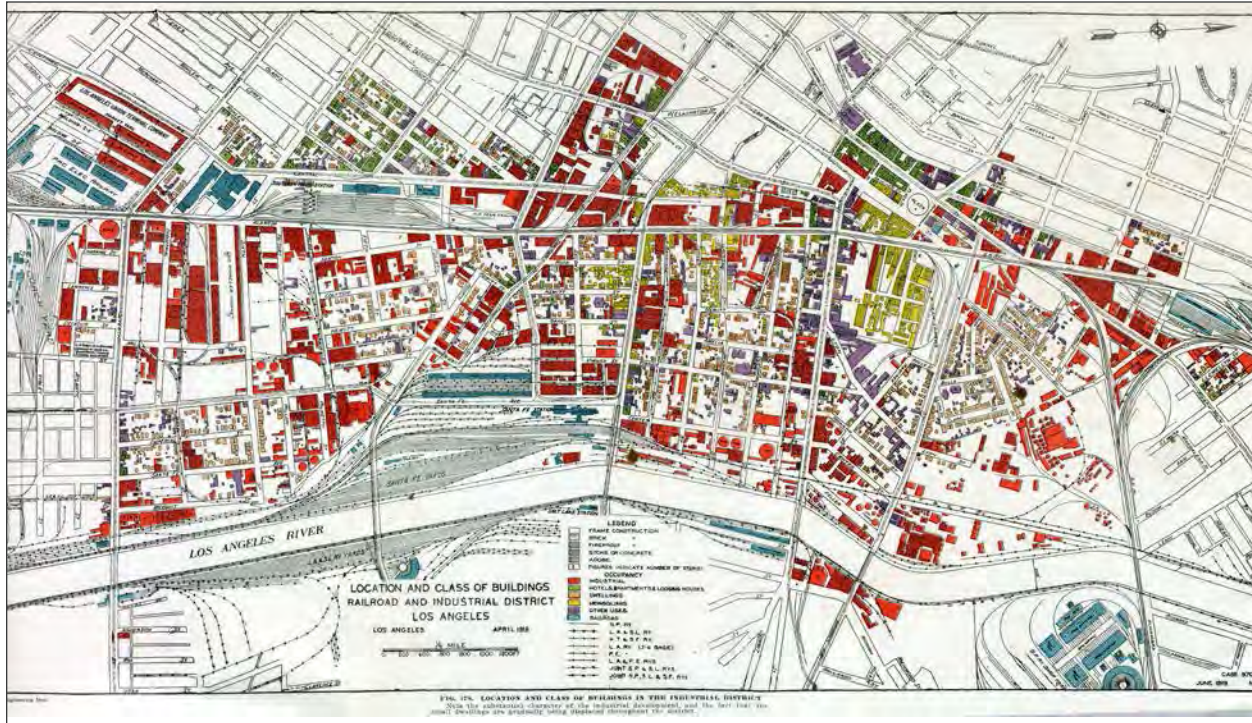
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<sup>36</sup> Page & Turnbull, "Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1905-1980," *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement*, August 2018, 16.

<sup>37</sup> George Sanchez, "The History of Segregation in Los Angeles: A Report on Racial Discrimination and Its Legacy," 2007, 4-5.

<sup>38</sup> LSA Associates, Inc. and Chattel Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, "Industrial Historic Context Statement," *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement*, prepared for the City of Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources, September 2011, rev. February 2018, 5.

## Chapter 2. The Origins of Zoning and Segregation in Los Angeles, 1908-1932



1918 map of planned industrial development adjacent to the Los Angeles River, including the present site of Union Station (number 7, then Chinatown). (Image courtesy of Jennifer Mapes)

to agriculture well into the twentieth century, industrial infrastructure thereafter became a key component of Los Angeles' built environment. Railroad companies like the Southern Pacific established terminals and yards in the eastern portion of downtown, with lines radiating outwards across the region. The rail lines became the primary means of moving goods to market, and industrial businesses located nearby to facilitate shipping.<sup>39</sup> The area east of downtown, which had been home to a mixture of agricultural land and working-class residential neighborhoods, transitioned to become the nexus of Los Angeles' industrial district in the early twentieth century, displacing the working-class residents and people of color that lived there.

<sup>39</sup> ARG, "Central City Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey Report," 20.

### Planning the Idealized Suburban City

Thus far, private ad-hoc development had dictated Los Angeles' growth. As the pace of growth accelerated, however, city leaders found themselves at a crossroads, one which reflected different visions of the city's future: would it be "the Riviera of the nation or the Detroit of the West"?<sup>40</sup> City leaders grappled with this fundamental question, raised by the competing interests of developers, real estate agents, industrialists, and home seekers. Land use decisions would attempt to answer it and in doing so, would shape the future of the city.

A powerful group of city leaders and reformers believed Los Angeles could serve as a model of

<sup>40</sup> Marc A. Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders: The American Real Estate Industry and Urban Land Planning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 83 qtd. in Whittemore, 37.

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a better city, one that embraced the suburban paradigm. They were committed to this suburban vision on ideological grounds. Early city leaders wanted to integrate the industrial landscape in a manner that spared Los Angeles the “slums,” congestion, and polluted manufacturing districts of East Coast cities. Progressive Era reformer Dana Bartlett predicted in *The Better City* (1907) that Los Angeles would be a spread-out city of suburbanized bucolic cottages around clean factories and commercial centers.<sup>41</sup> Many proponents of this vision also believed suburban home ownership would address the industrialized ills of the East.<sup>42</sup>

This vision of Los Angeles as an idealized city was intimately linked to notions of race. White residents often blamed people of color and immigrants for problems like overcrowding and unsanitary conditions that plagued newly industrialized cities in the East and Midwest – issues that people of color and the working-class suffered, but for which they were not responsible. Racist ideas of the time equated people of color with moral inferiority, disease, and dirty conditions. Therefore, in seeking solutions to the problems associated with industrialization, some city leaders concluded that keeping people of color out would help solve these issues. They conflated their ideal of Los Angeles as an idealized “morally pure city” with an absence of people of color, “who were assumed to bring with them crime and political radicalism, particularly labor

activism.”<sup>43</sup> In the eyes of *Los Angeles Times* owner Harry Chandler, for example, Los Angeles “possessed none of the blight, decay, civic corruption, or criminal activity that plagued other urban areas.”<sup>44</sup> He called it “the white spot of America.” Other city leaders saw Los Angeles as a final settling place for the American White race at the edge of the frontier. Booster Charles Fletcher Lummis frequently called it “the new Eden of the Saxon home-seeker.”<sup>45</sup> City leaders, planners, and real estate developers would work in tandem to translate these ideas into practice as they attempted to turn Los Angeles into their vision of an idealized White suburban metropolis.<sup>46</sup>

To achieve this vision, city leaders would have to balance this suburban ideal with growing industry, commerce, and other productive land uses in Los Angeles. Contrary to their ideal, Los Angeles’s early development became increasingly chaotic as its pace of growth accelerated. The city had regulated certain aspects of development since the mid-nineteenth century, such as the use of building materials and the location of “noxious” uses (also referred to as nuisances).<sup>47</sup> It soon became apparent, however, that neither individual efforts nor regulation of nuisances would be sufficient guides. City leaders concluded that a more comprehensive approach to land use regulation was needed, especially if city leaders and private interests were going to mold “the physical landscape to the cultural values of city promoters.”<sup>48</sup> This was especially evident as the

<sup>41</sup> Nicolaidis, *The New Suburbia*, Chapter 1.

<sup>42</sup> Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 158; Bartlett cited in Fogelson, 192; Martin Wachs, “Autos, Transit, and the sprawl of Los Angeles: the 1920s,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* (Summer 1984), 298; Mike Davis, “Sunshine and the Open Shop: Ford and Darwin in 1920s Los Angeles” in Tom Sitton and William Deverell, eds., *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders*; Culver, *Frontier of Leisure*.

<sup>43</sup> Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 27.

<sup>44</sup> Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 38.

<sup>45</sup> Barraclough, 27.

<sup>46</sup> Nicolaidis, *The New Suburbia*, Chapter 1.

<sup>47</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 27.

<sup>48</sup> Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2006), 35.

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industrial sector expanded, and industrial and residential uses began to crowd into proximity of each other. City officials therefore sought to govern the placement of certain, less desirable uses. Early regulation of this type was referred to as “districting,” and it involved designating specific uses or nuisances to be prohibited from a particular district of the city.<sup>49</sup> The city’s first attempt at zoning took this form.

In 1904, Los Angeles instituted its first public, legal land use controls. Officials designated three residential districts in the northwest and northeast parts of the city and restricted the range of commercial or industrial activity allowed there. The same year, the City passed a law regulating the location of commercial laundries, which had a tacit racial dimension.<sup>50</sup> The ordinance made it illegal to locate a commercial laundry within 250 feet of a church, school, hotel, or residence with the stated goal of the “preservation of public peace, health, and safety.”<sup>51</sup> Previously established businesses could petition the City Council for an exemption, and many did so. However, the law disproportionately affected the Chinese population, who operated nearly half of the city’s laundries. When Chinese launderers petitioned the City so they could continue to operate or be given enough time to relocate, the City cited issues of public health and denied their exemptions and extensions, despite granting these allowances to others.<sup>52</sup> Other California cities passed similar legislation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the law did not explicitly target Chinese immigrants, it became a means of regulating this particular group. Such laws had a history of being

<sup>49</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 32.

<sup>50</sup> Some councilmen actively used the legislation to attempt to control the location of Chinese-owned laundries in their districts. “Advocates Shotgun Remedy for Chinese Laundry Nuisance,” *Los Angeles Herald*, January 23, 1906, 7.

<sup>51</sup> Ordinance 9080 adopted 11 January 1904 qtd. in Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 31-32.

<sup>52</sup> Molina, 37-38.



View of the types of house courts the Housing Commission sought to improve, no date. (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)

used in a discriminatory manner against Chinese immigrants, even if the language they contained was neutral regarding race.

Three years later, government officials turned their focus to the regulation of substandard housing. The industrial economy and railway presence in Los Angeles led to the proliferation of several housing types that soon earned the ire of social reformers and city officials. They especially singled out the “house court,” which was a precursor to the later bungalow court in layout. The Los Angeles Housing Commission, formed in 1906, attempted to regulate substandard housing conditions and provide affordable single-family housing for the working class.<sup>53</sup> The Commission approved of the general house court form as a way to provide housing for working class families, however, they objected to the conditions found in many existing instances of the type. The house court was typically a group of homes located on a single parcel “crowded with one-story wood or tar paper shacks, either joined or freestanding; sanitary facilities were

<sup>53</sup> Todd Gish, “Building Los Angeles: Urban Housing in the Suburban Metropolis, 1900-1936,” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2007), 48.

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minimal, drainage was poor, and provision of light and ventilation irregular at best.”<sup>54</sup> They tended to be constructed in industrial areas in proximity to manufacturing jobs. The house court became synonymous with Mexicans and Mexican Americans and earned the derogatory nickname “Cholo court,” despite the fact that many other people of color and White residents lived in them as well.<sup>55</sup> In 1907, the City passed a housing ordinance that led to the removal or rehabilitation of house courts in the worst condition within 60 days. Their old residents, with no place to go, were reported to have found another piece of land to erect their “huts” downtown by the river. The City Housing Commission acknowledged the “discomfort”; a newspaper article described their belief that “it was for the eventual good of the cholo to be turned out now.”<sup>56</sup>

At the same time, the Housing Commission led a campaign to promote a better type of house court, showing that with higher standards, the housing type (a group of homes around a common courtyard) could be done well and offer a Los Angeles version of affordable housing that was “incomparably superior” to the tenements of the East Coast. As early as 1912, the Commission declared victory at banishing the “filth” of the old house court and applauded the “fashionable villa courts” arising in their place, which could command “big rents” and were not inhabited by Mexicans.<sup>57</sup>

### The 1908 Zoning Ordinance

With each successive development boom in Los Angeles, new residential neighborhoods formed further from the city center. This was facilitated by the abundant land available on the

broad Los Angeles Basin and the establishment of the Los Angeles Railway and Pacific Electric streetcar systems in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These newly available suburban housing tracts were almost exclusively open to White residents only, facilitated in part by the use of racially restrictive covenants (discussed below).

By the turn of the twentieth century, the city began using zoning to designate purely residential areas, separate from industrial and commercial areas. In 1908, the city passed its first zoning legislation related to land use. It expanded its districting legislation to bring order to piecemeal development by creating six residential districts in which industrial uses were not allowed. The desire was to maintain the majority of the city as “a residential paradise of spacious homes in quiet, clean surroundings.”<sup>58</sup> It also established six manufacturing districts, consisting of existing industrial areas along the Los Angeles River and scattered locations elsewhere. Outside of these areas industry could not be established. By 1909, the city had expanded that to twenty-five manufacturing districts. Any land not within a manufacturing district was designated as a residential district in which “any trade, calling, occupation or business” was prohibited.<sup>59</sup> Although the new zoning regulations were put in place to protect White-owned middle-class single-family homes from industrial environments, they also confined industry (and working-class neighborhoods) to the city’s least desirable areas, intensifying these pre-existing uses there and further exacerbating disparities in health and quality of life.

<sup>54</sup> Gish, 48.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-114.

<sup>56</sup> “Foul Cholo Courts Disappear: Many Occupants Shelterless,” *Los Angeles Evening Express*, April 5, 1907, 1.

<sup>57</sup> “Housing Board Work Finishing Fast,” *Los Angeles Evening Express*, August 31, 1912, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Mansel G. Blackford, *The Lost Dream: Businessmen and City Planning on the Pacific Coast, 1890-1920* (Ohio State University Press, 1993), 84, 92-93 qtd. in George Sanchez, “History of Segregation in Los Angeles,” 4.

<sup>59</sup> Ordinance 18565 adopted 3 August 1909 qtd in. Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 36-38.

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### *Population Estimates for the City of Los Angeles*

Year	Total Pop.	African American	Latino (incl. high-low range)	Chinese	Japanese	Korean
1850	1,610	12	1,215	2	--	--
1860	4,385	66	2,069	11	--	--
1870	5,728	93	2,160	172	--	--
1880	11,183	102	2,166	605	--	--
1890	50,395	1,258	--	1,871	~70	--
1900	102,479	2,131	3,000-5,000	2,111	~200	--
1910	319,198	7,599	9,678- 29,738	1,954	7,938	12
1920	576,673	15,579	29,757- 50,000	2,062	11,618	~100
1930	1,238,048	38,894	97,116- 190,000	3,009	21,081	~320

Sources: *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement*, Ethnic Los Angeles, African Americans in Los Angeles Multiple Property Documentation Form; We-Wui Chung Chen, "Changing Social-Cultural Patterns of the Chinese Community in Los Angeles." University of Southern California PhD dissertation, 1952, 54. When population numbers are not included, they were either not found in the source material or only numbers for Los Angeles County were found.

The City established more districts in the first two decades of the twentieth century, concerning residences, stables, and other uses in response to petitions against certain businesses. This "reactive" approach to land use had its drawbacks, however. It created a patchwork quilt of districts throughout the growing city, and it required the constant intervention of the City Council against specific nuisances as they came up.<sup>60</sup> City regulators also faced the constant challenge of where to locate certain uses, for while they were economically necessary and desirable, they were not wanted by residents in many areas.<sup>61</sup> This also represented an early instance of zoning legislation giving property

<sup>60</sup> Whittemore, "The Regulated City," 33.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

owners a say in land use decisions; certain land uses were not allowed in residential districts unless a majority of property owners approved.<sup>62</sup>

Such an innovative approach to city planning, the first citywide municipal code of its sort in the country, appeared perfectly functional on the map. However, the City had created no mechanism for enforcing zoning in practice; it would not create the Planning Commission until 1920, and most early regulatory efforts fell to the City Council.<sup>63</sup> In addition, the early residential districts allowed multiple types of

<sup>62</sup> Ordinance 22798 adopted 7 June 1911, in Whittemore, "The Regulated City," 39.

<sup>63</sup> Whittemore, "The Regulated City," 47. See Whittemore, "The Regulated City," 32-39 for more on Los Angeles' 1908 zoning regulation.

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land uses, including multi-family, unless they were specifically excluded; it was only specific “noxious” uses that were disallowed.<sup>64</sup> The built environment that developed in the first two decades of the twentieth century was therefore more diverse than planners’ idealized image, but this early vision of the city’s future significantly shaped housing policy for decades to come.<sup>65</sup>

Meanwhile, Los Angeles’ communities of color grew at a slow but steady pace (see “Population Estimates for the City of Los Angeles”), though they remained relatively small and had little political influence.<sup>66</sup> Due to a lack of political and social power, as well as rampant discrimination and even violence aimed against them, Los Angeles’ communities of color turned inwards, forming insular communities with their own social services, social organizations, and businesses (discussed further below). They began to slowly move within and outside downtown at different rates. Koreans and Korean Americans, for example, moved to the area west of the University of Southern California beginning in the 1920s. Unlike the majority of Los Angeles neighborhoods, this area was not race restricted and so became diverse with White, Asian American, Jewish, African American, and Latino residents.<sup>67</sup> The Japanese and Japanese American community expanded into small enclaves outside of downtown including Terminal Island at the Port of Los Angeles, Hollywood, Boyle Heights, and Venice, though the Alien Land Law of 1913 prevented Asian Americans from purchasing

land.<sup>68</sup> The largest concentration of African Americans in Los Angeles first settled downtown; as it grew, it moved south and east onto Central Avenue, where it intermingled with other communities of color.<sup>69</sup> As communities of color began to form outside the downtown core, White Angelenos responded by moving farther out into suburban neighborhoods.

### Zoning, Land Use, and Housing in the 1920s and 1930s

As Los Angeles grappled with its rapidly changing landscape, it also expanded at an incredible rate due to a series of land annexations. The city spread outward from its original boundaries (centered on approximately what is now downtown). It was during this period that Los Angeles assumed much of its present size and shape.<sup>70</sup> Its population also ballooned rapidly. In 1900, the city’s population stood at 102,479. By 1910, that number had tripled, and by 1920, it had increased to 576,673. It would double again

<sup>64</sup> Gish, 320.

<sup>65</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of the proliferation of multi-family housing in Los Angeles, contrary to popular belief, see Gish, “Building Los Angeles.” Chapter 6 discusses the city’s early zoning regulation.

<sup>66</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 20-21.

<sup>67</sup> Page & Turnbull, “Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1905-1980,” 19.

<sup>68</sup> Historic Resources Group, “Japanese Americans in Los Angeles, 1869-1970,” *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement*, August 2018, 25. The Alien Land Law forbade the sale of land - or its rental for longer than three years - to “aliens ineligible for citizenship.” Proponents used this phrasing to deny that the law discriminated against any particular racial group, though in effect, it made land ownership impossible for a majority of Asian Americans. A few loopholes, like the right to hold property in the name of American-born children, were closed with the State’s subsequent passage of a popular initiative, Proposition 1, in 1920.

<sup>69</sup> Teresa Grimes, “Historic Resources Associated with African Americans in Los Angeles Multiple Property Documentation Form,” 2008, E3; Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, “History of Downtown Los Angeles’ ‘Skid Row,’” accessed September 21, 2021, [http://www.lachamber.com/clientuploads/LUCH\\_committee/102208\\_History\\_of\\_Skid\\_Row.pdf](http://www.lachamber.com/clientuploads/LUCH_committee/102208_History_of_Skid_Row.pdf).

<sup>70</sup> Kevin Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley: America’s Suburb* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times Books, 2001), 63.





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by 1930.<sup>71</sup> Demand for housing skyrocketed. At the same time, high building costs, caused by materials shortages during and immediately after World War I, drove up the cost of constructing housing.

The housing shortage was especially keen in the booming City of Los Angeles. As more people moved to Southern California either seasonally or permanently, housing became difficult to find, and the price of residences for both purchase and rent rose.<sup>72</sup> Though the pace of building began to increase by 1920 and the number of building permits filed per month set records in the city, the housing shortage continued.<sup>73</sup> The Chamber of Commerce went so far as to put an advertisement in the *Times* asking, “if you have available any living quarters which you would be willing to rent at reasonable rates, in order to relieve the present acute housing shortage, you are requested, as a matter of public service, to fill out the subjoined blank [form] and mail it to the Housing Bureau.”<sup>74</sup> The city’s pace of building struggled to keep up with demand through the early 1920s.<sup>75</sup> Soon, however, materials shortages eased, and the pace of construction increased enough to keep up with demand.

Most of the new neighborhoods subdivided by developers at the time were open only to White households while excluding people of color. Developers and realtors used an array of tools

<sup>71</sup> State of California Department of Finance, “Historical Census Populations of Counties and Incorporated Cities in California, 1850-2020,” Demographic Reports, accessed May 2022, <https://dof.ca.gov/reports/demographic-reports/>.

<sup>72</sup> “Apartment Men Raising Rents,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 29, 1918, V1.

<sup>73</sup> “Home Building Forges Ahead,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1920, V1.

<sup>74</sup> “Living Quarters to Rent,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1920, III.

<sup>75</sup> “Stresses Need of New Homes,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 1921, I3; “More Garages than Houses,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 27, 1921, I4.

to accomplish this, including race restrictive covenants, the establishment of property owners’ associations which formed to make sure the covenants were heeded, and racial steering by real estate practitioners. Steering refers to a practice of guiding prospective buyers towards or away from certain neighborhoods based on their race. When all else failed, property owners used intimidation and violence (these methods of private sector discrimination and segregation are discussed further below). These systemic acts of racial discrimination in the housing market were used widely and effectively in early Los Angeles.<sup>76</sup>

The city’s rapid growth made it clear that districting and the prevention of nuisances on their own were not sufficient.<sup>77</sup> Districting’s piecemeal approach was largely reactionary, and it did not achieve the goal of regulating land use at the neighborhood or citywide scale for the purposes of “protecting” wealthier areas of the city. In the 1910s and 1920s, the newly prevailing views among the country’s planners was that land use regulation should be complemented by long-term planning, a theory which arose out of the Progressive Movement’s desire to bring transparency to municipal decision making and eliminate corruption. Planners thought that zoning, on the other hand, could regulate land use on a larger scale and thereby create coherent neighborhoods. Los Angeles planners promoted a dispersed city made up of a central commercial core and numerous outlying satellite neighborhoods, a trend that could be seen in city planning around the country at this time.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 69; Laura Redford, “The Intertwined History of Class and Race Segregation in Los Angeles,” *Journal of Planning History* 16, 4 (2017), 308; Sanchez, “The History of Segregation in Los Angeles.”

<sup>77</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 43-44.

<sup>78</sup> Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the 20th Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 43.

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At the same time, Los Angeles' planning efforts continued to have a definite racial and class dimension. Articles of the time emphasize the ability of zoning to preserve upper-income areas and "protect" single-family residences from apartments (often called flats or tenements).<sup>79</sup> In 1920, the new City Planning Commission requested the services of early zoning proponent Charles Cheney, a founding member of the American City Planning Institute. Cheney drafted California's initial zoning enabling act as well as the first single-family-only residential district in Berkeley, California. In the early 1920s, the Los Angeles Realty Board requested that Cheney speak in favor of zoning, including single-family zoning. Cheney's influence is notable because he promoted the idea of a race-based zoning system. In 1922, he was quoted as saying to a group of residents in Venice that he "does not see why see why cities in this country should not provide by ordinance for zones in which the Japanese, the African, or other races must reside."<sup>80</sup> He later elaborated, "Land values in many high class home communities in Los Angeles and other cities have been affected by sales being made to families of African or Mongolian races. Restrictions made to prevent sales to these races has not always been effective."<sup>81</sup>

All of these ideas would come into play and imbue continued planning efforts. The city passed its first comprehensive zoning ordinance in 1921. The new ordinance established five zones, and each zone allowed a particular "class" of building and their uses. Zone A allowed only single-family residences, while the other zones were less restrictive. Zone B covered income producing

properties such as hotels, boarding houses, and multi-family residences. Zone C allowed commercial and higher density residential uses. Zone D allowed certain industrial uses, and Zone E was unlimited in its uses allowed.<sup>82</sup> The ordinance was more generalized in many aspects than later regulation. Density was only regulated in Zone A, and scale restrictions were only put in place by a 1922 provision that set a minimum lot width in Zone A.<sup>83</sup> The categories were cumulative - in each zone below A, allowable uses included those stated for that particular zone and in zones above it. For example, in Zone B, single-family and multi-family residences were allowed, and these uses were also allowed in Zones C through E.<sup>84</sup>

This new zoning ordinance created areas in which more expensive single-family homes would be protected from all other uses – aside from churches, schools, and parks - in Zone A. Along with restrictive covenants, this tiered system set apart the most expensive, larger lot single-family housing for the White middle-class.<sup>85</sup> Otherwise, their neighborhoods might be "given over to the backwash of humanity," according to Los Angeles Realty Board (LARB) zoning consultant W.L. Pollard in overtly racist language printed in the

<sup>79</sup> "Zoning to Save Highclass sections," *Eagle Rock Sentinel*, July 4, 1918, 3; "Zoning means protection for the small home owner vs. the tenement," *Eagle Rock Sentinel*, July 4, 1918, 3.

<sup>80</sup> "Cheney Favors Racist Zoning," *Evening Vanguard*, September 27, 1922, 3.

<sup>81</sup> "Racial Zoning Plan Approved," *Monrovia Daily News*, Dec 22, 1925, 8.

<sup>82</sup> Whittemore, "The Regulated City," 59.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>84</sup> Gish, 326.

<sup>85</sup> The 1921 zoning ordinance was the subject of an important California Supreme Court decision regarding the validity of prohibiting a four-unit apartment in an area zoned for single-family (*Miller vs. LA Board of Public Works*). The lower courts found the zoning ordinance was primarily aesthetic in nature and not intrinsically related to public health, welfare, or safety. The Supreme Court disagreed, finding that the establishment of protected single-family residential districts brought public benefits such as "better attention to the rearing of children" and increased interest in "church and school." The Court found that since few people would choose to live near apartments, it was legal to establish exclusive areas where they would not be permitted as part of a comprehensive zoning effort.

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Los Angeles Times in 1931.<sup>86</sup> Single-family housing could be located in other zones - and it was - but these were not the superior version associated with the purest expression of the “American home” because denser forms of housing - and commercial or industrial uses in zones C, D, and E - could also locate in these zones.<sup>87</sup> Areas of mixed housing (Zone B) would serve as buffers between the most exclusive A zone and commercial areas.<sup>88</sup> However, developers and property owners who wanted more intensive uses could also lobby the City Council and undermine this goal.

Zoning legislation in the 1920s was innovative for its time. It represented a much more comprehensive means of land use regulation than had previously existed. Land use decisions had previously fallen to individual property owners or developers, who were reluctant to cede this right to local government. Developers and property owners alike also resisted attempts to classify their properties and potentially prevent its use for higher profit. In Los Angeles, which was at the forefront of zoning legislation, planners feared the backlash they might face in implementing it. This was especially true during the decade’s real estate boom, which resulted in high demand and speculation.

A variety of interests shaped the new zoning ordinance. Developers and property owners, for example, wanted to maximize their land’s property value. The Los Angeles Realty Board (LARB), which was founded in 1903, also played a key role in shaping zoning during this period. It was an influential organization that represented the interests of property developers and brokers. LARB members supported more restrictive zoning as a means of protecting the class and

White racial character of their developments.<sup>89</sup> The realty board’s code of ethics defined the ideal neighborhood as segregated by race and class; as noted above, it was the LARB zoning consultants Charles Cheney and W.L. Pollard who advocated for the separation of single-family neighborhoods. To gain the support of developers and the real estate industry for the new zoning ordinance, planners emphasized zoning’s ability to stabilize land values. To accommodate the rate of the city’s growth, planners ensured that an ample supply of land was zoned for multi-family dwellings.<sup>90</sup>

Although planners achieved the dispersal they sought with the new ordinance, some critics felt that Los Angeles in the 1920s was zoned too little for single-family homes, and too much land allowed both multi-family and single-family residences. By 1925, only 10 percent was restricted to Zone A (single-family residences), while nearly 60 percent of the city’s land fell in Zone B (single- and multi-family).<sup>91</sup> Although it was not a given that all land in Zone B would be developed with apartments, this trend worried city officials and homeowners alike. The 1921 ordinance had also grouped all multi-family housing types into one zone. Due to the building boom and demand for housing, far more large-scale apartment buildings were constructed during the decade than anticipated. In neighborhoods such as Westlake and in what is now Koreatown (Wilshire Boulevard and adjacent streets between Vermont and Normandie Avenues), multi-story apartments were constructed near single-family and low-scale multi-family residences - much to the chagrin of current residents and homeowners. Some critics also regarded these multi-family residential buildings as too reminiscent of the

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<sup>86</sup> W.L. Pollard, “Blighted Area Causes Listed,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1931, D4.

<sup>87</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 62.

<sup>88</sup> Fogelson, 255.

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<sup>89</sup> Redford, 307; Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders*.

<sup>90</sup> Gish, 338-339.

<sup>91</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 78.

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East Coast urban environment.<sup>92</sup> Despite the promotion of Los Angeles as a “city of homes” to prospective residents in the first decades of the century, as it took shape the city was more complicated. A substantial amount of the residential construction in the 1920s was in fact multi-family housing to accommodate the city’s rapidly growing workforce. Between 1920 and 1929, the construction of single-family homes fell while multi-family units became a larger portion of housing built; multi-family housing construction outpaced that of single-family by the end of the decade.<sup>93</sup> A survey completed by an economics firm in 1924 found that approximately 52 percent of housing in Los Angeles was single-family, and the remaining was multi-family (either apartments, duplexes, or bungalow courts).<sup>94</sup> The construction of multi-family housing helped accommodate the demand generated by the population influx of the decade. However, this was at odds with planners’ desired outcome for the city. It quickly became evident to them that more categorization was needed, and Los Angeles’ city planners continued to hone the zoning ordinance in the coming decades.

City leaders responded with the 1930 zoning ordinance, which attempted to address these issues. The new zoning legislation created more specific categories (eight zones up from five zones in 1921), including the establishment of four residential zones: R1 through R4. R1 included single-family homes, R2 allowed two- to four-unit multi-family buildings with a height limit of two-and-a-half stories, R3 allowed apartments up to four stories in height, and R4 allowed multi-family buildings up to the city’s 150-foot height limit, as well as hotels and clubs.<sup>95</sup> The number of categorizations for commercial and industrial property were also increased. The new categories



The 1930 zoning ordinance sought to create more differentiation between multi-family housing types. Though not the most common type of apartment construction, the Talmadge Apartments on Wilshire Boulevard illustrates the disparate uses that critics of the 1921 ordinance wanted to avoid. (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)

<sup>92</sup> Gish, 358.

<sup>93</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 80, 137.

<sup>94</sup> Gish, 125.

<sup>95</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 111; Gish, 348.

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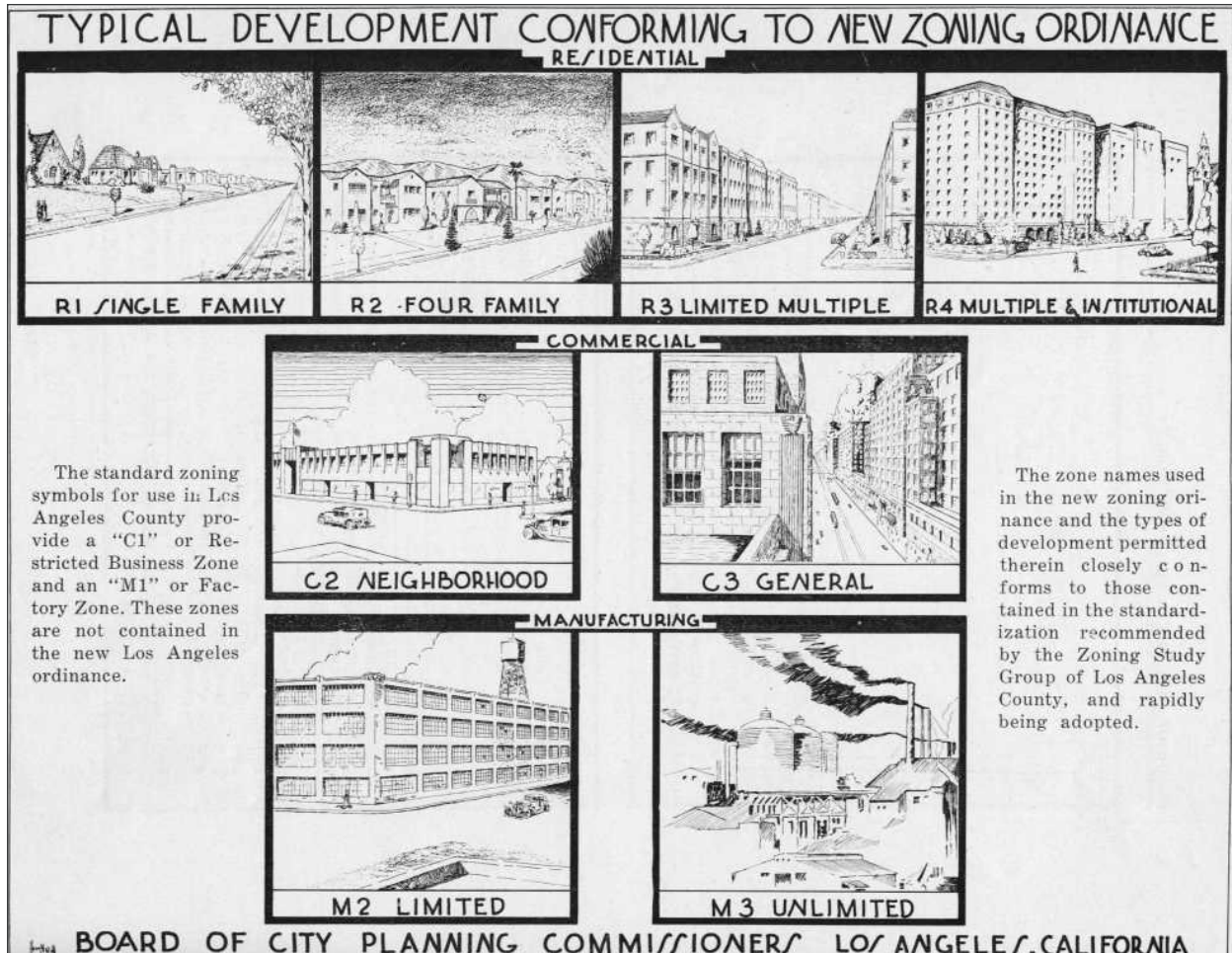


Illustration of the residential zoning categories created in the 1930 zoning ordinance. (Department of City Planning Annual Report 1929-1930, via Whittemore, "The Regulated City.")

were intended to create clearer delineations between different building classes and increase land use segregation. Los Angeles also was the first city in the country to establish parking requirements in response to a lack of street parking amid the booming popularity of the automobile.<sup>96</sup> The new ordinance made variance and zone change applications more transparent through public hearings and gave property owners in the vicinity a say in the process - an

<sup>96</sup> Whittemore, "The Regulated City," 111.

ability which would be increasingly seized upon as the century progressed.<sup>97</sup>

Zoning in the 1920s provided a way to accommodate rapid growth by allowing for denser multi-family housing construction. Residential construction radiated quickly and further than ever before from the city center into places like Mid-City and the Wilshire District. However, the prevalence of restrictive covenants and other discriminatory housing practices

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 113.

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(discussed below) prevented people of color from moving into most of these new neighborhoods. Available housing for these groups remained limited to areas closer to downtown and on land adjacent to industry, areas deemed undesirable to and unhealthy for White households. These patterns would persist in the coming decades. In addition, despite the overall availability of housing in the Los Angeles region, the quality of housing open to different groups varied widely. The new single- and multi-family homes constructed in middle-class residential neighborhoods were largely inaccessible to people of color. As city leaders sought to craft a city that was the antithesis of crowded, industrialized East Coast cities, they relegated people of color to the literal and metaphorical fringes and used zoning practices which were fundamentally intertwined with racism and classism to achieve these ends.

### Private Sector Tools of Racial Segregation

While public policy tools like zoning had begun separating land uses in Los Angeles, private sector tools were simultaneously at work ensuring that residential neighborhoods would be “protected” from various perceived threats and to ensure the White racial homogeneity of these neighborhoods. A variety of private sector tools were developed to keep people of color from settling in all-White neighborhoods. Some were informally organized actions of individuals; others were more formal, legal measures implemented by individuals, groups, companies, and developers. While these practices spread throughout Los Angeles, they were also strong in neighboring cities and outlying suburbs. This had the effect of excluding people of color from large portions of housing in neighborhoods throughout the region.

One of the most effective tools of segregation was the restrictive covenant, used widely in Los Angeles and cities nationwide from 1900 to 1948. This was a legal clause written into a property



A 1927 advertisement for Leimert Park from the *Los Angeles Times*. It is advertised as “inexpensive, ideally located,” and “restricted.”

deed, which specified that the owner could only sell or rent the property to “Caucasians,” otherwise the owner could be sued or lose the property. Many covenants listed the excluded racial groups by name, such as “Negroes,” Mexicans, Japanese, Chinese, or Jews, among others.<sup>98</sup> Covenants predated zoning as a form of land use regulation. They were intended to run with the land, despite future transfers in ownership, and typically lasted 20-30 years, and sometimes in perpetuity.<sup>99</sup> One African American resident described the impact of these covenants this way: they created “invisible walls of steel. The whites surrounded us and made it impossible for us to go beyond these walls.”<sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Wendy Plotkin, “Restrictive Covenants,” in David Goldfield, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Urban History*, vol. 2 (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2007), 681; Flammig, 69; Laura Redford, 308.

<sup>99</sup> Plotkin, 679; Flammig, 69; Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor, eds., *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001; and Autry Museum), 25.

<sup>100</sup> Quintard Taylor, *In search of the racial frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: Norton, 1998), 235.

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business of the Association, and all licenses, franchise taxes or other taxes or assessments levied against said corporation.

CLAUSE XVI  
LIMITATION OF OWNERSHIP.

No persons, except persons of the Caucasian race, shall be allowed to use or occupy said property, or any part thereof, except in the capacity of domestic servants of the occupant thereof.

CLAUSE XVII.  
CONSTRUCTION OF CONDITIONS AND RESTRICTIONS .

1. If, for any reason, it is uncertain which are the front, side or rear lines of any

Text from a restrictive covenant for a property in Leimert Park. Covenants like this covered many properties in the City of Los Angeles.

Restrictive covenants became one of the few enforceable means of maintaining discriminatory housing policy in the wake of *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917), which outlawed racial zoning.<sup>101</sup> Two important court cases, brought before the courts in the face of African American resistance to covenants, upheld their use. In *Los Angeles Investment Co. v. Gary* (1919), the California Supreme Court ruled that while the conditions limiting the sale of property in race restrictive covenants were invalid, the restrictive occupancy clauses in such deeds were still enforceable.<sup>102</sup> This meant, according to historian Douglas Flammig, “restrictive covenants could not prevent Black people from buying a home, but they could prevent the Black owners from living in it.”<sup>103</sup> In *Corrigan v. Buckley* (1926), the U.S. Supreme Court, citing lack of jurisdiction, upheld a lower court ruling in favor of enforcing covenants.<sup>104</sup> These rulings coincided with the

1920s building boom in Los Angeles, which unleashed their widespread use across the region.

Since the use of restrictive covenants was most effective on a neighborhood scale when widely used, private developers became formidable enforcers of racial segregation.<sup>105</sup> They could attach race restrictive covenants to all properties in their developments and impose their own race restrictions. These restrictions were often openly advertised, as a way of reassuring White homebuyers that the racial future of the neighborhood would be secured. Leimert Park, later to become one of Los Angeles’ most well-known Black neighborhoods, was initially restricted to White homeowners only and emphasized this in its advertising. A restrictive covenant was put in place encompassing the entire Leimert Park subdivision, stating that “No persons, except persons of the Caucasian race, shall be allowed to use or occupy said property, or any part thereof, except in the capacity of

<sup>101</sup> In the case *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial zoning by cities was unconstitutional because it violated the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal rights protection. This created a clear distinction between publicly enacted measures (zoning) and privately established measures (race restrictive covenants).

<sup>102</sup> F.D.G. Ribble, “Legal Restraints on the Choice of a Dwelling,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review and American Law Register* 78, No. 7 (May 1930), 848.

<sup>103</sup> Flammig, 156.

<sup>104</sup> Flammig, 223; Plotkin, 680.

<sup>105</sup> Developers also used restrictive covenants to dictate features such as home size or minimum value so that “residents would reflect the desired class composition for the development.” For more, see Lara Redford, “The Promise and Principles of Real Estate Development in an American Metropolis: Los Angeles 1903-1923” Ph.D. diss, University of California Los Angeles, 2014.



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domestic servants of the occupant thereof.”<sup>106</sup> Similarly, the Janss Investment Company used racial covenants widely in its new development of Westwood.<sup>107</sup> In Eagle Rock, a 1920s advertisement read, “As you journey about Eagle Rock... you will observe that the residents...are all of the white race.”<sup>108</sup> As late as the 1950s, some of the largest developers of suburban tracts in Los Angeles simply refused to sell homes to African Americans, including Milton Brock Builders, Lakewood Village Builders, and Julian Weinstock Builders. This practice closed off nearly all neighborhoods springing up during the booming housing market of the 1920s to people of color.<sup>109</sup>

The broader real estate industry likewise played a pivotal role in reinforcing segregation by codifying and enforcing racist norms within the profession, at both the regional and national levels. The LARB “led regional efforts to organize the real estate industry, professionalize its membership, and institute racially restrictive covenants” in both established and new developments.<sup>110</sup> It endorsed the use of covenants and urged members not to “sell property to other than the Caucasian race in territories occupied by them.”<sup>111</sup> In 1924, the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) established a code of ethics that prohibited realtors from selling property to “members of any race or nationality” where they would threaten property values.<sup>112</sup> The

NAREB reiterated this rule in its 1943 publication *Fundamentals of Real Estate*: “The prospective buyer might be a bootlegger... a madam... a gangster..., a colored man of means who was giving his children a college education and thought they were entitled to live among whites... No matter what the motive or character of the would-be purchaser, if the deal would instigate a form of blight, then certainly the well-meaning broker must work against its consummation.”<sup>113</sup> If a real estate agent violated these rules, he could lose his license. The code of ethics would stay in effect until the late 1950s.<sup>114</sup> A statewide survey conducted by the all-White California Real Estate Association (CREA) revealed strong support of racial restrictions by realtors and described their own efforts to prevent people of color from moving into White neighborhoods. Survey takers deemed African Americans the greatest threat to White neighborhoods, compared to other racial groups.<sup>115</sup>

Despite the widespread use of race restrictions, they were only effective when they were utilized by all property owners in a particular area. They became more difficult to enforce if any owners in a neighborhood refused to agree to the same covenant. As a result, homeowner “protective associations” became yet another means of ensuring segregation in addition to covenants. These groups were sometimes instigated by developers, other times by White homeowners who banded together in their neighborhoods. Protective associations essentially brought group pressure upon White residents to abide by the practices of racial exclusion. Association members conducted covenant-writing campaigns, held meetings when the threat of “invasion” by people of color was seen as imminent, and

<sup>106</sup> “Clause XVI Limitation of Ownership,” in Leimert Park Deed, Los Angeles County Deed, 1927.

<sup>107</sup> Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 28.

<sup>108</sup> Kurashige, 22, 25; and see Redford, 308-312.

<sup>109</sup> Flamming, 69; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 107.

<sup>110</sup> Sanchez, “History of Segregation in Los Angeles,” 4.

<sup>111</sup> Flamming, 220-221.

<sup>112</sup> Code of ethics quoted in Hirsch, Arnold R. Hirsch, “With or Without Jim Crow: Black Residential Segregation in the United States,” in Arnold R. Hirsch and Raymond A. Mohl, eds., *Urban Policy in Twentieth Century America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 75.

<sup>113</sup> Quoted in Hirsch, 75.

<sup>114</sup> Sides, 106.

<sup>115</sup> Flamming, 219-221; Andrea Gibbons, *City of Segregation: One Hundred Years of Struggle for Housing in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso Books, 2018), 25-27.

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were often the party filing suit in cases where individual covenants were broken. In Los Angeles, homeowners' associations proliferated after 1910, and by 1920, "the use of block protective association restrictions as well as individual deed covenants heralded a more rigid and efficient era of residential segregation" in Los Angeles.<sup>116</sup> These efforts targeted Asian and Asian Americans, African Americans, and Mexican Americans. In 1923, for example, the Hollywood Protective Association formed to "Keep Hollywood White," especially targeting Japanese workers who sought homes close to their employers.<sup>117</sup> The developers of Leimert Park required new residents to join a homeowner association to maintain the protective restrictions put in place there.<sup>118</sup> The South Park Improvement Association in South Los Angeles, which had 2,600 members in 1920, warned in its *South Park Bulletin* of imminent "invasion" by Japanese and African American residents, stoking racial anxieties and ultimately setting off panic selling by White residents.<sup>119</sup>

A final mode of ensuring racial segregation was overt intimidation and violence. In Los Angeles from 1900 to the 1960s, there were numerous examples of White residents taking matters into their own hands to keep people of color from buying in their neighborhoods. One example occurred in Hollywood in 1907, when African American Susie Anderson moved her infirm mother to Hollywood, and neighbors responded by pelting the home with bottles, rocks, and dead animals. In 1912, when a Black couple moved into an affluent section of East Hollywood, 12 "prominent" residents threatened them with

<sup>116</sup> Lawrence B. de Graaf, "The City of Black Angels: Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890-1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 39 (1970), 337; Flammig, 69, 221; Arnold R. Hirsch, "With or Without Jim Crow: Black Residential Segregation in the United States," in Hirsch, 75.

<sup>117</sup> Kurashige, 22-23.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-33.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.



Neighborhood groups like the Hollywood Protective Association sought to keep people of color out of their neighborhoods. Photo circa 1920. (Photo courtesy of the National Japanese American Historical Society)



People gather in front of the home of W.H. Whitson to protest Whitson selling his home at 1863 E. 70th Street to an African American family. 1949. (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)

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warnings to “get out.” In the 1910s, as African Americans were moving southward down Central Avenue, one of the first Black residents to move to 18<sup>th</sup> St and Central Avenue had her house sacked by a White mob.<sup>120</sup> In 1947, the Los Angeles Urban League identified 26 techniques that White homeowners used to turn back African American home seekers, including paying off neighbors to not sell to Black home buyers, vandalism, cross burnings, bombings, and death threats. Groups like the Ku Klux Klan fostered this climate of intimidation -- from 1915 to 1944, the KKK counted about 18,000 members in the Los Angeles/Long Beach area.<sup>121</sup> These actions by White residents maintained racial barriers around White communities.

### Housing and Community Building in Los Angeles’ Communities of Color

Despite the odds against them, Los Angeles’ people of color built thriving communities and purchased homes in these segregated spaces of the city. Among African American families, for example, homeownership rates reached 36 percent by 1910, a rate that far surpassed other regions of the U.S.<sup>122</sup> That number remained steady 20 years later; in 1930, approximately 33 percent of Black Angelenos owned their homes compared with 15 percent in Detroit, 10 percent in Chicago, and about 6 percent in New York City.<sup>123</sup> For the Black community, homeownership was closely linked with the promise of upward mobility and “a foundation in

a society that systematically marginalized African Americans” – a trend that had begun in the rural South after the Civil War.<sup>124</sup> The availability of land and employment in Los Angeles during the housing boom made the city particularly attractive to Black Americans. The African American community also formed churches, newspapers, and social and civic organizations, which anchored the community’s identity and activism by the 1920s. While city leaders may have largely ignored them when it came to housing policy, Black Angelenos nonetheless asserted their voice in matters of housing justice in the early twentieth century. For example, the People’s Independent Church, one of the most influential African American churches in Los Angeles, mobilized numerous civil rights campaigns, including protests against housing discrimination.<sup>125</sup> Such efforts often received the support and coverage by the Black newspaper the *California Eagle*, under the editorship of Charlotta Bass.

Just as influential in civil rights work were women’s clubs and groups like the L.A. branch of the NAACP (formed in 1913), led by middle-class Black Angelenos. They engaged in fights against housing discrimination. In 1914, for example, the California Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (CWC) came to the defense of Mary Johnson, a Black woman who had purchased a home on an all-White block of 18<sup>th</sup> Street near Central Avenue. When Johnson was away, White neighbors vandalized her home, threw her belongings on the front lawn, boarded up the windows and doors, and painted this threat: “if you value your hide don’t let night catch you here.” Johnson went to Charlotta Bass, who mobilized 100 CWC members. The women surrounded the home, unarmed, guarded her possessions, and eventually convinced police to secure the home

<sup>120</sup> Lawrence B. De Graaf, “The City of Black Angels: Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890-1930,” *Pacific Historical Review* 39, No. 3 (August 1970), 336.

<sup>121</sup> Sanchez, “History of Segregation,” 8; Sides, 101-106; Gibbons, 30-31; Lonnie G. Bunch, “A Past Not Necessarily Prologue: the Afro-American in Los Angeles,” in Norman Klein and Martin Schiesl, eds., *20th Century Los Angeles: Power, Promotion and Social Conflict* (Claremont: Regina Books, 1990), 106.

<sup>122</sup> Flammig, 51.

<sup>123</sup> de Graaf, “City of Black Angels,” 351.

<sup>124</sup> Weise, *Places of Their Own*, 84.

<sup>125</sup> de Graaf and Taylor, “Introduction,” in *Seeking El Dorado*, 19; Flammig, 109-117.

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so Johnson could reenter.<sup>126</sup>

Members of the Latino community, also systematically disenfranchised, formed organizations and businesses which provided services to the community; these included commercial stores, hotels, pharmacies, and movie theaters, among others.<sup>127</sup> They also formed their own religious congregations, and in response to the segregation they faced, they “organized social and cultural clubs that frequently blended politics, a sense of Mexican nationalism, and cultural pride.”<sup>128</sup> These social clubs, political organizations, and mutual aid societies, or *mutualistas*, strengthened a sense of Latino ethnic identity, serving as a buffer against racial discrimination. *Mutualistas* offered a variety of services, including medical insurance, loans, and social services. They also sponsored political and social activities, including cultural celebrations. One important *mutualista* in the 1920s was the Alianza Hispano Americana, which fought discrimination in court and provided other legal services.<sup>129</sup>

Los Angeles’ diverse Asian communities also created their own organizations within their respective neighborhoods. For example, in Chinatown, a number of community organizations provided support to Chinese residents and immigrants who could not count on city officials for protection or political representation. These organizations, which included *huiguan* and *tongs*, were often (but not always) composed of members with geographical or family connections to each other. Initially, they served as banks, employment centers, and unofficial governments

by providing loans, offering job assistance, and policing illicit activity. They also provided medical services, educational programs, and mobilized to fight anti-Chinese legislation. By the early twentieth century, their role became more akin to benevolent associations, playing a more philanthropic role in the community and providing aid in a variety of ways depending on need.<sup>130</sup> Los Angeles’ Asian American and Asian communities organized their own religious organizations, churches, and commercial enterprises as well.

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<sup>126</sup> For more on Mary Johnson, see Flammig, 140-141.

Material also taken from GPA Consulting, “African American History of Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement*, February 2018.

<sup>127</sup> GPA Consulting and Nicolaidis, “Latino Los Angeles Historic Context Statement,” 32.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

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<sup>130</sup> HRG, “Chinese Americans in Los Angeles, 1850-1980,” 23-24.

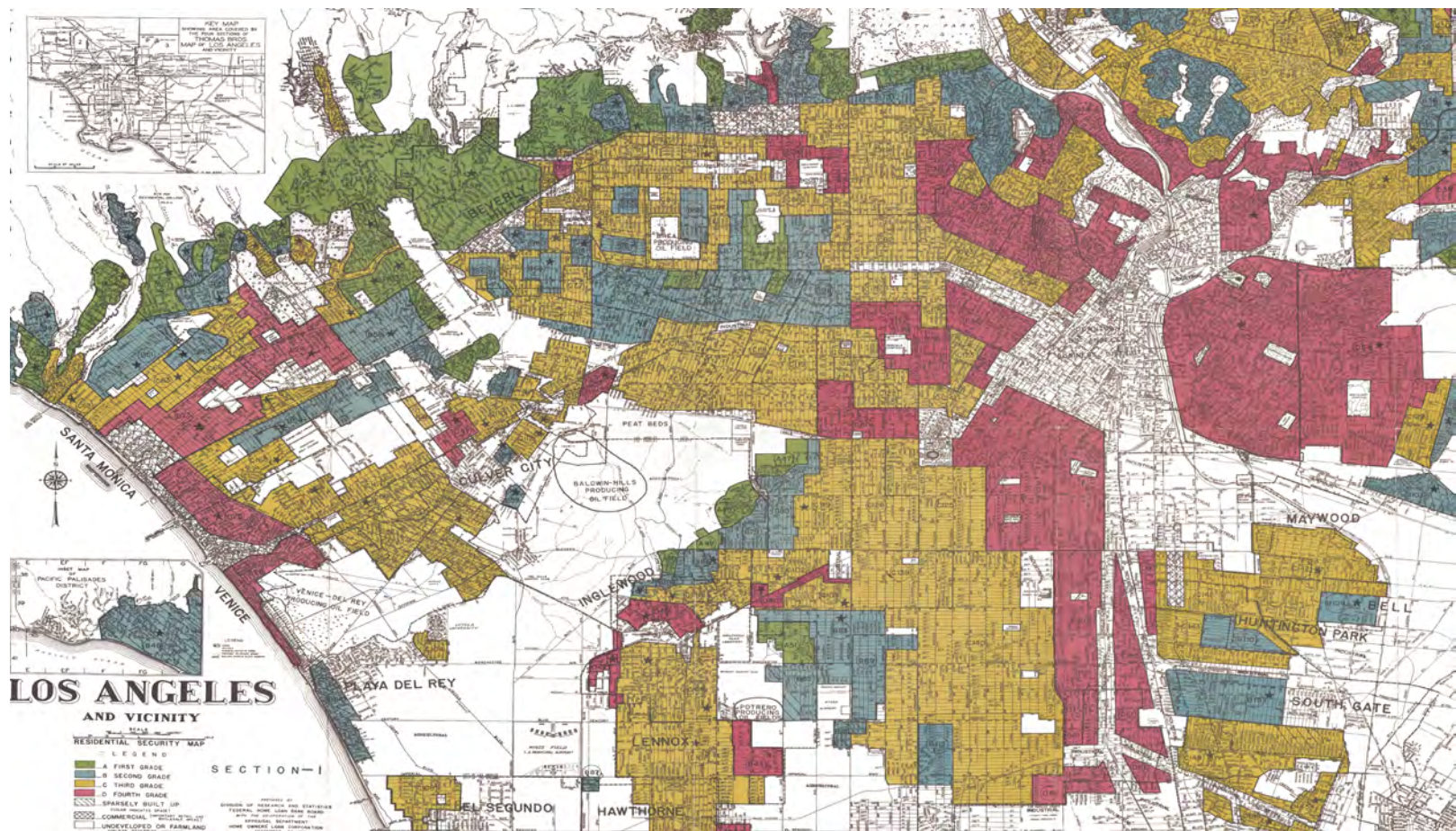
## Chapter 2. The Origins of Zoning and Segregation in Los Angeles, 1908-1932

### *The Furlong Tract*

The Furlong Tract, located off Central Avenue in Southeast Los Angeles, was an African American neighborhood located between E. 50<sup>th</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> Streets, Long Beach Avenue, and Alameda Street. It was developed beginning in 1905 by farmer James Furlong, who sold the lots to African Americans. It was one of the few places Blacks in Los Angeles could purchase land. The neighborhood eventually had around 200 homes, as well as a school (the 51<sup>st</sup> Street School, now Holmes Avenue Elementary), a business district, and churches. The 51<sup>st</sup> Street School was one of the only schools in the city that was predominately African American. Despite this, its teachers and principals were exclusively White. In 1911, Bessie Burke joined the school and became the first Black teacher in the Los Angeles public school system. Burke later became principal of the school, the first African American to hold the position in Los Angeles public schools. By the 1920s, the Furlong Tract had been surrounded by the larger Black and multi-ethnic neighborhood near Central Avenue. The land was acquired via eminent domain, and the existing neighborhood was demolished and replaced by the Pueblo del Rio public housing complex in 1940. (Source: GPA Consulting, "African American History of Los Angeles," 85)

Group of children from the 51st Street school in the Furlong Tract, circa 1900. (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)





## Chapter 3. The New Deal and Housing Policy, 1933-1964

*Opposite: Home Owners Loan Corporation Map of the City of Los Angeles (Courtesy of Redlining in New Deal America)*

## Chapter 3. The New Deal and Housing Policy, 1933-1964

The impacts of the Great Depression on America's population were apparent by the early 1930s, as economic collapse devastated homeowners and the residential construction industry. Housing construction in the United States fell 90 percent between 1925, the record high, and 1933.<sup>131</sup> Fourteen million Americans were unemployed and nearly 275,000 families lost their homes to mortgage foreclosure in 1933 alone.<sup>132</sup> The nation's poor were relegated to abject housing conditions as existing housing stock became more and more decrepit and migrants from agricultural regions and small towns crowded into cities in search of employment and public relief. Los Angeles reported a dramatic influx of people looking for work, termed "the indigent influx" at the time.<sup>133</sup> Temporary encampments cropped up in cities around the country as housing scarcity became more widespread. State and city officials sought ways to eliminate these camps, which fell under a variety of names including "shantytowns," "Hooverilles," or "Hoover Towns." Among the solutions initiated in the early 1930s was the creation of state and federally-funded work camps, which provided housing and work for the unemployed. However, city and county officials were not united around how best to address the population experiencing homelessness. As the number of these camps grew, the Los Angeles City Council balked at establishing such camps in residential neighborhoods and sought an ordinance limiting their location to industrial districts.<sup>134</sup> A number of California counties, including Los Angeles,

began cracking down on the seasonal influx of these so-called "vagrants," who were arrested or sent to work camps. The police department also arrested those who traveled to Los Angeles without paying railroad fare, one of the primary ways unemployed men traveled to the city. In response to these ongoing issues, a number of state and federal departments sought to address the housing problem. The gradual focus of government attention on alleviating the housing tragedy resulted in a number of federal housing initiatives and funding programs. As will be discussed in this section, this was the first time the federal government intervened in the private housing market in such a concerted manner, and as it did so, it put into place policies that reinforced racial segregation and inequality in housing.<sup>135</sup>

### The HOLC and FHA: Their Impacts on Housing in Los Angeles

The Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) and Federal Housing Administration (FHA) were products of President Roosevelt's "New Deal" policies. They were intended to provide emergency relief for home indebtedness and make homeownership financing more attainable to Americans who the government considered to be low financial risks. Relying on the expertise of realtors, the HOLC developed a system of rating neighborhoods as security risks for home loans that loaded racial assumptions into their formulas. This system influenced the more long-lived FHA, and ultimately put into place a

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<sup>131</sup> Peter G. Rowe, *Modernity and Housing* (Boston: The MIT Press, 1993), 103.

<sup>132</sup> Gertrude S. Fish, "Housing Policy during the Great Depression," in *The Story of Housing* (New York: Macmillan Publishers, 1979), 196.

<sup>133</sup> James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 80.

<sup>134</sup> "City Curbs Barracks," *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 1934, A1.

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<sup>135</sup> Kirsten Moore Sheeley et. al., "The Making of a Crisis: A History of Homelessness in Los Angeles," UCLA Luskin Center for History and Policy, January 2021.



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AREA DESCRIPTION			
Security Map of <u>Los Angeles County</u>			
1. POPULATION:	a. Increasing <u>Slowly</u>	Decreasing	Static
	Professional & business men, skilled artisans & white collar workers.		
b. Class and Occupation:	Income <u>\$1500-\$3000</u>		
c. Foreign Families <u>40%</u>	Nationalities <u>Polish, Russian &amp; Armenian Jews</u>		d. Negro <u>0%</u>
e. Shifting or Infiltration:	<u>Increase of foregoing foreign element evident.</u>		
2. BUILDINGS:	<b>PREDOMINATING</b>	<u>90%</u>	<b>OTHER TYPE</b>
a. Type and Size	<u>5 rooms</u>		<u>Multi-family dwellings</u>
b. Construction	<u>Frame &amp; stucco</u>		<u>Frame &amp; stucco</u>
c. Average Age	<u>13 years</u>		<u>8 years</u>
d. Repair	<u>Fair to good</u>		<u>Fair to good</u>
e. Occupancy	<u>98%</u>		
f. Owner-occupied	<u>40%</u>		
g. 1935 Price Bracket	<u>\$2750-3500</u>	<u>% change</u>	<u>\$</u> <u>% change</u>
h. 1937 Price Bracket	<u>\$3000-3750</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>\$</u> <u>%</u>
i. 1939 Price Bracket	<u>\$3000-3750</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>\$</u> <u>%</u>
j. Sales Demand	<u>Fair</u>		
k. Predicted Price Trend (next 6-12 months)	<u>Downward trend</u>		
l. 1935 Rent Bracket	<u>\$22.50-30.00</u>	<u>% change</u>	<u>\$</u> <u>% change</u>
m. 1937 Rent Bracket	<u>\$27.50-35.00</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>\$</u> <u>%</u>
n. 1939 Rent Bracket	<u>\$27.50-35.00</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>\$</u> <u>%</u>
o. Rental Demand	<u>Fair</u>		
p. Predicted Rent Trend (next 6-12 months)	<u>Downward trend</u>		
3. NEW CONSTRUCTION (past yr.) No. <u>70</u>	Type & Price <u>5 rooms \$3750-\$4500</u>	How Selling	<u>Readily</u>
4. OVERHANG OF HOME PROPERTIES:	a. HOLC. <u>4</u>	b. Institutions.	<u>Few</u>
5. SALE OF HOME PROPERTIES (3 yr.)	a. HOLC. <u>35</u>	b. Institutions.	<u>Few</u>
6. MORTGAGE FUNDS: <u>Ample (FHA)</u>	7. TOTAL TAX RATE PER \$1000 (1937-) <u>\$52.70</u>		<u>1938</u>
8. DESCRIPTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF AREA:			
<p>Terrain: Level to rolling, no construction hazards. Land improved 70%. Zoning varied from single to multi-family residential. Conveniences all available in most parts of area. Development of this area began over 25 years ago as a moderate priced area and has always been a popular residential district with the medial income class. Some 5 years ago an infiltration of Jewish families began and has been progressively increasing since and many foreign born Jewish people have become residents of the district and have proven a subversive influence. Construction and maintenance are of standard quality and without evident design or direction, type and style of improvements have been pleasingly uniform throughout most of the area, and there is a general indication of "pride of ownership". Owing to the increase in multiple family improvements during the past several years in some parts of the area is thought that within the next several years a re-survey will result in a breakdown of the district into at least five or more areas. This district constitutes a most interesting study in trend of residential desirability and in setting up this "far flung" area it is realized that determination is being somewhat "begged". The area is in a "state of flux" and is assigned a provisional rating of "low yellow".</p>			

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AREA DESCRIPTION			
Security Map of Los Angeles County			
1. POPULATION:	a. Increasing <u>Rapidly</u>	Decreasing <u>Static</u>	
	Professional men, minor executives, small business men, white collar workers, etc. Income \$1800-5000		
	b. Class and Occupation		
	c. Foreign Families <u>0</u> %	Nationalities <u>-</u>	d. Negro <u>0</u> %
	e. Shifting or Infiltration <u>None apparent or likely</u>		
2. BUILDINGS:	<b>PREDOMINATING</b> <u>75</u> %	<b>OTHER TYPE</b>	<u>25</u> %
a. Type and Size	<u>6-8 rooms</u>	<u>5 rooms</u>	<u>15%</u>
b. Construction	<u>Frame &amp; stucco</u>	<u>Larger dwellings</u>	<u>5%</u>
c. Average Age	<u>5 years</u>		
d. Repair	<u>Good</u>		
e. Occupancy	<u>98%</u>		
f. Owner-occupied	<u>80%</u>		
g. 1935 Price Bracket	<u>\$ 1500-8000</u> % change	<u>\$</u>	<u>% change</u>
h. 1937 Price Bracket	<u>\$ 5000-9000</u> %	<u>\$</u>	<u>%</u>
i. 1939 Price Bracket	<u>\$ 5000-9000</u> %	<u>\$</u>	<u>%</u>
j. Sales Demand	<u>Good</u>		
k. Predicted Price Trend (next 6-12 months)	<u>Static</u>		
l. 1935 Rent Bracket	<u>\$ 15 - 80</u> % change	<u>\$</u>	<u>% change</u>
m. 1937 Rent Bracket	<u>\$ 50 - 90</u> %	<u>\$</u>	<u>%</u>
n. 1939 Rent Bracket	<u>\$ 50 - 90</u> %	<u>\$</u>	<u>%</u>
o. Rental Demand	<u>Good</u>		
p. Predicted Rent Trend (next 6-12 months)	<u>Static</u>		
3. NEW CONSTRUCTION (past yr.) No. <u>100</u> Type & Price <u>5 to 8 rooms \$5500-9000</u> How Selling <u>Readily</u>			
4. OVERHANG OF HOME PROPERTIES: a. HOLC <u>7</u> b. Institutions <u>Few</u>			
5. SALE OF HOME PROPERTIES (.3 yr.) a. HOLC <u>8</u> b. Institutions <u>Few</u>			
6. MORTGAGE FUNDS: <u>Ample</u> 7. TOTAL TAX RATE PER \$1000 (1937-) <u>\$ 52.80</u> 1938			
8. DESCRIPTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF AREA:			
<p>Terrain: This area occupied a series of hills surrounding Silver Lake. Terrain is exceptionally rugged with many precipitous building sites which present many construction problems and hazards. Land improved 50% of a possible 80%. Deed restricted to single-family dwellings with provision for multiple-family structures in stipulated parts. Zoning conforms to deed restrictions. Conventomes are all readily available. The major portion of this area was subdivided some 14 years ago and district has experienced a steady growth with activity pronounced since the advent of the FHA financing. Construction and maintenance are of good quality. Population consists largely of families in moderate circumstances. The district directly west of and overlooking Silver Lake is a particularly sightly location and has been the scene of great activity during the past several years. The topography of the area protects it from the subversive elements of adjacent lower grade areas. The immediate future of the district appears to be favorable but past development has been somewhat ragged indicating a lack of proper direction and well planned promotion. While certain scattered parts might be accorded a higher rating the area, as a whole, does not warrant better than a "medial blue" grade.</p>			

The racist attitudes inherent in HOLC classifications are evident in the grading and discussion of the neighborhoods of West Adams (previous page) and Silver Lake (above). Images taken from "Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America."

### Chapter 3. The New Deal and Housing Policy, 1933-1964

market.<sup>136</sup>

The HOLC's appraisal system assigned a rating to every neighborhood across the U.S., including Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, the HOLC survey was completed in 1939. The ratings were: A-green, B-blue, C-yellow, or D-red. This system used racial considerations, among others, to assess whether neighborhoods were deemed financial security risks. Neighborhoods that were White, middle class, low density, zoned residential, and distant from industry, received the highest ratings. Neighborhoods deemed unworthy were non-White, denser, closer to industry or other "odious" threats, or demographically and socioeconomically unstable. Often, race was the most determining factor in a neighborhood's grade. Middle- and upper-income neighborhoods such as part of the West Adams district, occupied by African Americans, were assigned a D-red rating, solely based on race.<sup>137</sup> The HOLC sheet noted "Forty years ago this was a good medium priced residential district but since deed restrictions expired some 10 years ago, it has rapidly become infiltrated with Negroes and Japanese. [...] The area is highly heterogeneous both as to the population and improvements. It is considered the best Negro residential district in the city. [...] Owing to stability of values and evident pride of ownership, the area is accorded

a 'high red' grade."<sup>138</sup> A multiracial neighborhood just southwest of Silver Lake represented a typical D-red rating, resulting from its "adverse racial influences," as African Americans, Japanese, Russians, and Latinos moved in when deed restrictions began expiring. The presence of African Americans in a neighborhood had a more negative impact on HOLC ratings than other ethnic groups or communities of color. An analysis of the Los Angeles HOLC appraisal worksheets indicated that the presence of Latinos, Japanese, Jews, and other "subversive" racial groups (to use the HOLC's terminology) did not necessarily yield a D-red rating; several of their neighborhoods got C-yellow ratings. Yet, if African Americans were present, their neighborhood invariably got a D-red rating.<sup>139</sup> By blacklisting (or "red-lining," in real estate parlance) non-White or integrated neighborhoods, HOLC's rating system entrenched the idea that these areas, African American neighborhoods in particular, were financially

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<sup>136</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, "Race, Ethnicity, and Real Estate Appraisal: The Home Owners' Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration," *Journal of Urban History* 6 (August 1980), 419-452; Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, ch. 11. Ryan Reft, "Segregation in the City of Angels: A 1939 Map of Housing Inequality in L.A.," for Lost LA, KCET, November 14, 2017, <https://www.kcet.org/shows/lost-la/segregation-in-the-city-of-angels-a-1939-map-of-housing-inequality-in-la>.

<sup>137</sup> Area D-50, City Survey File for Los Angeles, Record Group 195, Records of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

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<sup>138</sup> Area D-50, City Survey File for Los Angeles, Record Group 195, Records of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>139</sup> A, B, C, D worksheets, City Survey File for Los Angeles, Record Group 195, Records of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Our analysis of the Los Angeles HOLC appraisals found that no Blacks were present in A-green and B-blue rated areas; they were present in just 3 out of 166 C-yellow rated neighborhoods, where they comprised just one percent of the population. By contrast, 45 of the C-yellow areas contained Mexicans, Japanese, Jews, and other non-White groups. Of 71 D-red areas in Los Angeles, 69 had people of color in them, 35 included African Americans.

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### *Los Angeles Housing Units Per Decade*

Decade	Total Housing Units	Single-Family (detached)	Multi-Family	Population
1940	529,251	281,599	245,218	1,504,277
1950	698,039	281,599	319,004	1,970,358
1960	936,265	499,983	376,402	2,479,015
1970	1,077,309	530,466	887,319	2,816,061
1980	1,189,475	520,038	662,132	2,966,850
1990	1,299,963	512,197	686,938	3,485,398
2000	1,337,706	524,787	716,023	3,694,834
2010	1,413,995	555,379	843,533	3,792,621
2020	1,513,791	553,204	843,340	3,898,747

Source: U.S. Federal Census (2020 numbers come from California Department of Finance E-5 City/County Population and Housing Estimates). The numbers above are total existing housing stock.

untrustworthy and doomed to deteriorate.<sup>140</sup>

The discriminatory practices inherent in the HOLC's appraisal system were also evident in the policies of the FHA, which became the most important program for homeownership in the nation. The FHA's mortgage insurance program guaranteed loans granted by private lenders.

<sup>140</sup> Nightingale, *Segregation is Everywhere*, chapters 11 and 12; Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*; Hirsch, "With or Without Jim Crow"; Nicolaidis and Wiese, eds., *Suburb Reader*, chapter 8. Prevailing scholarship has emphasized the degree to which the HOLC redlining maps influenced postwar FHA policy. However, emerging research suggests that the FHA independently implemented its own redlining policies in the 1930s, using data gathered from the federal census. These would reinforce disinvestment in communities of color in the postwar period. For more, see Price V. Fishback et. al, "New Evidence On Redlining by Federal Housing Programs in the 1930s," NBER Working Paper Series, National Bureau of Economic Research, September 2021.

These included low-interest loans to homeowners and construction loans to builders. As part of the stipulations of a construction loan, the FHA established construction guidelines that regulated lot size, building setback, materials, and other features. These standards by their very nature favored new single-family suburban development and disqualified most existing urban residential areas from loan eligibility.<sup>141</sup> They were intended to improve construction standards to reduce mortgage risk and provide minimum requirements when local codes were

<sup>141</sup> Becky Nicolaidis and Andrew Wiese, "Suburbanization in the United States after 1945," April 26, 2017, accessed January 10, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.64>.

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insufficient or not enforced.<sup>142</sup> Early publications focused primarily on neighborhood planning and design, with broad guidance for construction, while subsequent editions provided more detail on materials and techniques. Other recommendations were later disseminated through the *Community Builders' Handbook* (1947), which included best practices for real estate developers. The FHA also established a division that focused on “the enforcement of ‘uniformity to city plan’ and zoning for properties receiving insured mortgages.”<sup>143</sup> The division saw to it that properties requesting loans met the standards; part of this evaluation was an examination of local zoning codes and how effective they were. If zoning did not meet FHA standards, the FHA might not approve loans. A significant factor in whether local zoning code met FHA standards was the degree to which it zoned for homogenous areas of single-family homes and protected those areas from “incompatible” land uses. The surest way to obtain financing from the FHA, therefore, became single-family zoning.

Los Angeles' cumulative zoning, which allowed for the mixing of land uses in less restrictive categories, became problematic in the face of the FHA standards. Properties in these mixed-use areas were refused loans; this included loans for residential construction in commercially zoned areas, as well as residential construction in proximity to commercially or industrially zoned areas. Though FHA financing was available for multi-family residences, it was rarely given.<sup>144</sup> The Los Angeles Planning Commission heralded

<sup>142</sup> National Institute of Building Sciences, “Part 1: Minimum Property Standards for One- and Two- Family Dwellings,” prepared for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research, March 2003, 2-3.

<sup>143</sup> Whittemore, “How the Federal Government Zoned America,” 625.

<sup>144</sup> Whittemore, “How the Federal Government Zoned America,” 630.

the FHA standards as “splendid,” since they gave planners and their allies on the LARB the ability to rezone the city as they wanted.<sup>145</sup> As early as the 1930s, in response to these policies, the Commission began focusing on decentralized neighborhoods and began rezoning property for lower density uses. These new standards facilitated some of the first citywide downzoning; area wide rezoning typically consisted of downzoning higher density to lower-density residential or commercial. This trend continued for several decades.<sup>146</sup>

In 1934, the City passed the Comprehensive Yard Ordinance, which introduced mandatory setbacks from lot lines in residential zones and required side yards, thereby preventing the construction of the rowhouses common in eastern cities.<sup>147</sup> FHA policy and the City's response to it ultimately “set a future course for a more low-density build-out of the city,” and rezoning of large areas typically consisted of downzoning, reducing the number of dwelling units allowed on properties throughout Los Angeles.<sup>148</sup> The FHA standards soon led to the creation of large, exclusively single-family only areas in Los Angeles. Often the only areas with space for these developments was on the previously undeveloped outskirts of the city – land that ultimately became home to vast middle-income White suburban neighborhoods in the post-World War II period.<sup>149</sup>

Two neighborhoods that illustrate the vastly different development encouraged by the FHA standards are Leimert Park and Westchester.

<sup>145</sup> City of Los Angeles, Department of City *Planning Annual Report 1934–1935* (Los Angeles City Archives), 19 qtd. in Whittemore, “How the Federal Government Zoned America,” 628.

<sup>146</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 122, 140.

<sup>147</sup> Whittemore, “How the Federal Government Zoned America,” 629-630.

<sup>148</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 123, 140.

<sup>149</sup> Whittemore, “How the Federal Government Zoned America,” 630.

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Aerial photos of Leimert Park, circa 1938, and Westchester, 1949. The photos show the differences in neighborhood layout and development before and after the implementation of FHA guidelines. (Photos courtesy of USC Digital Library)

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Leimert Park was laid out in 1927 by developer Walter Leimert as a residential and business community. Containing both single-family and multi-family housing, it was touted for its ideal location and amenities, which included a school, drive-in market, theater, and commercial center. When it opened, Leimert Park was praised as an ideal development that used the ideas of modern community planning to great effect.<sup>150</sup> Westchester, developed between 1941 and 1944, typified the application of the FHA's standards and the resulting single-family neighborhoods of the post-World War II period. It contains vast areas of single-family homes, with commercial areas strictly contained along major thoroughfares, and no multi-family housing. When it opened, Westchester was lauded as "the largest and most spectacular feat of city building ever witnessed in Southern California."<sup>151</sup> As a result of the FHA standards, development moved away from mixed use and mixed density neighborhoods like Leimert Park and towards homogenous tracts of single-family housing like Westchester.

The FHA mortgage insurance program was instrumental in spurring the postwar suburban boom and made homeownership possible for millions of middle-income White Americans after World War II. People of color, however, were largely cut off from these programs. Until 1948, the FHA supported the use of restrictive covenants and was reluctant to guarantee home construction loans in areas without them. The FHA Underwriting Manual noted, "If a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes."<sup>152</sup> The Manual

<sup>150</sup> Hise, 19; Yosuke Kitazawa, "Walter H. Leimert and the Selling of a Perfect Planned Community," KCET, accessed October 4, 2022, <https://www.kcet.org/shows/departures/walter-h-leimert-and-the-selling-of-a-perfect-planned-community>.

<sup>151</sup> Whittemore, "The Regulated City," 140.

<sup>152</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 208.

emphasized that restrictive covenants "provide[d] the surest protection against undesirable encroachment and inharmonious use."<sup>153</sup>

Among the recommended restrictions were the "prohibition of the occupancy of properties except by the race of which they are intended."<sup>154</sup> Entire subdivisions in the postwar period were financed by the FHA on the condition that they be exclusively White.<sup>155</sup> Out of 125,000 FHA housing units built from 1950-1954 in Los Angeles County, only 3,000 (2.4 percent) were open to people of color.<sup>156</sup> Nor would it guarantee loans for home renovations in predominantly African American areas such as South Los Angeles.<sup>157</sup> The HOLC appraisal system of "redlining" was particularly significant for influencing the lending practices of private banks, which were reluctant to lend in redlined areas.<sup>158</sup> Following the implementation of the FHA's standards, both public and private investment in older areas of the city decreased, ultimately contributing to the decline of these areas. In this way, the FHA's standards contributed to the very conditions it deemed unworthy of investment.<sup>159</sup> Historian Ryan Reft summarized the impacts of redlining in Los Angeles:

"Redlined communities struggled to receive federally backed home loans, making property ownership much more difficult for residents. Moreover, it made getting loans for home improvements – maintenance, upkeep and renovation – though not impossible, very unlikely. Neighborhoods fell into a vicious circle of decline:

<sup>153</sup> Federal Housing Administration, *Underwriting Manual: Underwriting and Valuation Procedure under Title II of the National Housing Act*, Washington, D.C., rev. 1938, 980 (1).

<sup>154</sup> FHA, *Underwriting Manual*, 980 (3).

<sup>155</sup> Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How the Federal Government Segregated America* (Liveright Publishing Corp: New York, 2017), 70.

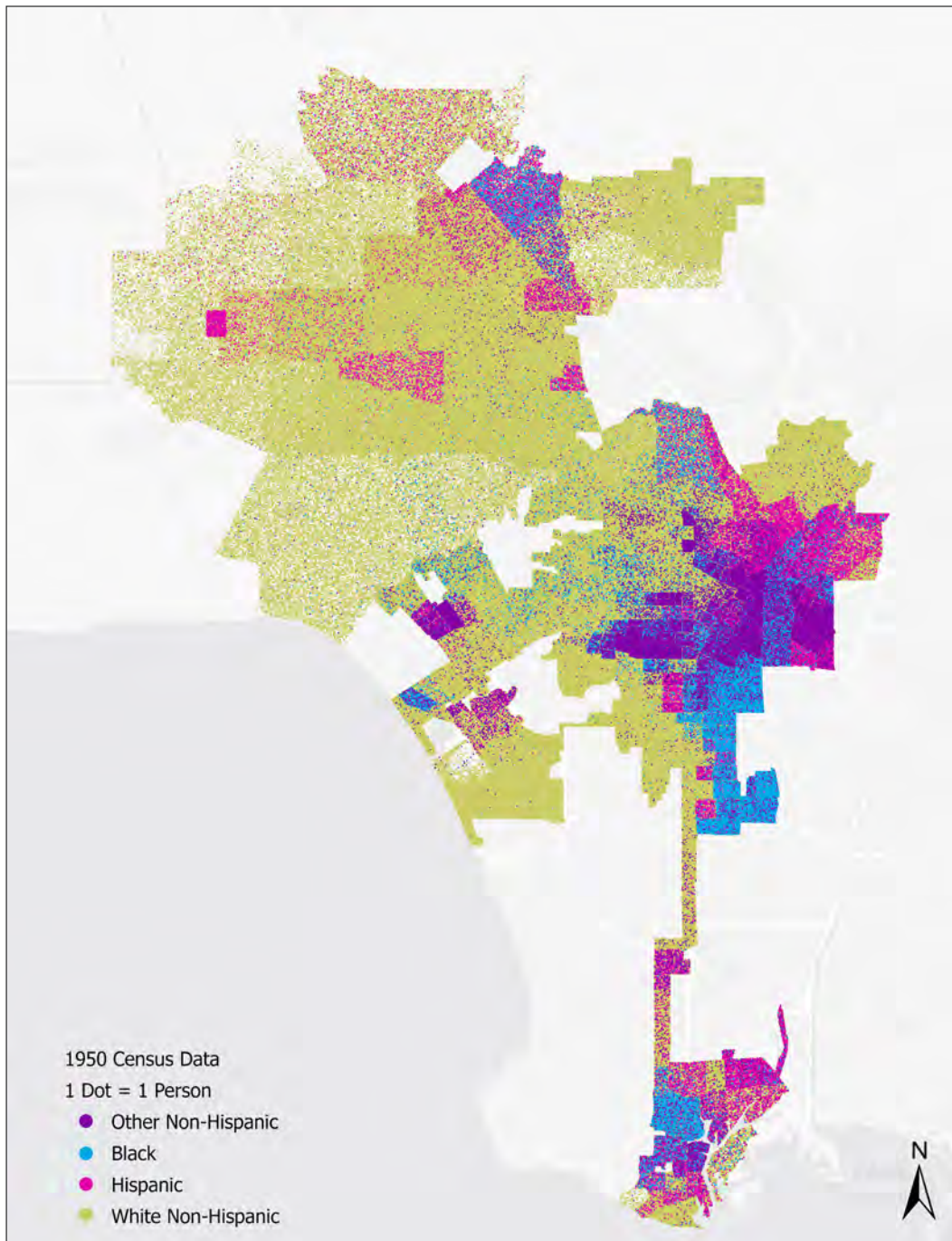
<sup>156</sup> Sides, 108.

<sup>157</sup> Flamming, 352-353; Sides, 107-108; Nicolaidis, *My Blue Heaven*, 179.

<sup>158</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 213-217.

<sup>159</sup> Whittemore, "The Regulated City," 139-140.

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Demographics map of the City of Los Angeles in 1950, showing how population concentrations would take shape after World War II as a result of policies and practices laid out in the first half of the century. The category Other Non-Hispanic includes Asian and Asian American populations. (Map created by Jennifer Mapes, categories are taken from the census)



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the inability to access capital led to disrepair and the physical decline of a community's housing stock, which in turn reinforced the redline designation. That redlining became equated with race and class led to the naturalization of segregation... Redlined communities also sat closer to industrial areas, vice districts, and environmentally compromised settings, exposing residents to health risks and crime."<sup>160</sup>

These deeply inequitable and discriminatory policies, in tandem with on-going real estate practices and intimidation tactics, would reinforce segregation and inequality in Los Angeles as it grew rapidly in the postwar period. FHA underwriting thus subsidized the massive demographic transition out of central neighborhoods in Los Angeles to new suburbs on the outskirts, which remained White through the 1960s. Developers closed these neighborhoods off to buyers and renters of color, while opening them to a broader array of White ethnic groups, including members of the Jewish community. With this expansion of whiteness, Jewish Americans once relatively restricted to property ownership and residence in Boyle Heights and Hollywood (and areas of Fairfax/Wilshire where covenants were not strongly enforced against Jews) began moving to neighborhoods like the San Fernando Valley and Westwood. Historian Eric Avila has called this "the Age of White Flight."<sup>161</sup> Across Los Angeles County in the 1950s and 1960s, the majority of suburban municipalities were over 95 percent White; similar proportions prevailed in the suburban tracts being developed in the San Fernando Valley.<sup>162</sup> The HOLC and FHA programs thus created a framework that would shape growth in Los Angeles in the decades to come (see discussion

in "Development and Change in Wartime and Postwar Los Angeles" below).

### Public Housing in Los Angeles

The FHA's subsidized mortgage program represented an unprecedented federal intervention into the housing market and made homeownership possible for millions of middle-class White Americans. The federal public housing program was also conceived in response to the economic disaster of the Great Depression. In 1937, the passage of the United States Housing Act (Wagner-Steagall Act) created the United States Housing Authority (USHA). One of the objectives of the law was to eliminate unsafe housing conditions, eradicate "slums," and provide sanitary housing for low-income Americans through the formation and actions of local housing authorities. The USHA, however, never operated on the scale of the FHA mortgage insurance program. Between 1937 and 1940, the USHA constructed 118,045 housing units valued at \$500 million.<sup>163</sup> In 1937 alone, the FHA insured 104,799 single-family home mortgages with the same monetary value.<sup>164</sup> This stark contrast was due, in part, to local municipalities' discretion over whether to implement a public housing program at all. Some declined to do so, in order to keep people of color away.

The City and County of Los Angeles Housing Authorities were established in 1938. Under the 1937 Housing Act, for every affordable unit built, one unit of what was deemed "slum housing" had to be demolished. Housing activists appealed for improved housing conditions using economics as evidence: "Slums cost money. They are the most expensive form of housing known, and it is the

<sup>160</sup> Ryan Reft, "Segregation in the City of Angels."

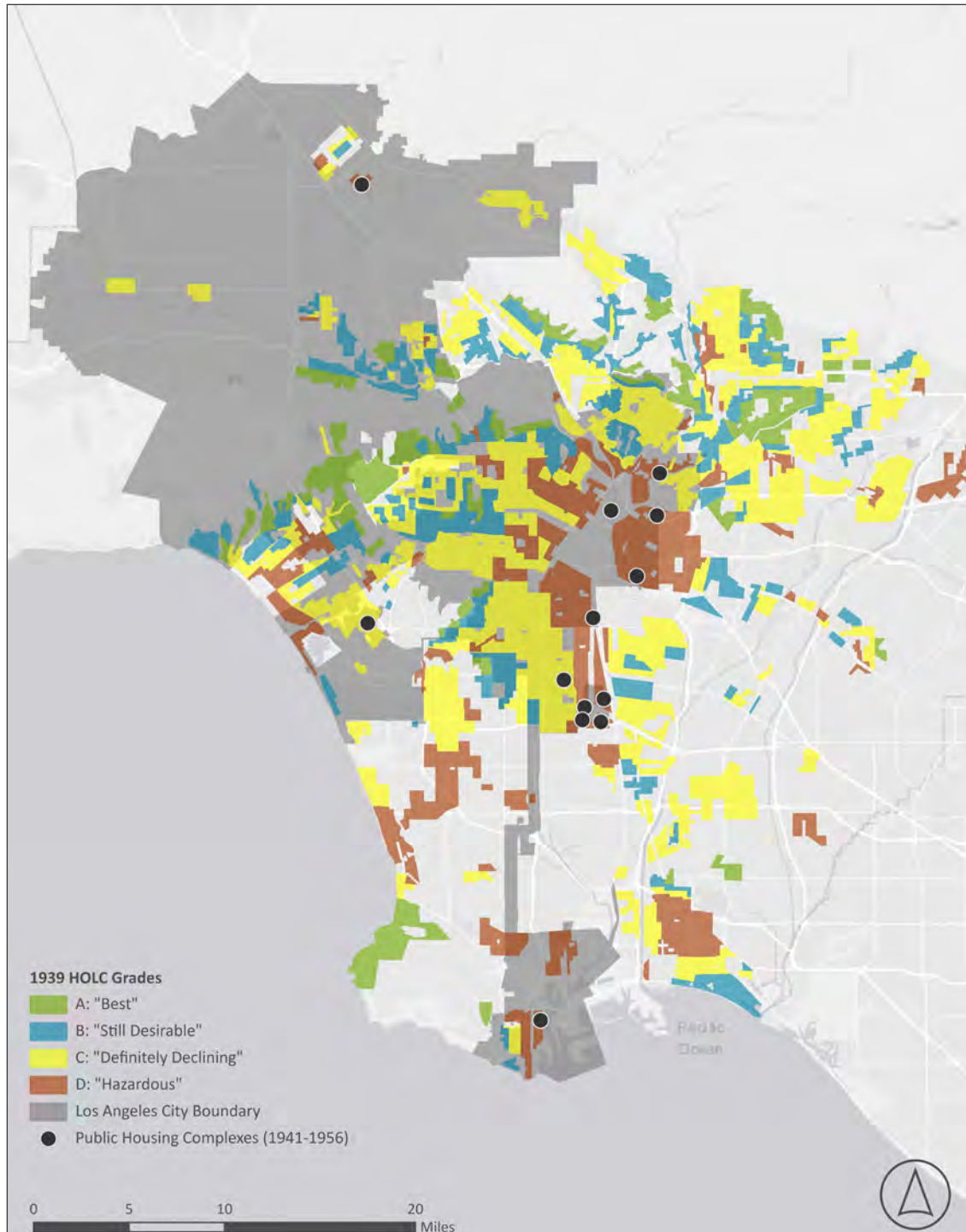
<sup>161</sup> Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>162</sup> Nicolaidis, *The New Suburbia*, Chapter 2.

<sup>163</sup> United States Housing Authority, "Questions and Answers: The Program of the U.S. Housing Authority — its Records to Date," 1940, 19.

<sup>164</sup> Stewart McDonald, "Sixth Annual Report of the Federal Housing Administration," (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1940), 2.

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Map of Los Angeles public housing projects and their location. As can be seen above, they were not distributed evenly across the city (Map by ARG)

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community that pays for them... However great the cost of wiping out slums, it is not so great as the cost of maintaining them.”<sup>165</sup>

Public housing design drew upon English Garden City planning principles and ideas of urban planner Clarence Stein. The careful grouping of low-rise buildings was intended to create common open space to be enjoyed by all - an antidote to life in industrialized late nineteenth century cities. Believing Garden City planning would be an appropriate model for “slum clearance” replacement projects in the form of public housing, the County of Los Angeles Housing Authority (CLAHA) brought Clarence Stein to Los Angeles County to design its first two public housing complexes: Harbor Hills in Rancho Dominguez and Carmelitos in Long Beach (both 1939). Construction of public housing in Los Angeles continued at a rapid pace. In 1941 and 1942 alone, 16 such complexes were constructed by the City and County Housing Authorities of Los Angeles, creating approximately 9,000 units of housing.<sup>166</sup> The Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA), however, did not distribute these new housing complexes evenly throughout Los Angeles. Of the nine earliest public housing facilities in Los Angeles, five were constructed in the mixed-race, working-class neighborhoods of Boyle Heights and Lincoln Heights. In this area, nicknamed “The Flats,” public officials viewed the existing housing as crowded, unhygienic “slums.”<sup>167</sup> In 1941 and 1942, HACLA evicted area residents and built Ramona Gardens, William Mead Homes, and Aliso Village. According to historian George Sánchez, these complexes did not save spots for all former residents, and

<sup>165</sup> Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000), 106.

<sup>166</sup> Howard Holtzendorff, “Homes for Heroes,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1942.

<sup>167</sup> George Sánchez, *Boyle Heights: How a Los Angeles Neighborhood Became the Future of American Democracy* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 2021), 73.



Aerial photograph of Ramona Gardens in Boyle Heights, undated photo. The complex can be seen at the center. (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)



Jordan Downs public housing complex, 1957. (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)

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Rodger Young Village in Griffith Park, 1950. (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)

U.S. citizens and defense workers were given priority.<sup>168</sup>

The FHA standards which governed the construction of public housing similarly reinforced the existing geography of race. These standards specified that the ethnic and racial makeup of the communities in which they were constructed inform the demographics of the new community. Rather than the creation of integrated housing, however, the outcome was the segregation of communities of color. In step with FHA and USHA standards, CLAHA complexes were segregated by race, and the earliest examples (Carmelitos and Harbor Hills) were for White residents only.<sup>169</sup>

Communities of color were proponents of public housing from the beginning of the program. They actively advocated for the construction of complexes since it represented municipal

<sup>168</sup> Sánchez, 84-87.

<sup>169</sup> Architectural Resources Group, "Garden Apartments of Los Angeles Historic Context Statement," prepared for the Los Angeles Conservancy, October 2012, 42.

investment in their neighborhoods.<sup>170</sup> In response to lobbying by Black Angelenos, HACL A appointed Mrs. Jessie L. Terry, an African American woman, as Commissioner of the Authority in 1939. In addition, then-Mayor Fletcher Bowron formed an Advisory Committee on Tenant Selection for HACL A projects, appointing a large and diverse team which included African American representatives from the NAACP and the Urban League. Other appointments included Ramon Welch of the Spanish American Congress, and members of other labor and Jewish organizations.<sup>171</sup> The Advisory Committee on Tenant Selection met with City authorities in 1940, bending the USHA guidelines to advocate that the city create integrated housing projects. For the first city housing project, Ramona Gardens, it was determined in December 1940 that the existing population would be used as a starting point to mirror the racial composition of families moving into the new development, and racial quotas were used to ensure integration. Instead of using USHA guidelines to re-segregate the new community, this decision broke new ground, creating one of the first (if not the first) interracial public housing projects in the country.<sup>172</sup>

In 1943, HACL A rescinded its racial quota policy based on the existing population of the community and began using a first-come-first-served approach, regardless of race. According to Don Parson, this policy change was in response to pressure from the Los Angeles NAACP, the

<sup>170</sup> For more, see Don Parson, *Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

<sup>171</sup> Charlotte Brooks, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends: Asian Americans, Housing, and the Transformation of Urban California* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 77-78.

<sup>172</sup> The only other integrated housing project in California was in Oakland, "a community with a similar tradition of black political activism." Brooks, 77-78.

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Urban League, Charlotta Bass of the California Eagle, and Leon Washington of the Los Angeles Sentinel. Frank Wilkinson, the public relations officer of the Housing Authority, was quoted as saying he did “not believe that segregated housing projects contributed towards the making of a better world. He thought that learning to live together makes for a better understanding among all the people.”<sup>173</sup> HACLA also offered housing to non-U.S. citizens (primarily non-naturalized Mexican citizens) after the Los Angeles Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) petitioned to allow “allied and friendly aliens” to be admitted to certain housing projects.<sup>174</sup> Once these anti-segregation policies had been established, Los Angeles was said to have “the most enlightened, liberal and complete interracial policy to be effected anywhere in public housing,” according to the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing, though in reality the city still maintained exclusionary practices.<sup>175</sup>

The housing shortage continued in the immediate postwar years, and temporary housing was constructed to meet the demand. One such example was Rodger Young Village, erected in 1946 in the northeast corner of Griffith Park for war veterans. The complex consisted of 750 Quonset huts, each of which housed two families, a commercial center located in airplane hangars, community centers, an elementary school, and churches. More than 13,000 people applied for spots in Rodger Young, indicating the acute housing shortage facing the city. Rodger Young, like other veterans’ housing complexes in the postwar period, was racially integrated. Despite residents’ protests, the complex was eventually demolished in 1954, and its Quonset Huts scattered throughout the southland, adapted for

other (typically commercial or industrial) use.<sup>176</sup>

The passage of the Housing Act of 1949 revived the public housing program in the postwar period. It paved the way for the construction of more public housing in an attempt to relieve the postwar housing shortage, though due to political opposition, it would ultimately take twenty years for the program to construct the 810,000 units of housing officials intended to build in six.<sup>177</sup> Following the passage of the 1949 Housing Act, the city’s public housing program became intimately linked with urban redevelopment (discussed below). This became a preeminent force in the 1950s and 1960s.

<sup>173</sup> Parson, 1.

<sup>174</sup> Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 225-226.

<sup>175</sup> Sides, 116.

<sup>176</sup> Elysha Paluszek and Teresa Grimes, “Garden Apartment Complexes in the City of Los Angeles, 1939-1955,” National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form, 2017, E24. For more on the decline of the public housing program, see Don Parson, *Making a Better World*.

<sup>177</sup> Paluszek and Grimes, E12.

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Little Tokyo in 1937 (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library).



People walking along Central Avenue in 1939 (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)

### Development and Change in Wartime and Postwar Los Angeles

As detailed above, the HOLC and FHA fundamentally shaped growth and development in Los Angeles after World War II. The war brought rapid change to Los Angeles. The city's industrial sector exploded before and during the war, providing jobs and attracting migrants from across the country in search of work. Between 1940 and 1950, the city's population increased dramatically and became more segregated both racially and economically. The city's people of color experienced the war in dramatically different ways.

The city's Japanese and Japanese American community faced a diverse and unique set of challenges during the war. Approximately 120,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans were subjected to incarceration and forced relocation to detention centers and prison camps during the war years.<sup>178</sup> Many had to sell their homes and businesses at a loss or lost their homes and businesses to foreclosure. The Japanese community at Terminal Island (Los Angeles Harbor) had existed since the 1910s, when a small village of Japanese workers formed in association with the fishing industry. Terminal Island eventually included a school, commercial district, churches, community centers, and residences.<sup>179</sup> At the beginning of incarceration, the military established a detention center there. In 1942, the community was forcibly removed from the island, and the area's buildings were demolished.<sup>180</sup> Likewise, the government incarcerated residents of other Japanese American enclaves like

<sup>178</sup> Japanese American National Museum, "Timeline of Japanese American History," accessed September 30, 2022, <https://www.janm.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/janm-education-resources-common-ground-previsit-timeline-and-vocabulary-2021.pdf>.

<sup>179</sup> Historic Resources Group, "Japanese Americans in Los Angeles," 26.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

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Little Tokyo, Sawtelle, Boyle Heights, and West Jefferson (Jefferson Park). At the end of the war, many returning Japanese Americans had no place to live, and they had to find housing in a city facing an acute shortage. When the prison centers closed, Japanese Americans began the process of resettlement largely on their own. Often with only \$25 and a one-way train ticket from the U.S. government, many found temporary housing in community and religious organizations' facilities or in trailer camps created expressly for that purpose.<sup>181</sup> Residents also returned to prewar Japanese American communities, but never in the same numbers as before the war. Incarceration created a fundamental division, leading to the creation of new Japanese American communities in areas such as the Crenshaw district (not far from the preexisting community in West Jefferson), Pacoima, and Venice.<sup>182</sup>

During the 1940s, a rapid influx of migrants looking for work resulted in a desperate need for housing in Los Angeles's communities of color. The African American population ballooned as migrants from the American South came looking for work (part of a larger movement which became known as the Great Migration). The Great Migration refers to the movement of approximately six million African Americans from the Southeast to northern, Midwestern, and Western states between the 1910s and 1970s; in Los Angeles, it consisted of a significant influx of African Americans in the 1940s.<sup>183</sup> The majority of the city's African American population, hemmed

in by restrictive covenants, resided in the Central Avenue area. In addition to settling near Central Avenue, the African American community also moved into Little Tokyo, which was vacant due to Japanese incarceration and became a commercial district and social hub known as "Bronzeville" during the war.<sup>184</sup>

The Mexican and Mexican American population also began to increase as many moved to the city in search of work in the wartime industrial sector.<sup>185</sup> This followed on the heels of the repatriation and deportation programs of the 1930s; due to the economic downturn of the market crash, many Mexicans and racially profiled Mexican-Americans were blamed for the lack of economic opportunity, which had resulted in the dramatic decrease in and deportation of the Mexican and Mexican American population. During World War II, the Bracero Program, in place between 1942 and 1964, was an agreement between the United States and Mexico that brought temporary Mexican workers to the U.S. to ease the labor shortage.<sup>186</sup>

The city continued to grow dramatically, driven in part by veterans who sought out Los Angeles after being stationed in Southern California during the war. In the face of a rapidly increasing population, the city suffered an acute housing shortage, disproportionately impacting people of color, whose housing options remained limited. Existing housing stock became overcrowded, and conditions deteriorated, especially in communities of color that were limited by restrictive covenants. In 1945, Mayor Fletcher Bowron estimated that the city needed 114,075 more units of housing to accommodate its residents.<sup>187</sup> The City responded with policies that included public housing and rent control,

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<sup>181</sup> Historic Resources Group, *Ibid.*, 55-56; Japanese American National Museum, "Timeline of Japanese American History," accessed September 30, 2022, <https://www.janm.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/janm-education-resources-common-ground-previsit-timeline-and-vocabulary-2021.pdf>.

<sup>182</sup> Historic Resources Group, "Japanese Americans in Los Angeles," 57-58.

<sup>183</sup> Grimes, "Historic Resources Associated with African Americans in Los Angeles," E1.

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<sup>184</sup> Kurashige, 159.

<sup>185</sup> GPA Consulting and Nicolaidis, "Latino Los Angeles Historic Context Statement," 19-20.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>187</sup> Kurashige, 166.

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which helped curb extreme price fluctuations in housing. The public housing program of the 1940s and 1950s (discussed in the previous section) represents one attempt to alleviate this shortage and solve the issue of substandard housing in the city. Another came from the wartime Price Control Act of 1942. The Office of Price Administration (OPA) sent regulators to supervise rationing, guard against war profiteering, and investigate accusations of price gouging. In Los Angeles, they instituted a universal, federally-mandated system of rent control. As African American migrants came to Los Angeles in search of jobs in the newly integrated defense industry, they rented from landlords in historically segregated neighborhoods. Some tenants turned to the OPA's local price rationing board at the Vernon Branch of the Los Angeles Public Library and used this platform to voice grievances against landlords who had overcharged tenants, failed to keep units in dignified condition, intimidated residents, threatened them with unlawful evictions, and with each of these actions, impeded the war effort.<sup>188</sup>

Wartime rent controls outlasted the war by five years before landlords succeeded at convincing officials to drop the program. To abolish rent control, real estate interests lobbied all levels of the government. Los Angeles City Council staged hearings where landlords served as witnesses and testified that the program had been "un-American." In July 1950, the Council voted to end the program, and USHA approved their decision months later. Lawyers for the County and the City put their reasoning for opposing rent control into letters. One lamented that "many extremely undesirable tenants [were] being foisted on unwilling landlords," and another worried "that landlords have been subjected to abuses by tenants relying upon the rent control law and its enforcement as a shield against any retaliation

<sup>188</sup> Vestal, "Property Conflict in the Promised Land," 135, 139, and 148.

by the landlord."<sup>189</sup> A national program, which the *California Eagle* called "one of the many happy contributions of the New Deal to the welfare of the common man," had fallen victim to local officials and local interests amid fears of Communism during the Red Scare.<sup>190</sup> Overall, officials demonstrated a readiness to identify with landlords rather than tenants. The forces that opposed rent control would soon lobby to end the public housing program, which landlords claimed drove down the price of their rental units.

Following the war, the private real estate industry recovered, and wartime material shortages eased. In contrast to the public housing complexes of prior decades, the completion of enormous single-family suburban tracts was seen as the solution to the housing shortage. Spurred by access to FHA financing, developers such as Fritz Burns built tract housing which became synonymous with postwar prosperity. And not only was the sheer pace of construction remarkable; there was also a fundamental shift in the type of residential construction being undertaken. Of the more than 30,000 housing permits approved by the City in 1950, approximately 25,000 of these were for single-family residences.<sup>191</sup> Compare this to 1930: of the approximately 10,000 housing unit permits that were approved that year, about two-thirds were for multi-family units.<sup>192</sup> The abundance so closely linked to this period in the popular imagination, however, was typically only available to White

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 181-183.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 159. The Red Scare refers to a rise in anti-Communist sentiment during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. The rivalry led to concerns that Communist sympathizers and spies would threaten U.S. security from within, and it led to a period of heightened paranoia, political conservatism, and the infringement of civil liberties for those suspected of having Communist sympathies.

<sup>191</sup> Whittemore, "Zoning Los Angeles," 399.

<sup>192</sup> Gish, 284.



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residents. (See “Los Angeles Housing Units Per Decade” table above.) For instance, the passage of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act (commonly known as the GI Bill) in 1944 provided World War II veterans with funds for college education, unemployment insurance, and housing. It placed the possibility of homeownership in the hands of millions of Americans. However, the program’s housing benefits were not nearly as accessible for veterans of color.

### The Era of Community Redevelopment

With the passage of the 1949 Housing Act and California’s Community Redevelopment Act of 1945, urban renewal or so-called “slum clearance” became a prominent force in the postwar years.<sup>193</sup> Los Angeles’ Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) was founded in 1948. The CRA was dedicated to revitalizing economically depressed (“blighted”) areas of the city, and it was pivotal in the redevelopment of areas such as downtown. It eventually possessed significant power, including the ability to acquire property through eminent domain if necessary, finance its own projects, and impose land use and development controls.<sup>194</sup> Over time, the CRA became a key player in the provision of affordable housing and urban renewal in alliance with business and real estate interests.<sup>195</sup> Prior to the dissolution of redevelopment agencies by the State in 2012, it was estimated that the Los Angeles CRA had helped build approximately 40,000 units of affordable housing.<sup>196</sup>

Neighborhoods with significant populations of

<sup>193</sup> The state passed the Community Redevelopment Act in 1945 provided tools to municipalities to facilitate redevelopment and combat urban “blight.”

<sup>194</sup> Mara A. Marks, “Shifting Ground: The Rise and Fall of the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency,” *Southern California Quarterly* 86, no. 3 (Fall 2004), 245-246.

<sup>195</sup> Marks, 254-255 and 246.

<sup>196</sup> Madeline Janis, “Rethinking Redevelopment,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 8, 2012, 10.



Panorama City in the San Fernando Valley in 1946 (above) and 1950 (below). (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)

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### *Chavez Ravine*



The Chavez Ravine neighborhood in 1952. (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)



1952 rendering of the planned Elysian Park Heights public housing complex. The public housing project was never built. (Image courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)

The story of Chavez Ravine in many ways encapsulates the struggle over housing in the 1950s. Chavez Ravine was home to an established Mexican and Mexican American community with as many as 3,300 residents. Its three neighborhoods (Palo Verde, La Loma, and Bishop) had homes, an elementary school, agricultural land, and several buildings owned by the Catholic Church. The site was designated as “blighted” and selected to be redeveloped as Elysian Park Heights, a 3,600-unit public housing complex (the site’s density was later reduced to 2,800 units) (Paluszek and Grimes, E24-E25). Eviction notices were presented to residents beginning in 1950. Approximately one third of the residents refused to sell their properties, resulting in HACLA initiating condemnation of the site and exercising eminent domain powers to seize the properties (Cuff, *The Provisional City*, 276). By the time the tide of public opinion and political inclination halted the Elysian Park Heights project, the Chavez Ravine community had already been largely demolished and its residents displaced. The last residences were demolished in 1959, and the land was sold for the development of Dodger Stadium.

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people of color such as Chavez Ravine, Bunker Hill, and Watts were frequently the targets of urban redevelopment. Though the 1949 Housing Act stipulated that new public housing be within the economic means of those displaced by redevelopment, this did not always play out. According to architecture and urban planning theorist Dana Cuff, it was only later that “it became obvious to the housing movement’s progressives that slum clearance was a form of racial discrimination that had the opposite effect of its intentions: it actually made affordable housing more scarce.”<sup>197</sup>

Shifts in the country’s political climate after World War II led to changes in public housing policy, influencing both the fledgling CRA and the public housing program. The tide turned against public housing and rent control, which were often “bound up with the McCarthy-era criminalization of socialism and Communism.”<sup>198</sup> One of the first actions of the CRA was to amend the Community Redevelopment Act to distinguish redevelopment from the public housing program. The change “enabled the CRA to portray redevelopment as a feasible alternative to public housing in blighted and slum areas.”<sup>199</sup> Public opposition to the public housing program grew. The real estate industry, which was finally recovering following the war, homeowners, and groups like the Committee Against Socialist Housing (CASH) opposed new housing projects. CASH was founded in 1952 and sought to stop public housing, the “socialist menace,” and what they saw as overbearing bureaucracy.<sup>200</sup> Members accused HACLA of being infiltrated by Communists and Socialists; they also opposed the idea of government funded housing and the

residents it would have brought with it in their communities. In the politically charged climate of the time, this spelled doom for the public housing program. Though HACLA had received approval for eleven projects funded by the 1949 Housing Act, property owners were vehemently opposed to the construction of additional public housing. In the face of the political pressure of the time, the City Council ordered HACLA to cease development on all its proposed projects. HACLA fought back, arguing that the City Council had no authority to cancel projects sponsored by the federal government. The case went to the state Supreme Court, which ruled that the City Council could not cancel its existing contract with HACLA. In 1952, in a referendum on public housing, the majority of voters supported the end of the public housing program. At the same time, a federal bill passed that ended funding for public housing in cities where votes like the referendum indicated opposition to such projects. Soon after, the mayor, members of City Council, and HACLA met with federal housing officials to discuss terminating the public housing program. Projects already under construction could proceed, but those not already started (such as Elysian Park Heights in Chavez Ravine) were canceled.<sup>201</sup> By 1955, the public housing program had ended. The city lost an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 units of housing with the cancellation of the pending Chavez Ravine and Rose Hill projects alone. This loss would be felt acutely in communities of color in the coming decades.<sup>202</sup>

Conversely, urban redevelopment gained mainstream political support and was generally popular with the public. Indeed, influenced by public sentiment, the City advocated for “improved housing and neighborhoods but at relatively low residential densities to discourage further concentration of Negro population

<sup>197</sup> Cuff, 216 qtd. in Architectural Resources Group, “Garden Apartments of Los Angeles Historic Context Statement,” 18.

<sup>198</sup> Cuff, 199.

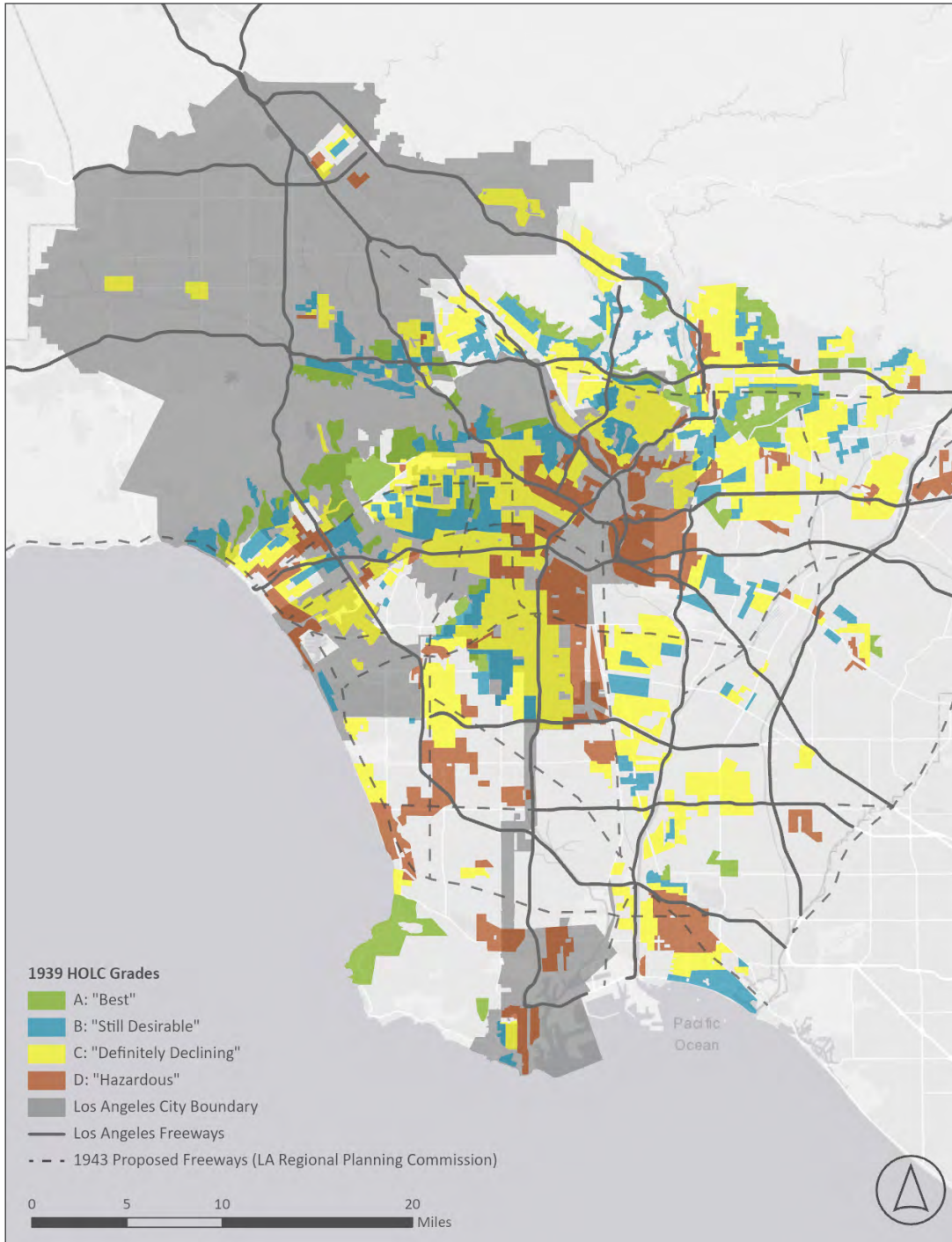
<sup>199</sup> Marks, 255.

<sup>200</sup> “Group Will Fight City Housing Plan,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 1952, 28.

<sup>201</sup> Cuff, 295; Grimes and Paluszek, E25.

<sup>202</sup> Horne, 216.

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Areas that were “redlined” by the HOLC were often those that were chosen for freeway development in the post-World War II period. (Image by ARG)

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in the area.”<sup>203</sup> CRA officials also declared the neighborhood of Bunker Hill, home to a working-class Latino, Indigenous, and pensioner community, a “slum” in 1955. The clearance effort that began in 1959 resulted in the loss of 7,310 units of housing.<sup>204</sup> The housing shortages that working-class and communities of color faced only became more acute.

Freeway building became another means of “slum clearance” and urban renewal in the postwar years. Highway planning often recommended placement of routes in redlined ethnically and racially heterogeneous neighborhoods. One HOLC appraiser had concluded, for example, that Lincoln Heights, home to African American, Armenian, Japanese, and Latino residents, was “ideal for the placement of a new highway project.”<sup>205</sup> Freeway construction left communities of color with significant social and environmental impacts for the sake of accommodating the new far-flung suburban single-family communities. Some highway planners saw the chance to coordinate urban renewal and highway construction; it was a chance to get rid of “the mean clutter of narrow streets” and “decaying slum areas” that prevented the efficient movement of automobile traffic.<sup>206</sup> Though publications on highway planning did not include an overt discussion of

race, author Eric Avila notes that the racialized bias was inherent, for planning thought at the time equated poverty and “blight” with racially and ethnically mixed urban neighborhoods.<sup>207</sup> It was often these neighborhoods that were chosen as the locations for new freeways, and freeway construction would have a host of impacts, including interruption of community boundaries, health impacts on residents, reduced walkability, and disinvestment.

One of the earliest communities impacted by this practice was Boyle Heights, where workers demolished 200 residences between Soto Street and Eastman Avenue in 1944 for the construction of the Santa Ana Freeway. In the years prior to California’s Collier-Burns Act of 1947 and the U.S. National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956, builders did not have the funding to purchase expensive urban real estate for conversion into transportation networks.<sup>208</sup> Therefore, they planned narrow routes along empty floodplains to impact as little property as possible. A windfall of financing after 1947 enabled a shift in freeway placement. With this funding, the State was able to use eminent domain to purchase urban land for the construction of the Hollywood (101) Freeway. Dozens of apartment buildings at Fort Moore Hill, which had housed a racially mixed population of 4,000 residents, were demolished. In contrast, in Hollywood, the White congregations of Hollywood Presbyterian (green diamond) and St. Stephen’s Episcopalian (blue square) successfully lobbied to have the route avoid their churches. To accomplish this, however, the road had to follow a longer route through a neighborhood of homes and apartments. Despite resident protests, the Hollywood Freeway cut through the area and

<sup>203</sup> Los Angeles City Planning Department, “Watts Community Plan,” April 1966, 7, MSS 078, South Los Angeles 20th Century Documentation Collection, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles, California qtd. in Nathan C. Rosenberger, “Art in the Ashes: Class, Race, Urban Geography, and Los Angeles’s Postwar Black Art Centers,” Master’s Thesis, California State University, Long Beach, 2016, 87-88.

<sup>204</sup> Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Gail Sansbury, “Lost Streets of Bunker Hill,” *California History* (Winter 1995/1996) 74, no. 4, 399; Marks, 276.

<sup>205</sup> Eric Avila, *Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2014), 41.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>208</sup> Eric A. Morris, Jeffrey R. Brown, and Brian D. Taylor, “Negotiating a Financial Package for Freeways: How California’s Collier-Burns Highway Act Helped Pave the Way for the Era of the American Interstate Highway,” *Transportation Research Record* 2552 (2016): 16-22.

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### *Valley Apartment Boom*

While the San Fernando Valley has always been a stronghold of single-family zoning, the story of apartment construction in the Valley from the 1950s to the 1970s provides an example in which rapid, large-scale apartment development led to lower rents, fewer evictions, and more racial integration.

In 1940, only about 5 percent of housing in the Valley was multi-family. By 1970, almost 30 percent of housing there was multi-family, and apartment construction each year outnumbered single-family homes. The rapid change was due to rezoning for apartments in a number of Valley communities in the mid-1950s, which led to increased construction in the latter part of the decade. Soon, supply outpaced demand. By 1959, the Valley had the highest vacancy rate in the region; the Apartment Association reported that one in six apartments in the Valley were deemed vacant (“Valley Apartment Vacancies Critical,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 2, 1959, SF1). Despite high vacancies, apartment construction remained robust throughout the 1960s. In 1963 alone, more than 15,000 apartment units were permitted in the Valley. The Apartment Association reported that landlords were unable to raise rents due to “apartment overbuilding” that kept vacancies high. Interestingly, that same year, the Apartment Association also publicly urged that landlords “obey the law and accept Negro tenants without discrimination” as a solution to their vacancy problem (“Apartment Owners Urged to Admit Negroes,” *California Eagle*, November 7, 1963, 1). By 1965, as apartment vacancy rates continued to climb to as high as 20-30 percent in some areas, a deal was reached with the City Housing Authority to house lower income tenants in Valley apartments. This resulted in some limited racial integration in the Valley.

Housing production in the Valley eventually began to decline but demand to live in Los Angeles continued unabated. By 1968, vacancy rates had stabilized to “normal,” and rents began to rise again—by as much as 15 percent. That year, eviction rates were also reported to have increased by 64 percent. The Apartment Owners’ Association explained that “landlords were less willing to tolerate late rent payments, or whose behavior was objectionable, because there were fewer vacant apartments” (Ken Hansen, “Evictions from Rentals Increase 64% in Year,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1968, SFV1).

opened in 1954.<sup>209</sup>

As freeway building accelerated, Los Angeles was remade into what historian Eric Avila has called the “Sutured City.”<sup>210</sup> Multi-ethnic East Los Angeles proved the path of least resistance for the Division of Highways, since FHA redlining suppressed property prices and made land there cheaper for the State to seize via eminent domain. The *Eastside Sun* lamented, “Five freeways now slash through Boyle Heights, namely the San Bernardino, Santa Ana, Golden State, Long Beach and now the Pomona. Question is, how do you stop the freeways from continuing to butcher our town?”<sup>211</sup> The newspaper had attempted one tactic, which was to ask the Los Angeles City Council to use its veto power against ceding public land like streets, schools, and parks to the Division of Highways. The Council, however, did not budge. The 15 men, only one of whom was Latino, were willing to accept these sacrifices. By 1972, all the freeways planned for East Los Angeles were completed and occupied

<sup>209</sup> Richard Simon, “Hollywood Freeway Spans Magic and Might of L.A.,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1994.

<sup>210</sup> Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-11.

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an estimated 19 percent of East LA's land.<sup>212</sup>

### Zoning and Housing in the Postwar Period

The post-World War II period saw a fundamental shift in the construction of housing in Los Angeles. While Los Angeles had been idealized as a city of single-family homes since the early twentieth century, it was in the postwar period that zoning aligned with these ideals, and they were realized on a scale not previously seen. Wartime growth and the postwar development boom brought about entirely new planning challenges in the 1940s. The most pressing of these challenges was a housing shortage. Los Angeles was also a fundamentally different city than it had been twenty or even ten years earlier; it had a

<sup>212</sup> Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*; Liam Dillon, "60 years after being taken for abandoned L.A. freeway, homes may get new life," *Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 2021. During this period, White homeowners in other parts of Los Angeles County had successfully resisted the construction of hundreds of miles of freeways. Residents in Pasadena and South Pasadena successfully fought the completion of Interstate 710 through their community in the 1970s. At the same time the state acquired properties via eminent domain in the adjacent Los Angeles neighborhood of El Sereno, which had a substantial Mexican American population by this time, for the construction of the same route. In West Los Angeles, Beverly Hills and West Hollywood, residents fought the extension of State Route 2 (Glendale Freeway), which was supposed to connect Interstate 405 and US Route 101 through their neighborhoods. The Laurel Canyon Freeway, intended to run north-south and connect the I-405 and US 101, was also never constructed due to resident opposition. As of 2002, 918 miles of mid-century Los Angeles' original 1,500-mile plan had been built. Sources: Colin Cab Washington, "4 freeways that did not get built in LA (and why)," KCRW, accessed January 11, 2022, <https://www.kcrw.com/culture/shows/curious-coast/4-freeways-that-did-not-get-built-in-la-and-why>; Gilbert Valadez Estrada, "How the East Was Lost: Mexican Fragmentation, Displacement, and the East Los Angeles Freeway System, 1947-1972," (Master's Thesis, California State University, Long Beach 2002), 5, 97, 101, and 111.

### *Sugar Hill, West Adams*

A test case for neighborhood-wide covenants arose in the 1940s with a five-year court battle over the integration of "Sugar Hill" in West Adams. In 1941, Hattie McDaniel was fresh off her groundbreaking Academy Award victory, the first Black actor to cross this line. She and her new husband moved into 2203 South Harvard Boulevard where they joined ten other affluent Black households brave enough to settle in single-family mansions they knew had covenants. They also had the money to hire a team of lawyers in defense against White neighbors who sued to have them collectively evicted. When the case went to trial before Judge Thurmond Clarke, he asked to visit Sugar Hill with the attorneys for both sides "and determine the present status" of the neighborhood. The next day, on December 5, 1945, Clarke dismissed the case without hearing any further evidence. He noted that covenants violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, but more so, he stressed Black Americans' recent display of patriotism, sacrifice, and industry during the war. "Words cannot express my appreciation," said McDaniel to a reporter for Time magazine, which relayed the movie star's declaration of gratitude to millions of readers. (Source: Jennifer Mandel, "Making a 'Black Beverly Hills': The Struggle for Housing Equality in Modern Los Angeles" (PhD diss., University of New Hampshire, 2010), 65, 75-76, 101-102, 107, and 110)

larger population and was more industrialized. Established neighborhoods were overcrowded and faced deteriorating housing conditions, and city officials sought solutions.

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This explosion of wartime industry, rapid growth, and dramatic shifts in the city's landscape made it all too clear that the zoning established in the 1920s and 1930s was insufficient.<sup>213</sup>

During the 1940s, the Planning Department was instructed to develop a master plan. The Planning Commission was given the responsibility of securing "adherence to and systematic execution of the master plan."<sup>214</sup> Then, in 1946, the City adopted a new zoning ordinance which made extensive changes to the zoning code. The new code consolidated the separate zoning ordinances, which had become confusing and at times contradicted the building code, into a single entity. It created a new use category for agricultural land with different densities (A1, A2, and RA) to preserve existing agricultural land and manage the urbanization of the San Fernando Valley.<sup>215</sup> It also incorporated new zones for industry, and introduced new density allowances for each land use category.<sup>216</sup> Overall, the new zoning ordinance provided more flexibility and emphasized "the regulation of individual performance over strict categorization."<sup>217</sup> Subsequent zoning legislation, passed in 1948, allowed the City Council to approve minor adjustments to zone boundaries and down-zoning in the process of subdivision without a hearing. An amendment the same year reduced setbacks and reduced parking requirements in R4 and R5 zones.<sup>218</sup>

At the time, planning practice emphasized low-density construction and re-zoning typically focused on downzoning, at times because existing zoning did not meet FHA standards. It

<sup>213</sup> Whittemore, "The Regulated City," 149.

<sup>214</sup> *Charter of the City of Los Angeles as Adopted January, 1925 . . . and Amended May, 1941*. Article VIII, Section 96.5, qtd. in Whittemore, "The Regulated City," 139.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-153.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-150. For more on the 1946 zoning code, see Whittemore, "The Regulated City," 149-159.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-152.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 153-154, 156.

incorporated the ideals inherent in the FHA's policies including tracts of low density, single-family construction.<sup>219</sup> This had profound implications for construction in the postwar period, when low-density single-family residential suburban neighborhoods such as Westchester became the dominant form of housing built.

At the same time, planning for the San Fernando Valley occurred "practically independently of the rest of the city" due to its distance from the city center.<sup>220</sup> These plans involved the creation of low-density urban communities "each with their own services and employment centers, functioning as self-sufficient urban islands" among swaths of agricultural land.<sup>221</sup> They were part of a larger national trend of coordinated long-range planning and zoning, but they would not come to fruition due to a number of factors, including the reality of the postwar housing crisis and the sheer pace of development in the Valley after the war.<sup>222</sup> In 1950, for example, more than three-quarters of Los Angeles' subdivided lots were located in the San Fernando Valley.<sup>223</sup> By the mid-1950s, the City stopped zoning land in the Valley for agricultural purposes and recommended more than 34,000 acres be zoned for residential and other "suburban" designations.<sup>224</sup>

As these new suburban subdivisions offered

<sup>219</sup> Becky Nicolaidis, Teresa Grimes, and Emily Rinaldi, "Residential Development and Suburbanization, 1880-1980," DRAFT, *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement*, December 2020, 20.

<sup>220</sup> Whittemore, "The Regulated City," 141.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 144, 155.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>224</sup> Los Angeles City Planning Commission, *San Fernando Valley: 1955 Master Plan Restudy...Zoning* (Los Angeles: City Planning Commission, 1955), 20, Box C-0944, City Planning Commission, LA City Records, in Jean-Paul deGuzman, "'And Make the San Fernando Valley My Home:' Contested Spaces, Identities, and Activism on the Edge of Los Angeles" (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2014).



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**CAL. NEGROES CAN NOW LIVE ANYWHERE, SAYS HIGH COURT**

**Homes Like These No Longer 'Out of Bounds'**

**—Freed From Restrictions—** Pictured above are two of the many homes in Los Angeles which have figured prominently in race restrictive covenant cases and which, by virtue of Monday's U.S. Supreme Court decision, are no longer "out of bounds" to Negroes. Both of these houses are in the city's wealthy "Sugar Hill" area, built in 1920 and 1925, respectively, and were built by the late Ben Carter, well-known comedian and motion picture agent, who was teamed with Mantan Moreland for television shows at the time of his death. At the right is a photo of the late Ben Carter's home. The right to live there was challenged on racial grounds despite the fact that she has attained top rank in motion pictures and is currently giving a 15-minute nightly program, the "Benish Show," over radio station KFI.

**—Mothers 5 Generations—**

**Los Angeles Sentinel**

Vol. XIV No. 17 72 Los Angeles, Calif., Thursday, May 6, 1948 Three Sections—Sec. 1 10c

**Led Covenant Fight**

**'Sugar Hill,' Other L.A. Areas Freed; Race Ban Outlawed**

(See other stories on 2nd Front Page)  
by Grace E. Simmons

Los Angeles Negro families—like thousands of other Negro families elsewhere in California and throughout the entire nation—won the right on Monday to live in their own homes, to buy homes wherever they choose, or to rent homes in any

The *Los Angeles Sentinel* announcement of the Supreme Court ruling in 1948. (Courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library)

home ownership to White residents (in many cases, exclusively), many moved out of historically multi-ethnic communities, such as Boyle Heights and Watts. This trend is commonly known as “White flight.” Other areas previously occupied by White communities only, such as the Crenshaw district and Leimert Park, which had a mix of single- and multi-family uses for people of varying economic means, became available to people of color as White communities moved to newer suburban developments on the outskirts of the city.<sup>225</sup>

### Housing Desegregation in the Postwar Period

Due to the persistence of private and public methods of housing segregation, the city’s ethnic enclaves remained in place into the immediate

<sup>225</sup> Reginald Chapple, “From Central Avenue to Leimert Park: The Shifting Center of Black Los Angeles,” in *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities*, eds. Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramon (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 71.

postwar period. The growth of multi-ethnic neighborhoods during the war led some White homeowners in neighboring areas to believe that racial transition was inevitable. Some left, selling to non-White buyers, many of whom were willing to pay a premium for better housing and were only limited by race, not income.<sup>226</sup> Other White residents dug in their heels, using existing restrictive covenants and creating new ones to prevent people of color from moving in.

In the face of this renewed opposition, people of color began fighting restrictive covenants through a variety of means. The postwar housing shortage meant that they felt the enforcement of restrictive covenants more keenly, as they attempted to move out of older and deteriorating neighborhoods but were prevented from doing so time and time again. In the southern and western portions of Los Angeles as well as the San Fernando Valley, White homeowners refused entry to people of color at an increasing rate. This, in turn, agitated middle-class non-White

<sup>226</sup> Brooks, 176.

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residents, often veterans, who simply sought the same freedoms that they had fought to defend during World War II. They formed activist groups and took their cases to court. Several judges ruled that restrictive covenants were unconstitutional or, at the very least, unenforceable.<sup>227</sup> These local cases joined the larger nationwide struggle fought by the NAACP and American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to end restrictive covenants. The NAACP and ACLU appealed several state-level covenant rulings, including those from California, Michigan, and Missouri, to the U.S. Supreme Court, the most well-known of which was *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948). Los Angeles lawyer Loren Miller, along with future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, was instrumental in the fight against racially restrictive covenants and argued the case for the NAACP.<sup>228</sup> In the decision, the Supreme Court found the enforcement of restrictive covenants to be unconstitutional. While covenants were a private agreement outside the realm of the Constitution, state rulings enforcing such covenants violated the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause.

Although the *Shelley v. Kraemer* ruling "undercut the legitimacy of openly white supremacist viewpoints and the state-sanctioned ability to maintain exclusively white areas," it did not end discriminatory housing practices.<sup>229</sup> They merely evolved. Many realtors "increasingly saw themselves as the first line of defense in maintaining a color line" and simply refused to sell homes to people of color in White areas.<sup>230</sup> Following the Shelley decision, the CREA developed several tactics that could be used to surreptitiously control who lived where. One method suggested that homeowners' associations could require a discretionary occupancy permit

<sup>227</sup>Brooks, 177-178.

<sup>228</sup> Gibbons, 63.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>230</sup> Sanchez, 8 qtd. in "Residential Development and Suburbanization," *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement* (Draft), 2020, 26.

for residences under their purview. These permits would not make any "reference to race or color, but [would require] personal qualifications as a good neighbor, or in other words, cultural status."<sup>231</sup> The CREA's attorney advised that "if fairly administered so as to exclude undesirable persons irrespective of race or color, no difficulty should be encountered."<sup>232</sup> Those realtors that did sell homes to people of color in these areas ran the risk of losing their licenses. Homeowners' protective associations continued to police the sale of property, and residents of White neighborhoods resorted to threats, intimidation tactics, and violence against people of color who moved into their neighborhoods.<sup>233</sup> In March 1952, for example, two homes on S. Dunsmuir Avenue in Mid-City were bombed. The homes were located in an area that had recently opened to African American homebuyers as the deed restrictions expired. One of the homes belonged to middle school teacher William Bailey, his wife, and 12-year-old son, who were home at the time. The other home was in the process of being sold to Los Angeles City firefighter Roger Duncan. Both men fought in World War II and were members of the famed Tuskegee Airmen. In Leimert Park, 40 White homeowners working under an organization called "Friendly Endeavors" filed suit of \$185,000 against a White homeowner who sold his home to a Black couple in 1950 – two years after the 1948 Supreme Court decision.<sup>234</sup> In 1951, a Black couple who had just purchased a home at 3775 Olmstead Avenue in Leimert Park came home to find that someone had broken in and poured automobile oil over

<sup>231</sup> Gene Slater, *Freedom to Discriminate: How Realtors Conspired to Segregate Housing and Divide America* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday 2021), 160.

<sup>232</sup> Slater, 160.

<sup>233</sup> For more detail on the ways realtors and property owners circumvented the *Shelley* ruling, see Gene Slater, *Freedom to Discriminate*, 160-161.

<sup>234</sup> "Owner who sold home to Negroes faces damage suit," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 15, 1950.

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The note left with the bomb reads, “Negros move off Dunsmuir north of Adams we will bomb all Negro s off.” 1952. (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)

the walls and floor of nearly every room in the house.<sup>235</sup> Targeted incidents of intimidation and violence like these, coupled with the circulation of pamphlets and notes threatening African Americans with violence if they continued to move into all-White neighborhoods, occurred throughout the city into the 1950s and beyond.

For Japanese Americans, the legal struggle for housing equality in California had just begun in earnest. In 1943, the Magnuson Act had extended citizenship eligibility to Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans as a gesture to the Republic of China, a wartime ally. However, Japanese immigrants technically still were not allowed to purchase land due to the Alien Land Law of

1913.<sup>236</sup> In 1948, an *Issei*<sup>237</sup> journalist named Sei Fujii bought a house in Los Angeles anyway, as a test case. The legal conundrum went to the State Supreme Court, which struck such laws down in 1952 with a slim majority of 4-3.<sup>238</sup> In response to the ruling, the Title Insurance and Trust Company ended its policy of refusing to insure Japanese “alien”-owned land and agreed to cease asking *Nisei* buyers for their birth certificates as verification of their citizenship.<sup>239</sup> Kashu Realty, opened in 1947 by Kazuo Inouye in the Crenshaw district, played a pivotal role in the Japanese American struggle to open historically

<sup>236</sup> The term “alien” was a derogatory one used to refer to immigrants, often from Asian countries.

<sup>237</sup> *Issei*, or first generation, is the term for Japanese immigrants to the United States.

<sup>238</sup> “California Supreme court rules Alien Land Law unconstitutional,” *Rafu Shimpō*, April 18, 1952.

<sup>239</sup> “Title insurance firm ready to assure *Issei* ownership,” *Rafu Shimpō*, May 17, 1952. *Nisei*, or second generation, refers to Japanese people born in the United States.

<sup>235</sup> “Hoodlums Damage Home,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 15, 1951.

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White neighborhoods to residents of color. The company identified White homeowners with the most potential to sell across the color line and cultivated relationships with them. Many were liberal Jewish Americans. Having had success in the Crenshaw area, Kashu Realty opened new branch offices in Los Feliz and Monterey Park to continue its work.<sup>240</sup> Additional cases – including one brought by Korean American Yin Kim – helped advance housing equality for Asian Americans in Los Angeles. Kim and his wife purchased a home in the Arlington Heights neighborhood in 1947. After the Kims moved into the home, they were served an injunction to vacate, which they challenged in court. Although their case was not ultimately accepted by the Supreme Court as part of the group of cases against racial covenants, it was reviewed as an example of how restrictive covenants affected other groups in addition to African Americans.<sup>241</sup>

Following the ruling on restrictive covenants, people of color were able to integrate into previously White-only neighborhoods at different rates. In terms of pace of change, Latinos and Asians moved into suburbia faster than African Americans. For the Japanese, Chinese, and Korean communities, their entry into suburbia after World War II following decades of exclusion grew out of a distinct set of factors. These included their growing economic power, the Cold War political climate, and gender ratios which changed as immigration patterns shifted and led family makeup to more closely conform to the socially expected and supposedly ideal “nuclear family.” Historian Charlotte Brooks has shown how Asians went from being the most vilified racial group in California to an accepted, even admired group by the 1950s, a process of shifting racialization

that showed up vividly in housing patterns. World War II and the Cold War were critical turning points, recasting the place of ethnic Asians in American society. During the war, for example, Japan’s invasion of China began to erode the intense anti-Chinese prejudice that had reigned in California for decades and to foster sympathy for ethnic Chinese, especially those fleeing Mao’s communist regime. Shifting public opinion after the war led to increasing acceptance for Japanese and Japanese Americans by White Angelenos. By the 1950s and 1960s, these changing outlooks translated into a greater willingness to accept ethnic Asians as neighbors in formerly White-only neighborhoods such as the Crenshaw district, after years of exclusion.<sup>242</sup> The Korean and Korean American community, which grew after 1950 following relaxing immigration laws, began to move outward from its existing neighborhood along Jefferson Boulevard. They moved to the north and west into what would later become the area known as Koreatown, as well as into the Westside and the San Fernando Valley.<sup>243</sup> Latinos were also increasingly accepted in the postwar period. Access to FHA and G.I. loans, combined with access to better paying jobs, allowed a small number of Latinos to move to previously all-White suburban neighborhoods. Lighter-skinned Latinos were more easily able to access the suburbs, while darker-skinned Latinos continued to face harsher discrimination.<sup>244</sup>

The relative ease with which Asians and Latinos breached the suburban color line, compared with African Americans, was partly related to colorism: prejudice based upon skin color, and the resulting position of these groups within the American racial hierarchy. Both Asians and Latinos occupied what some scholars call the

<sup>240</sup> Laura Pulido, Laura Barraclough, and Wendy Cheng, *A People’s Guide to Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2012), 149-150.

<sup>241</sup> Page & Turnbull, “Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1905-1980,” 33.

<sup>242</sup> Brooks, Chapters 7-9; Nicolaidis, *The New Suburbia*, chapter 2.

<sup>243</sup> Page & Turnbull, “Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1905-1980,” 32-33.

<sup>244</sup> GPA Consulting and Nicolaidis, 20.

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“racial middle,” a term that refers to a place in American society’s racial hierarchy somewhere between White and Black. They didn’t occupy the “bottom,” yet they didn’t necessarily possess the advantages of Whiteness.<sup>245</sup> In general, those with lighter skin tones had an easier time crossing the lines imposed by racism and segregation than did those with darker skin tones.<sup>246</sup> As noted previously, lighter-skinned Mexicans could “pass” for “Spanish” and thereby gain acceptance into White-only neighborhoods, while those with darker complexions were barred. African Americans had the hardest time moving into White suburbia. In the 1950s, they were barred from nearly every suburban area, including most tracts of the San Fernando Valley, and confined to the city proper. After 1960, they made inroads into a very small number of neighborhoods such as those in the Crenshaw District and in the Harbor Gateway community, setting off frantic White flight. The construction of the Santa Monica Freeway (Interstate 10) had already bisected the city by this time, and nearly everything to the south began to take on the stigma of “South Central,” as these neighborhoods (many of which were all White before the war) became increasingly Black. The suburban progress of the African American community was thus confined to a few places early on. Exceptions north of the 10 freeway were places like Pacoima where African Americans had deep roots.<sup>247</sup>

It was not until 1959, when California passed the Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA), that further legal strides were made against housing

<sup>245</sup> Eileen O’Brien, *The Racial Middle: Latinos and Asian Americans Living beyond the Racial Divide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Gonzalez, *In Search of the Mexican Beverly Hills*, 9, 46-49.

<sup>246</sup> Colorism can exist both within racial and ethnic groups as well as between groups.

<sup>247</sup> Nicolaidis, *The New Suburbia*, Chapter 2.

### *Edward Roybal and Housing Discrimination*

City Councilman Edward R. Roybal, the first Mexican American to serve on the Council since the nineteenth century, inadvertently tested housing discrimination soon after being elected in 1949. The Roybal family needed to move, so he found a development in his district advertising “GI Housing.” He had a \$250 check ready for the deposit, and his city councilman card on his person, when the White realtor responded, “Well, I’m sorry, young man, it’s not my fault, but I’m instructed that I cannot sell to you because you’re a Mexican.” A few moments later, after Roybal angrily walked away, the man ran up to add, “if you say you are of Spanish or Italian descent, we will sell you a house.” Roybal took his story to the City Council, attracting nationwide publicity. A subsequent investigation found only six Los Angeles developers disclaiming racial discrimination in housing. Another eleven were like the one Roybal had witnessed; they only sold to Mexicans who claimed “Spanish” blood (George Sánchez, *Boyle Heights*, 157-158).



Edward Roybal (right), in Washington D.C. as a U.S. House Representative, circa 1965. (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)

### **Chapter 3. The New Deal and Housing Policy, 1933-1964**

discrimination. The FEHA led to the creation of the states' Department of Fair Employment and Housing. This was accompanied by the passage of the Unruh Civil Rights Act, also passed in 1959, which made discrimination in housing and public accommodations illegal. As discussed in the next section, fair housing initiatives would continue moving the needle forward in the 1960s.

## Chapter 3. The New Deal and Housing Policy, 1933-1964

### *Nat King Cole in Hancock Park*

By the 1940s, Nat “King” Cole was one of the most famous Black singers in the country. He had numerous hit songs, including “Straighten Up and Fly Right” (1943), “Route 66” (1946), and “The Christmas Song” (1946). Despite his fame, though, Cole was still an African American man, and was therefore subjected to the same racism that dominated the housing market at the time. He purchased a home on West 21st Street in the mid-1940s, but a restrictive covenant delayed his move-in date. In 1947, he married Maria Hawkins Ellington. Soon after, the couple began looking for another home. They hired a realtor, who initially took them to Beverly Hills, but the couple found the attention of autograph-seekers and tourists off-putting. The realtor then found them a residence on Muirfield Road in Hancock Park, which they fell in love with. According to Maria, Cole “walked through the great, wide oak door with its pointed arch, saw the sweeping staircase, and declared, ‘This is it!’ before they had seen the bedrooms or the kitchen.” The couple purchased the home in which they hoped to raise their family. Almost immediately, Hancock Park residents opposed the prospect of having Black neighbors and formed the Hancock Park Property Owners Association to keep the Coles out. The Supreme Court had ruled that restrictive covenants were unconstitutional earlier that year, so area residents technically had no legal means of preventing the Coles from moving in. Residents attempted to pay Cole off, and when that did not work, threats and intimidation began. Despite this, Nat and Maria moved into their new home in August 1948. Though residents eventually accepted the family, the Coles continued to face intimidation into the next decade. Daughter Natalie Cole remembered an incident when “people showed up and put firecrackers in our bushes. Another time a bunch of people put a burning cross on our lawn. My mom and I were the only ones home. My mom was such a little socialite. She rolled up a newspaper, went outside and told them to clear off. There she was in her nightgown with a thick roll of newsprint yelling at the guys. I was flabbergasted.” Despite all this, the family remained in the home. Following Nat’s death from lung cancer in 1965, Maria sold the home and moved back to the East Coast. (Sources: Jack Guy, “Natalie Cole: An Unforgettable Dream House,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 28, 2014; Hadley Meares, “When Nat King Cole Moved In,” *Curbed LA*, December 20, 2018)

Federal agents seized Nat King Cole’s home in 1951, citing unpaid back taxes. Many, including Cole, thought Hancock Park residents had a role in the sudden seizure. Eventually, the Coles were allowed to meet with the IRS and save their home. (Photo courtesy of UCLA Library, Los Angeles Times Photographic Collection)





**Chapter 4.**  
**Fair Housing and the Homeowner**  
**Revolution, 1964-1992**



*Opposite: Aerial view of a neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley in 1953 (Photo courtesy of USC Digital Library)*

## Chapter 4. Fair Housing and the Homeowner Revolution, 1964-1992

During the 1960s, fair housing activists in Los Angeles worked to help people of color buy into White neighborhoods, while other campaigns focused on helping renters. They advocated for state funding for public housing, tenant vouchers, and renters' rights against mistreatment by landlords, to expand access to affordable rental housing and protect the well-being of tenants. At the same time, largely White homeowners emerged as an increasingly powerful and politically active voting bloc in Los Angeles and around the country. As their numbers expanded, so did their political clout. With the onset of desegregation, White homeowners saw their way of life as under threat, and they engaged in numerous campaigns to protect their communities from an array of perceived encroachments. Their efforts in the postwar years ultimately came to influence national politics and both political parties.<sup>248</sup> Housing policy shifted in a direction that benefitted the interests of single-family homeowners and investors in existing commercial and multi-family residential real estate. These initiatives became part of a new iteration of residential segregation in Los Angeles.

### Early Fair Housing Initiatives in Los Angeles

In the early 1960s, fair housing campaigns began to see small signs of progress in Los Angeles. Much of this was the result of housing justice activism in response to persistent segregation in the post-Shelley era by realtors, developers, lenders, and residents. Black activists, building on the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement, documented acts of racism in housing throughout

the city. In 1960, for example, housing activists heard that landlords in the San Fernando Valley were complaining publicly of vacancies in their apartments; however, when African American tenants attempted to rent units, they were refused at all but one of the buildings.<sup>249</sup> In Wilmington, in 1962, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) found Doris and James McLennan were the victims of housing discrimination. Developer Banning Gardens informed the couple that they did not qualify for a Veterans Affairs loan to buy a home and then claimed it had been sold. Soon thereafter, the same home was shown to another couple, two White "testers" from CORE with the same offer. The seller accepted. Subsequent protests for 18 months, including a 35-day "dwell-in" or occupation, forced the sale to the McLennans. Activists also mobilized demonstrations against discrimination in suburbs such as Pacoima.<sup>250</sup>

Fair housing activists mobilized at the state level by staging a week of sit-ins at the Capitol in Sacramento. The result was the Rumford Fair Housing Act of 1963, which banned discrimination in housing based on "race, color, religion, nationality, or ancestry." Buyers and renters won the power to sue if denied on those grounds. However, the Rumford Act exempted properties containing four or fewer units, and single-family homes were only covered if they had a government-backed loan (such as "government-insured mortgages or other public assistance"). One estimate found that the Rumford Act only covered 25 percent of single-family homes in California, but 99 percent of apartment

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<sup>248</sup> Matthew Lassiter, *Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*; David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Nicolaidis, *My Blue Heaven*; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*.

<sup>249</sup> Jon Wiener and Mike Davis, *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (New York: Verso Books, 2020), 11.

<sup>250</sup> Laura Pulido et al, *People's Guide to Los Angeles*, 169-170. For more on the complex racial dynamics and history of the San Fernando Valley, as well as activism by its communities of color, see Jean-Paul deGuzman, "'And Make the San Fernando Valley My Home: Contesting Spaces, Identities, and Activism on the Edge of Los Angeles'" (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2014).

## Chapter 4. Fair Housing and the Homeowner Revolution, 1964-1992

complexes of five units or more. The worst penalty that any owner who refused a buyer or a renter of color faced was a \$500 fine after a long grievance filing and conciliation process with the State's Fair Employment Practices Committee. The California Real Estate Association (CREA) reacted to Rumford with vehement statements that distorted who was truly affected; they emphasized the infringement upon every homeowner's property rights, while obscuring the disproportionate impact on large landlords.<sup>251</sup>

Backlash came swiftly with the campaign for Proposition 14 in 1964. Designed to undo the Rumford Act and to reverse the progress of California's Unruh Civil Rights Act of 1959, Prop. 14 would create a constitutional amendment that read: "Neither the State nor any subdivision or agency thereof shall...limit or abridge...the rights of any person...to decline to sell, lease or rent [their real] property to such...persons as he, in his absolute discretion, chooses." A win for Prop. 14 threatened to gut older, more moderate civil rights bills and to ban any future open housing laws at the municipal level. A robust campaign to pass Prop. 14 quickly mobilized, headed by the CREA. Political scientist Daniel Martinez HoSang has stressed how the colorblind language used in this campaign convinced a purportedly liberal population by focusing on "the seemingly transparent and fundamental notion of property rights," which spoke directly to suburban homeowner values.

Along with job discrimination, inequality in education, and police brutality, the passage of Prop. 14 was a crucial precipitating factor that sparked the Watts Uprising of 1965. The uprising erupted after the arrest of a Black motorist ignited conflict between onlookers and the police. Dozens were killed and many more arrested by police and the National Guard. Sociologists sought explanations, especially after

<sup>251</sup> George Skelton, "Here's the Proposition," *Madera Tribune*, October 7, 1964.

more urban revolts erupted across the country in the late 1960s. In 1973, two scholars compared statistics from 42 impacted cities nationwide and found that grievances about substandard housing correlated with the intensity of what they termed "racial disorders."<sup>252</sup> High-severity revolts correlated to high housing inequality, representing a more important factor than even job inequality; national polls found that Black dissatisfaction with housing remained high throughout the 1960s. The study concluded, "To decrease these tensions, housing conditions for Blacks should be improved."<sup>253</sup>

The years 1967 to 1971 saw some positive developments in fair housing in Los Angeles. In *Mulkey v. Reitman* (1967), the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Prop. 14, declaring that the initiative "was intended to authorize, and does authorize, racial discrimination in the housing market." The Court found that the proposition violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>254</sup> A year later, in the wake of Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination, Congress moved to speed passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which prohibited discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing, based on race, religion, and national origin (and sex, as of 1974). In response, councils formed in Los Angeles to investigate violations. Groups like the Housing Rights Center (1968) and the Fair Housing Congress (1971) tested listings randomly by sending Black and White "testers" to collect evidence of special treatment. Some cases involved landlords offering perks to White residents, such as free coffee, rooms with better views, and lower cleaning fees. In one case, a landlord showed a White tester the video monitor

<sup>252</sup> William R. Morgan and Terry Nicholas Clark, "The Causes of Racial Disorders: A Grievance-Level Explanation," *American Sociological Review* 38, no. 5 (October 1973), 611-624.

<sup>253</sup> Morgan and Clark, "The Causes of Racial Disorders," 621-623.

<sup>254</sup> *Reitman v. Mulkey*, 1967.

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used to check for Black home seekers. If one was coming, the landlord never answered the door. Yet such clearly provable cases were rare and led to only thirty lawsuits per year nationwide, indicating the limits of the 1968 Act.<sup>255</sup>

Around the same time, the federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Act of 1968 passed, designed to end the practice of redlining once and for all. Section 235 of the Act was meant to expand homeownership access to African Americans by extending mortgage credit to them. Many took on these loans in previously redlined neighborhoods. Yet what often resulted was what historian Keeanga-Yamattha Taylor has termed “predatory inclusion,” the aggressive efforts of real estate agents and mortgage bankers to target poor Black communities for unscrupulous loans. They targeted poor Black women especially, “because of the likelihood they would fail to keep up their home payments and slip into foreclosure.”<sup>256</sup> Realtors and mortgage bankers would then put the foreclosed home back on the market; they profited from maintenance fees and volume sales built into this system. This type of predatory lending foreshadowed practices that expanded in later decades, revealing how discrimination was evolving in the housing market. In Los Angeles, Section 235 loans were granted in places like Watts and South Los Angeles.<sup>257</sup>

In 1969, California responded to the wave of fair housing legislation by passing a housing

element law that required local jurisdictions to meet their housing needs. It was intended “to focus the attention of city policymakers on policy actions that they might take to make it easier or less expensive for additional housing units to be built.”<sup>258</sup> The State required that all cities and counties “engage[d] in detailed planning” assess their housing needs and prepare for the development of more residences to meet anticipated regional growth.<sup>259</sup> The 1971 Housing Element of the General Plan focused on producing housing for lower income people, and the 15% Ordinance, passed the same year, required “all developments of five units or more made feasible pursuant to a zone change” to reserve three units of low- or middle-income housing for every 20 in new apartments of five or more units.<sup>260</sup> HACL was to buy these to rent them for a reduced rate to tenants in need, but the city never adequately funded the program to meet the prices at which landlords wanted to rent the units.<sup>261</sup> The 1972 draft Housing Element proposed requiring the provision of low or moderate income units in multi-family housing or waiving the fees of such units.<sup>262</sup>

President Johnson’s 1968 Kerner Commission, convened to study the causes of the 1960s race riots, recommended policies to disperse low-income urban tenants of color into the suburbs to reverse the tendency of housing authorities to foster residential segregation and discrimination. These policies included the “reform of obsolete building codes,” the “reorientation of federal

<sup>255</sup> David Ferrell, “Fair Housing Act at 20,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 11, 1988.

<sup>256</sup> Keeanga-Yamattha Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 5.

<sup>257</sup> Mitchell Landsberg, “Woman Evicted Near End of 30-Year Loan,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1999; Dave Felton, “Watts ‘Home of Hope’ Built in Only 96 Hours,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 1968; Jack Jones, “South Central’s ‘Pride’ Housing Hopes Shattered,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1970.

<sup>258</sup> Paul G. Lewis, *California’s Housing Element Law: The Issue of Local Noncompliance* (Public Policy Institute of California, 2003), 11.

<sup>259</sup> Lewis, 11-12.

<sup>260</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 286.

<sup>261</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 286; Irv Burleigh, “Commission to Reconsider Law Forcing 15% Low-Income Homes,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 1973; “Los Angeles City Council Repeals the 15% Ordinance,” *Goodwin Law*, November 12, 2008.

<sup>262</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 286.

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housing programs to place more low and moderate-income housing outside ghetto areas," "scattered site construction," and "rent supplements."<sup>263</sup>

The Nixon Administration took a more market-oriented approach to the provision of fair housing via "rent supplements." This represented a shift away from direct subsidies for private developers towards vouchers and block grants.<sup>264</sup> In 1974, Congress passed the Housing and Community Development Act which provided federal subsidies for the building of low-income housing units and vouchers for renters in need. This was the genesis of regionally-administered Section 8 programming, which granted housing allowances to seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income families to purchase a home on the private market. Section 8 tenants had to set aside 30 percent of their income to pay rent, and HUD covered the difference.

In Los Angeles from 1975 to 1980, the Section 8 program showed both strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, the program housed residents in 12,400 units, which represented a 150 percent increase over HACLA's prior public housing offerings. On the other hand, the demand far outpaced the supply; another 28,000 eligible households ended up on a waiting list for these Section 8 vouchers.<sup>265</sup> Moreover, since 55 percent of Section 8 households stayed where they already lived, in part because landlords retained the right to reject any potential tenant relying on vouchers, the program's impact on desegregating Los Angeles was limited. Local administrators

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<sup>263</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (The New York Times Company, 1968), 467-82.

<sup>264</sup> Block grants are sums of money given by the federal government to fund a specific state or local program. These programs are often related to public housing, health, or other social services.

<sup>265</sup> Frederick A. Lazin and Samuel Aroni, "Federalism, Low Income Housing Policies and the Myth of Centralized Power," *Policy Studies Review* 3, no. 1 (August 1983).

also unevenly enforced requirements for landlord recipients of these payments to replace or to repair housing, especially in areas occupied by people of color.<sup>266</sup> This led to a degradation of conditions in Section 8 housing. While some progress in provisioning low-income housing was apparent, need continued to outstrip availability in Los Angeles.

### The Homeowner Revolution in 1960s-1970s Los Angeles

Many White suburbanites in Los Angeles derived their core political identity -- as homeowners, taxpayers, and parents -- within the context of their suburban neighborhoods, including areas like the San Fernando Valley. Suburbanites made a direct connection between their role as taxpaying homeowners and their right to a particular quality of life. They engaged in numerous campaigns to protect "their" communities from an array of perceived threats. This new phase -- the slow growth movement -- gained traction after 1964.

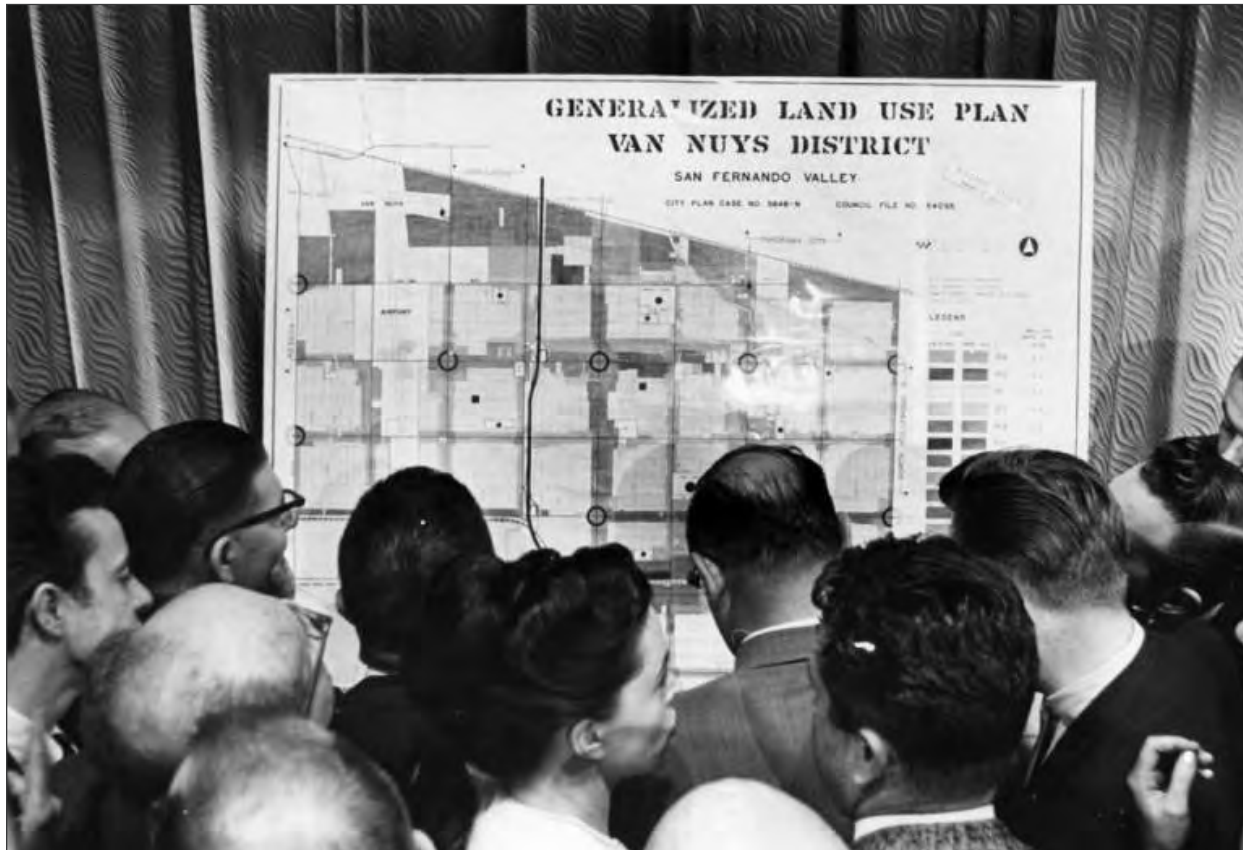
An important driver in this movement was the advent of community planning. In 1964, Calvin Hamilton became the Director of City Planning, a position he would hold until 1985. Hamilton broke from top-down planning norms and pioneered participatory planning, putting unprecedented land use power in the hands of residents. Participatory planning became the hallmark of the "Goals Program," which Hamilton initiated in 1965 and which echoed a national trend reflective of President Johnson's Great Society programs that aimed for "maximum feasible participation." The philosophy of this new planning approach was to give communities more democratic decision-making power and to respect their autonomy over their communities. It gave them more input in the planning process.

Tens of thousands of Angelenos, in "the largest planning consultation ever conducted," shared

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<sup>266</sup> Lazin and Aroni, 62-66.

## Chapter 4. Fair Housing and the Homeowner Revolution, 1964-1992



In 1963, the *Valley Times* covered the unveiling of the draft Van Nuys Community Plan. The article noted, “More than 400 people interested in Van Nuys business and real estate went to a preview showing Friday of the new Van Nuys master plan and showered Los Angeles city planning officials with questions and criticisms. ... After a department presentation, many rushed up to the stage to get a closer look at the map and ask the officials more specific questions.” (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)

their thoughts at meetings in every community.<sup>267</sup> The surveys conducted as part of the process revealed that only 40 percent of respondents favored little to no growth, while approximately 60 percent of respondents wanted continued growth. These numbers were not consistent across the city, however; of African American respondents, for example, the number who

<sup>267</sup> Greg Morrow, “The Homeowner Revolution: Democracy, Land Use, and the Los Angeles Slow-Growth Movement, 1965-1992,” (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2013), 260.

wanted growth was higher at almost 90 percent.<sup>268</sup>

The 1967 Goals paper produced by the Los Angeles Department of City Planning, as a response to public sentiments of the time, made the most important objectives clear. Housing is mentioned in the summary section solely in reference to property values, as the “largest

<sup>268</sup> Morrow, 50, 260.

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single investment many of us will ever make.”<sup>269</sup> The objectives of homeowners were clearly prioritized, with the rationale being simply that “many citizens want to preserve suburban living.” Housing issues that dominate the discussion today such as affordability were largely ignored, or seen as part of the problem, and it was necessary to intervene in areas with “changing ethnic composition[s]” so that “social stability” could be maintained.<sup>270</sup> The housing goals and objectives reflected in city documents of this time were a reflection of the sentiments held by decision making powers and further reaffirmed the feedback homeowners had provided to limit change in Los Angeles.

After consultation ended in 1967, a Goals Council formed to implement these grassroots objectives. Unfortunately, the ideals meant to enhance equity via participation resulted in privileging those with the greatest resources and ability to engage in such participation. Meetings were held in each community, yet the voice of older, White, middle-class suburbanites tended to dominate the Goals Program. Suburban activists tended to focus more on issues of land use and planning than did groups representing the interests of communities of color. The latter, such as the Los Angeles Urban League, tended to focus more on job growth and social services in Black neighborhoods as well as civil rights and community organization.<sup>271</sup> In addition, neighborhood associations, which became a significant force for change, were unevenly active across the city, and not all concerned themselves with land use issues. Those that did, tended to

<sup>269</sup> Department of City Planning, “Goals - Planning Goals for the Los Angeles Metropolis” (Discussion Paper). (Los Angeles: Department of City Planning, June 1967), 16.

<sup>270</sup> Department of City Planning, “Goals - Planning Goals for the Los Angeles Metropolis,” 16.

<sup>271</sup> Morrow explores this in detail throughout “The Homeowner Revolution.”

represent White, middle-class residents.<sup>272</sup> These more vocal groups overwhelmingly articulated a slow-growth agenda, which became reflected in the Goals Program.<sup>273</sup>

Hamilton’s Department of City Planning was instructed to work this input into a comprehensive planning vision with its 1970 report, *Concept Los Angeles*, which outlined a growth strategy for the city. To satisfy both the anti- and pro-growth sides, *Concept* limited development in residential neighborhoods and gave freedom to redevelop land in 37 discrete, urbanized centers (22 near the city’s core, 3 on the Westside, 11 in the San Fernando Valley, and 1 at the Harbor). These spots had already become centers of business and commerce and represented what the journalist Joel Garreau would dub “Edge Cities” in places like Century City, North Hollywood, and Sherman Oaks.<sup>274</sup> If large-scale rebuilding was not allowed in these specific places, *Concept* predicted that more single-family home lots citywide would become “low-rise apartments of standard design and minimum quality” and the “rate of decay” would only rise as “economic and social segregation will continue.”<sup>275</sup> To reverse this trend, City Planning recommended steering future commerce and multi-family housing into these existing centers while maintaining single-family neighborhoods.<sup>276</sup>

Concurrent with the drafting of *Concept*, the State mandated that cities and counties adopt

<sup>272</sup> For more, see Morrow, “The Homeowner Revolution,” 207-215.

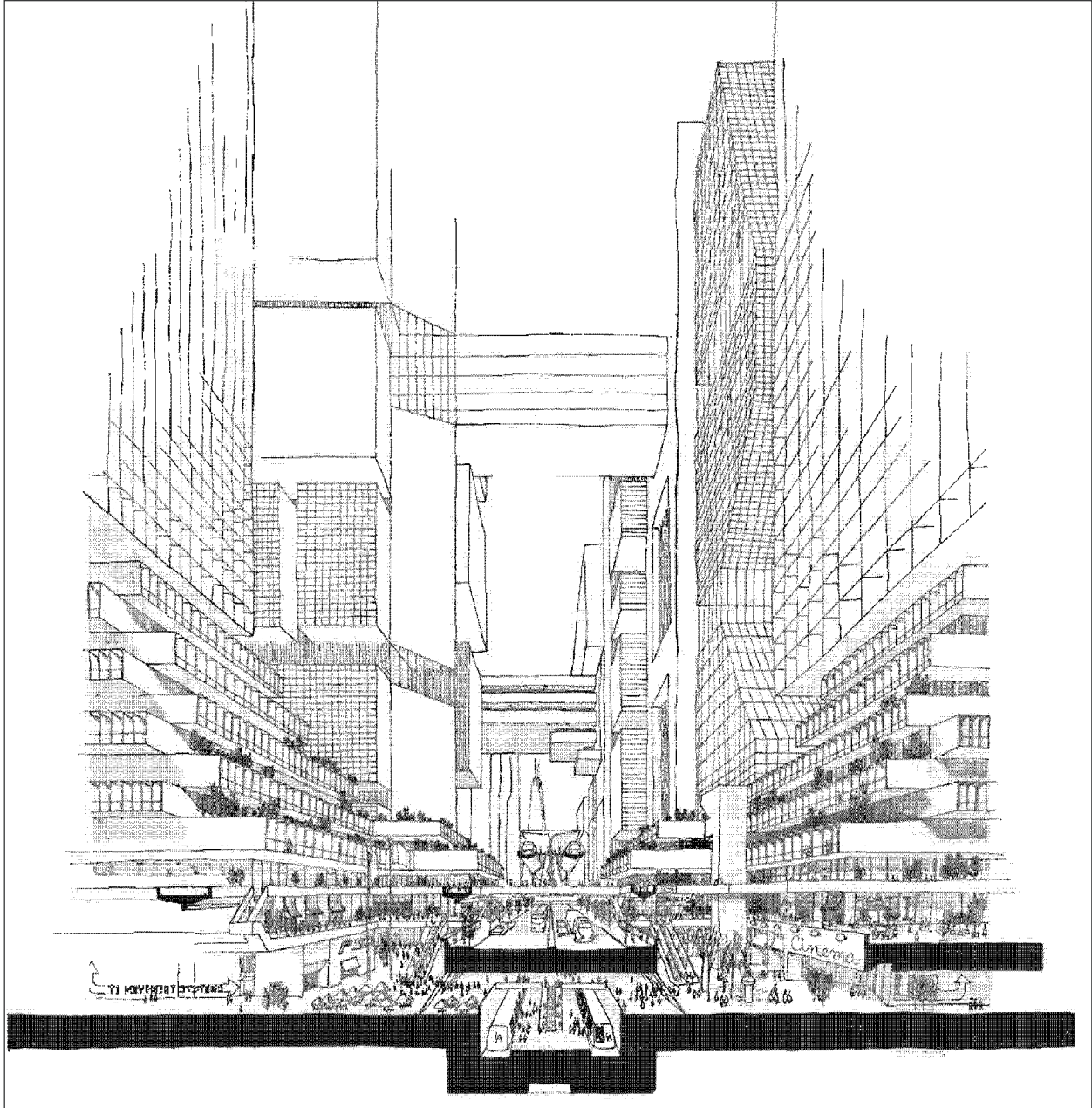
<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 260-262 and 50-51; Andrew Whittemore, “Zoning Los Angeles: a brief history of four regimes,” *Planning Perspectives* 27, no. 3 (2012), 394.

<sup>274</sup> Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York, Anchor Books, 1991), chapter 8.

<sup>275</sup> Department of City Planning, *Concept Los Angeles: The Concept for the Los Angeles General Plan* (Los Angeles: Department of City Planning, January 1970), 5.

<sup>276</sup> Department of City Planning, *Concept Los Angeles*, 5 and 23.

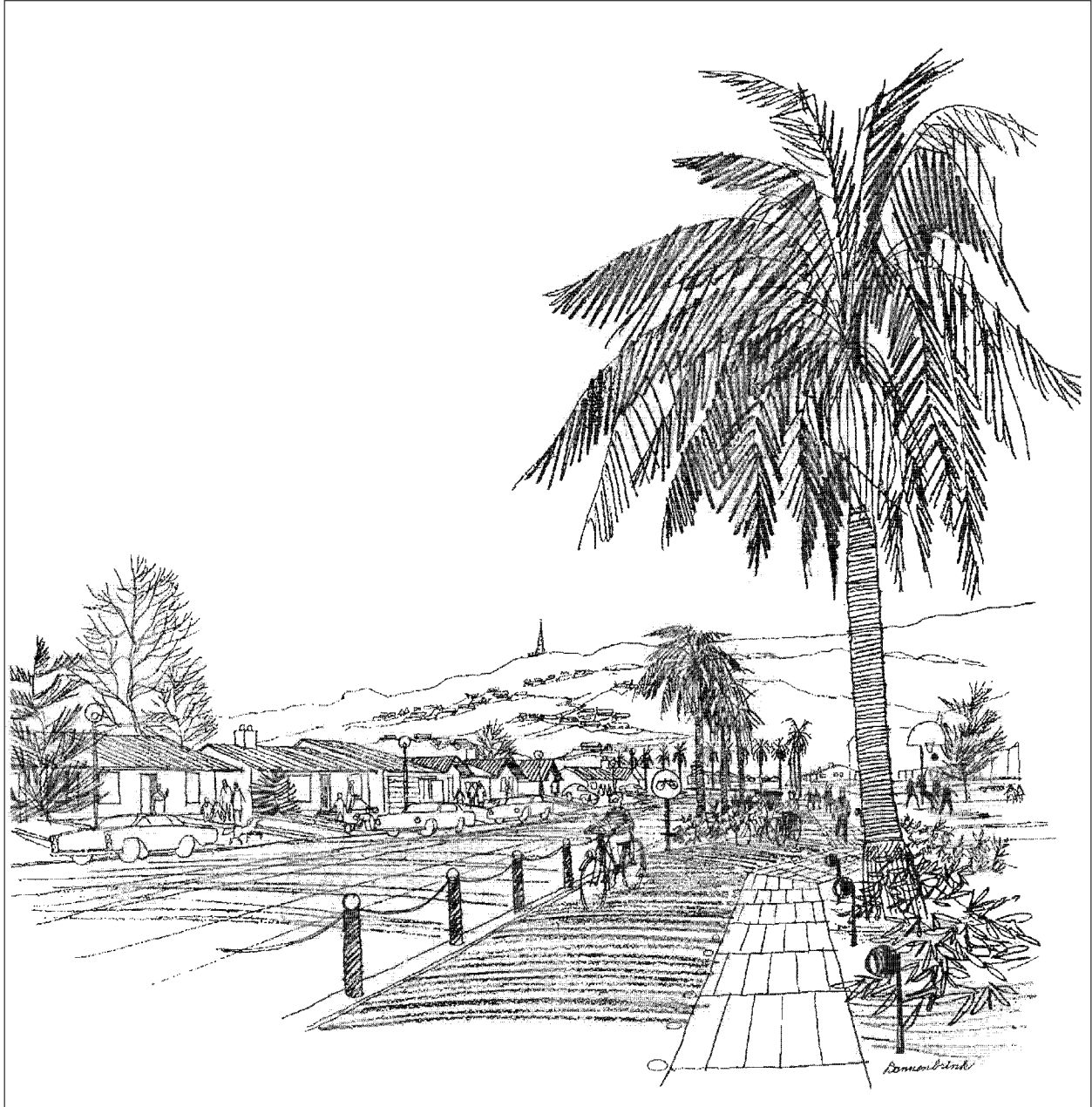
## Chapter 4. Fair Housing and the Homeowner Revolution, 1964-1992



*Concept Los Angeles* sought to funnel future development into urban centers to protect single-family neighborhoods from apartment construction and “decay.” (Image courtesy of Los Angeles Department of City Planning)



## Chapter 4. Fair Housing and the Homeowner Revolution, 1964-1992



A depiction of the type of single-family residential development that *Concept Los Angeles* aimed to maintain (Image courtesy of Los Angeles Department of City Planning)

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a comprehensive long range general plan in 1971. Though the mandate did not apply initially to charter cities, of which Los Angeles is one, amendments to the City Charter required the creation of a General Plan, a policy document that would inform future land use decisions.<sup>277</sup> The General Plan included a land use element as well as others. The Charter amendments required area-by-area review of the new Plan, which gave residents a new level of input in community planning. It also set forth guidelines for the creation of neighborhood Specific Plans.<sup>278</sup> The 1970 General Plan formalized the low-density single-family residential development outlined in *Concept*. The intent of the 1970 Land Use Element was to “accommodate new growth while preserving the existing low-density character over the remainder of Los Angeles.”<sup>279</sup>

Many of the centers envisioned as part of *Concept Los Angeles* never came to full fruition, however, since many homeowners who participated in “bottom-up community planning” opposed increases in density. To bolster the call for this guarantee of a low-density future for Los Angeles, homeowner activists capitalized on residents’ opposition to developers and fear of people of

color moving into their neighborhoods.<sup>280</sup> Slow-growth activists wrote independently prepared Community Plans and then pushed the city for their implementation. They wanted to reduce the density capacity of single-family housing tracts eligible for rebuilding as duplexes or apartments to R1. Such a change was to prevent developers from buying homes plot by plot, demolishing them, and replacing them with apartments. In response, the City was directed to consider downzoning most of the city’s land.

The Community Plans coming out of Hamilton’s participatory planning program called for “zoning rollback” across the city.<sup>281</sup> Into the 1970s, when Los Angeles had a population of approximately 2.8 million people, it still had room for a theoretical residential population of 10.5 million if every lot were rebuilt to its maximum zoned potential. Community Plans asked for that capacity to drop to 4.1 million.<sup>282</sup> Community Plans justified the downzone with a discussion of population control as well as the need to “protect the City’s suburbia within the city’s atmosphere.”

Support for zoning rollbacks reflected homeowner concerns about increased traffic congestion, noise and air pollution, impeded

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<sup>277</sup> The California Constitution’s “home rule” provision gives cities the ability to adopt a charter and provides those charters with the force and effect of state law. A charter city has authority over municipal affairs, and a charter city’s law regarding a municipal affair will have precedence over the state’s law on the same issue. Zoning and land use decisions are considered municipal affairs. A charter provides greater local control. See Berkeley Law, “Foundational Aspects of Charter Cities,” <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/Albuquerque3 - Foundational Aspects of Charter Cities.pdf>. The mandate did not apply to charter cities except when the charter, or ordinance, of a city assumed the obligation. Later legislation required that charter cities also bring their zoning into consistency with their general plans.

<sup>278</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 239.

<sup>279</sup> Department of City Planning, *Land Use Element of the Los Angeles City General Plan, 1970*, 10., qtd. in Whittemore, 261.

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<sup>280</sup> Davis, *City of Quartz*, ch. 3. For a fascinating counterexample to this thesis, consider the Crenshaw Neighbors, Incorporated, a Black-white neighborhood association which formed in 1964. The aim was to resist the practice of blockbusting, which entailed realtors literally using the prospect of racial transition to intimidate white homeowners into selling for under market value. Instead, CN reached out to white homeowners and encouraged them to remain in place as part of achieving “a balanced community.” Jennifer Mandel, “Making a ‘Black Beverly Hills’: The Struggle for Housing Equality in Modern Los Angeles,” (PhD diss., University of New Hampshire, 2010), 18.

<sup>281</sup> Morrow, 56.

<sup>282</sup> Application for American Planning Association “distinguished leadership” award, 1988, the Calvin Hamilton Papers, Huntington Library, Box 1, Folder 1; Morrow, “The Homeowner Revolution,” 55.

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### *Westwood*

Westwood was the first community to publish its plan in 1972, and this document represents a useful case study for how zoning rollback fostered economic inequality. Westwood's Community Plan called for its transformation into "a major Center" while preserving the neighborhood's "varied and distinctive residential character." The community agreed to set aside 435 acres zoned for multi-family residential to house 51,000 people. Meanwhile, a much larger swath of 1,000 acres would be zoned R1, meant to house 14,000 people in single-family homes. The Plan required that increases in density on this land be allowed "only if a compensating reduction in density can be made at some other location in Westwood." Even if the number of workers or students in the district rose, the resident population was to stay stable. The Plan made further commitments "to preserve the estate character" of Holmby Hills and "to redesignate" Los Angeles Country Club from residential to an "agricultural zone," which protected this space from redevelopment. The Community Plan essentially captured multiple acres for properties used by wealthier households, excluding that land from higher-density development and preventing future changes that could be needed to address a housing shortage. Though the plan has been updated since 1972, it remains in place today with many of its core components unchanged. These limitations have reduced housing opportunities and created housing pressures for staff and students at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). (Source: Community Plans, the Calvin Hamilton Papers, Huntington Library, Volumes 45 and 46.)

### *The Park Mile Specific Plan*

The framework of the 1979 Park Mile Specific Plan includes subtle development standards which lead to limitations on the establishment of new businesses and community serving uses on Wilshire Boulevard. The plan placed restrictions on particular uses within the Commercial-Residential (CR) zones, which effectively prevented the construction, alteration, or expansion of buildings. Notably, churches were explicitly prohibited from being established. Given that churches hold significant social importance as places of gathering, prohibiting new church uses limited the area's growing Korean American population from establishing new community centers. While seemingly subtle due to its focus on building restrictions, this provision has served as a form of exclusion. In addition, subtle exclusion within the plan was also arguably perpetuated by imposing strict standards for signage design. For instance, only signs conforming to the Helvetica font were permitted, a requirement that may not immediately appear exclusionary on its face; however, at the time Helvetica font was only available for English and other Latin-based languages, meaning the Korean and other non Latin-based languages could not be used on building signage. While the Park Mile Specific Plan regulations still apply today, the helvetica font is now available in a wide array of languages. (Source: Park Mile Specific Plan, 1979)

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views, loss of open space, plant life removal, and lowered property values. Due in part to the efforts of White homeowner groups, who were able to “dramatically decrease density as a means of controlling population growth,” denser development followed a zoning-enforced “path of least resistance” into neighborhoods of color, which lacked the strong neighborhood associations and citizen participation of affluent White districts.<sup>283</sup>

Ultimately the City created thirty-five Community Plans; all but one was adopted by 1980 (Silver Lake’s Community Plan was adopted in 1984).<sup>284</sup> Many included more demands for downzoning and other means of perpetuating low-density, majority-White suburbs.

Though land use designations did not change dramatically as the result of the participatory planning process, the allowable density of parcels within a particular zone, specifically residential zones, did.<sup>285</sup> This change was not uniform across the city. Areas with a higher percentage of affluent or middle-class White residents, such as the Westside and portions of the San Fernando Valley, saw decreases in density, which are maintained to this day. Conversely, areas with larger populations of people of color or lower income populations saw increases in density during the period.<sup>286</sup>

The combined effects of the slow growth movement in affluent White neighborhoods and gradual zoning rollbacks by city officials in the 1970s decreased potential density in many parts of the city. In time, these actions exacerbated a housing market already under strain from a lack of supply. Housing prices and rental costs went up, which disproportionately affected low-income residents and communities of color. Owing

to sustained discriminatory planning, public input, and real-estate practices, these groups were driven out of the reach of the housing market. As one real estate developer said in 1972: “We are faced here with two timebombs. A rapidly deteriorating environment and a growing population of underhoused, seemingly unrepresented people who become frustrated and disillusioned every day. Which bomb will explode first?”<sup>287</sup> Another developer noted in 1980, “I think it’s a situation where everybody knows that Los Angeles desperately needs housing, but they don’t want it built around them.”<sup>288</sup>

Initially, *Concept* and zoning rollback were difficult to implement.<sup>289</sup> Then, in 1978, the State passed AB 283, which required that cities of more than two million people (Los Angeles being the only one in California, both then and now) bring their zoning into consistency with their General Plan. Though the city fought the bill, the resulting lawsuit only extended its deadline; Los Angeles had to bring its zoning in line with the density laid out in the Community Plans (which serve as the land use element of the General Plan) by 1982.<sup>290</sup> The result was the General Plan Zoning Consistency Program, which began in 1981. Its aim was to bring the city’s zoning into line with its General Plan. It dramatically reduced the population capacity of Los Angeles to 4 million when the actual population already stood at over 3 million; the number of housing units was reduced from a zone capacity of about 3 million to approximately 2 million.<sup>291</sup> Due to the sheer number of parcels that required rezoning, the city had to downzone large areas, rather than being able to change the zoning of individual parcels

<sup>283</sup> Morrow, ii, 223.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>288</sup> “Silver Lake Residents Seek Halt to 40-Unit Condo Plan,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 1980, GB1.

<sup>289</sup> Whittemore, “Zoning Los Angeles,” 402.

<sup>290</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 315.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

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with attention to nuance, in order to bring them into compliance with the land uses designated in the Community Plans. Ironically, however, many of the parcels that had to be rezoned were not in the Westside or the San Fernando Valley; instead, they were in Los Angeles' denser communities of color; wealthier areas had often already been built to their planned densities while lower income communities often had not been.<sup>292</sup> In two districts with concentrated and racialized poverty, Arleta-Pacoima and Southeast Los Angeles, planning of the 1980s left no space for the population to grow more than 15 percent and 10 percent, respectively.<sup>293</sup> It was here that the effects of the Zoning Consistency Program were most keenly felt, at a time when housing was becoming increasingly difficult to find.

### Proposition 13 and the Rent Stabilization Ordinance

In the 1970s, one of California's most important housing and taxation policies was taking shape: a voter-approved initiative known as Proposition 13. Prop. 13 set the taxation rate of properties at no more than one percent of their assessed value in 1975-1976 and limited annual increases to two percent of a home's assessed value or the inflation rate, whichever was less. When property was sold, it would be reassessed and a new tax would kick in at the one percent rate. Prop. 13 also transferred the ability to distribute property tax revenue from localities to the state. Homeowners called for property tax reductions, driven by rising home prices and inflation in the 1970s, which drove up tax rates and mortgage payments but were also closely tied to the slow growth movement.<sup>294</sup>

<sup>292</sup> Morrow, 327, 338-339.

<sup>293</sup> Andrew H. Whittemore, "Requiem for a Growth Machine: Homeowner Preeminence in 1980s Los Angeles," *Journal of Planning History* 11, no. 2 (2012): 124-140.

<sup>294</sup> Peter Schrag, *Paradise Lost: California's Experience, America's Future* (New York: New Press 1998), 136-141.

### *Echo Park in 1971, "Inner City Oasis or Slum?"*

By the early 1970s, much of downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods were considered "blighted." The one exception to this pattern was Echo Park, located to the northwest. The area was home to a population of multi-racial, multi-ethnic residents of all income levels. Seventy percent of the population was Latino but there was also a growing number of middle-class White residents moving in. Radically different types of housing- both housing deemed "slums" and in-demand higher-priced units- resulted. Soon, a fierce fight about its future ensued. After a developer announced plans to construct 94 units of affordable housing, a homeowners committee pushed for zoning rollbacks on not only that site, but in all of Echo Park's residential area, which was zoned for much higher density than had actually been constructed. At the core of the fight were views equating denser housing with people of color, deteriorating conditions, and lowered property values. "With the development of downtown Los Angeles, with property values rising, the poor people are not going to dominate this area," one Echo Park resident asserted. "Someplace else must be found for them (Source: Dial Torgerson, "Which Way for Echo Park- Inner City Oasis or Slum?" *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 1971, K1).

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Despite its roots in White homeowner interests, Prop. 13 was initiated by Howard Jarvis, director of the Los Angeles Apartment Owners Association (LAAOA). Prop. 13 would benefit commercial property owners and corporations even more than homeowners. Yet Jarvis was savvy enough to appeal to constituencies across the social spectrum. He promised that Prop. 13 would result in a halt in rising rents, wage increases for workers after employees saved money on commercial property taxes, and lower taxes for suburban families. He also emphasized that it would prevent skyrocketing taxes from forcing those on fixed or lower incomes out of their homes. The African American community was not sold on the measure though. The *Los Angeles Sentinel* slammed the practice of property tax reassessment and urged a “No” vote – claiming the risk to Black public servants, last hired and first fired, was too great, and Prop. 13’s “principal beneficiaries” will “be those people and corporations that are large land and property holders.” Councilman Pat Russell, representing an area of South Los Angeles, stated, “By indiscriminately erasing established redevelopment and commercial areas, the initiative would erode our ability to provide future economic opportunities.” Councilman David Cunningham called it an elitist measure. Ted Watson of the Watts Labor Community Action Committee said it “doesn’t have any real relationship to what’s going on in South Central.”<sup>295</sup> Prop. 13, however, won resoundingly in California with approval from 63 percent of all voters, by majority in all but three counties.

When Prop. 13 passed in June 1978, it had many immediate impacts. First, it cut the tax bill of the average homeowner by nearly 60 percent. Other beneficiaries were the state’s major corporations and large commercial property owners. Second, local governments and services

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<sup>295</sup> Andrew H. Whittemore, “Requiem for a Growth Machine,” 130.

experienced devastating cuts. Local governments lost \$6-7 billion annually in the early years, and that number would climb. County governments suffered the most since they lacked alternative funding sources besides the federal government, which was experiencing its own retrenchment during the Reagan era.<sup>296</sup> At a moment when homeownership in Los Angeles was still dominated by White residents, Prop. 13 froze in place fiscal advantages for this group. (In 1980, of all homeowners in the City of Los Angeles, 75 percent were White, 25 percent were non-White.)<sup>297</sup>

In Los Angeles, some landlords, who benefited from the tax savings of Prop. 13, had promised not to raise rents but did so anyway. The Los Angeles City Council reacted with a rent freeze through April 30, 1979. During the freeze, the Council drafted a Rent Stabilization Ordinance (RSO), which sought to balance the needs of renters and landlords by allowing annual rent increases in line with limits established by the City.<sup>298</sup> Exemptions to the RSO included single-family home rentals and - initially - duplexes, public housing, and Section 8 housing, new properties going on the market after October 1978, pre-1978 units qualifying for a Luxury Exemption Certificate, and multi-family units that tenants had vacated.<sup>299</sup> The RSO permitted landlords to seek the highest bid on newly empty units, and then the new price became the

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<sup>296</sup> Schrag, 151-154.

<sup>297</sup> U.S. Census 1980 (from Nicolaidis dataset).

<sup>298</sup> Landlords could raise rents by 7 percent in a given year initially; in 1985, the limit shifted to a flexible, consumer price index-based rate of 3-8 percent. See Alisa Belinkoff Katz, with historical contributions by Peter Chesney, Lindsay King, and Marques Vestal, “‘People Are Simply Unable to Pay the Rent’: What History Tells Us About Rent Control in Los Angeles” (UCLA Luskin Center for History and Policy, October 2018).

<sup>299</sup> Rent Stabilization Ordinance, operative May 1, 1979, Tom Bradley Papers, Young Research Library, UCLA, Box 633, File 3.

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baseline for future yearly increases in rent (known as vacancy decontrol/recontrol). This rewarded landlords who had shorter-term tenants, while it disadvantaged landlords, especially small-scale ones, with long-term tenants. The State would attempt to favor these small-scale landlords in 1985 with the passage of the Ellis Act, which allowed landlords of rent-controlled buildings to evict tenants in order to exit the rental market. The RSO tended to benefit long-term tenants, whose rents could only be increased by a fixed amount, and recent movers, whose rents were temporarily decontrolled at the time.<sup>300</sup>

### Race and Housing Inequality in the 1980s

By the 1980s, Los Angeles's economy, like the rest of the nation's, was shifting. It changed from an industrial economy based on unionized jobs that supported an expansive middle-class, to one in which the labor market was more unevenly distributed between high paying, highly skilled jobs on one end, and low-skilled, low-paid, non-union jobs on the other. This meant a few things to Los Angeles' economy and ultimately its housing: factories closed in South Los Angeles' industrial belt, new manufacturing opened in outlying areas, jobs themselves began to change, and economic inequality ballooned.<sup>301</sup>

The housing market became similarly unequal. Regional housing prices, which had been equal to the national average in 1974, climbed to exceed it by 55 percent in 1985. The equity of existing homeowners skyrocketed, while first-time buyers faced a distinct disadvantage. Wealthy enclaves

multiplied, while low-income areas spread more widely, including into suburban areas. While the supply of low-income housing slightly exceeded demand in 1970, there were twice as many low-income families as affordable housing units just a decade later. By 1985, the number of affordable housing units in Los Angeles County fell from 35 percent to just 16 percent of the total housing stock. To meet the pressing need for affordable housing, an informal housing market spread across Los Angeles in lower-income communities.

Informal housing cropped up in backyards, in garages, trailers, or even tool sheds. These informal rentals were embedded within the suburban landscape to such a degree they created invisible high-density districts.<sup>302</sup> In a 1987 exposé, the *Los Angeles Times* estimated that 42,000 backyard garages sheltered about 200,000 people in Los Angeles County, including places like South Los Angeles, Sylmar, East Los Angeles, San Fernando, Pacoima, and Arleta. Many were unpermitted. By 1997, the city had an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 illegal garage conversions within its limits.<sup>303</sup> Although housing enforcement of these unpermitted units tended

<sup>300</sup> Ira S. Lowry, "Rent Control and Housing Assistance: The US Experience" (The Urban Institute, Washington, DC, 1996), 6.

<sup>301</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso Books, 1989); Ed Soja, *My Los Angeles: From Urban Restructuring to Regional Urbanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Nicolaidis, *The New Suburbia*, chapter 2.

<sup>302</sup> Jacob Wegmann, "'We Just Built It': Code Enforcement, Local Politics, and the Informal Housing Market in Southeast Los Angeles County" (PhD diss., University of California Berkeley, 2014); Vinit Mukhija, "Outlaw In-Laws: Informal Second Units and the Stealth Reinvention of Single-Family Housing," in Vinit Mukhija and Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, eds., *The Informal American City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 39-45; Nicolaidis, *The New Suburbia*, chapter 6.

<sup>303</sup> Stephanie Chavez and James Quinn, "Garages: Immigrants In, Cars Out," *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 1987; Hugo Martin, "Crackdown Urged on Illegal Garage Homes," *Los Angeles Times*, May 28, 1997; Nicolaidis, *The New Suburbia*, chapter 6. Vinit Mukhija, "Outlaw In-Laws," shows the ubiquity of these informal units across Los Angeles, not just in poor neighborhoods. In 1981, the state passed SB 1160, which allowed zoning variances in R1 areas for ADUs and was geared toward seniors. The next year, SB 1534 (Mello Act) empowered local municipalities to allow ADUs in single-family.

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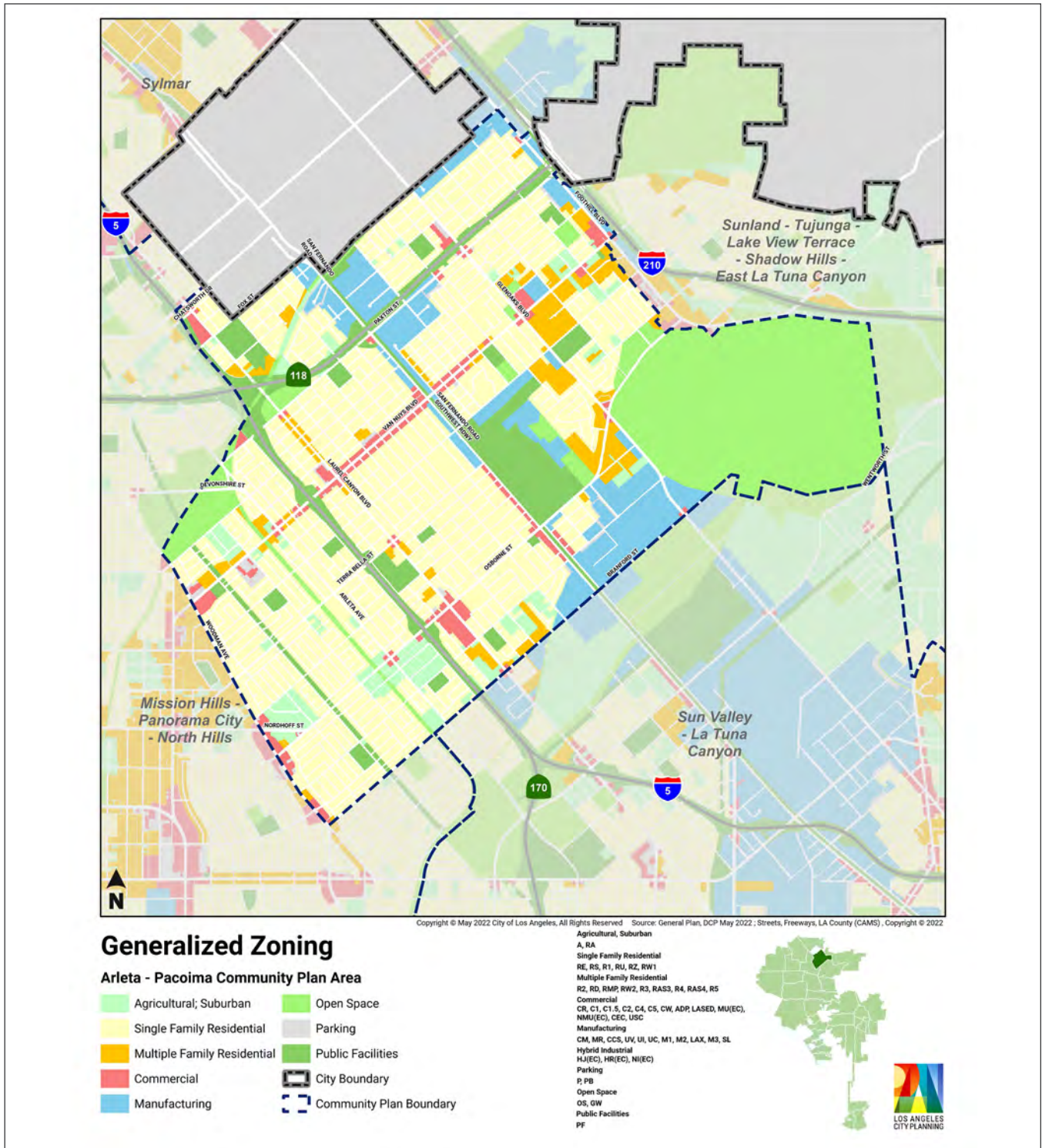
### *Pacoima: High Density Housing in a Low Density Setting*

Pacoima in the San Fernando Valley had long been a multi-racial and multi-ethnic community. Its proximity to the railroad and agriculture made it a natural home for immigrant railway workers beginning in the 1880s. It was one of the few areas in the Valley in which people of color could live, in part because its flood-prone land made it less attractive to White residents. A community of African Americans, Japanese and Japanese Americans, and Mexicans and Mexican Americans grew there. The HOLC sheet for the area described it as a neighborhood of “old residences” where “goats graze in the streets.” During and after World War II, it was attractive to African Americans seeking work at places like Lockheed Aircraft nearby, and a middle-class African American community developed. It was also the location of Basilone Homes, a temporary integrated public housing complex for veterans. After the complex was demolished in 1954, African Americans moved into the Joe Louis Homes subdivision, which was marketed to African American veterans and members of the Black middle class. The San Fernando Gardens public housing project was constructed in 1955. By 1960, an estimated 90 percent of African Americans living in the Valley made their home in Pacoima. A substantial Japanese American community also developed in and around Pacoima in the 1950s and 1960s. As a result of the growing numbers of people of color moving into Pacoima, many White residents left. In the 1960s and 1970s, Pacoima and its adjacent areas (such as Sylmar, Arleta, and Sun Valley) transitioned from majority White to majority Latino and Black. The construction of Interstate 5 in the 1960s reinforced the division of Pacoima’s racially diverse neighborhoods from White areas. In 1968, residents to the southwest successfully petitioned to become a separate neighborhood, which became known as Arleta. Area residents had long protested the construction of low-income housing that would tax Pacoima’s existing schools and recreational facilities. At the time, the area had vacant housing even as additional low-income housing was constructed. In the 1960s and 1970s, the area saw the construction of three freeways – Interstates 5 and 210 and Highway 118. In the 1980s, deindustrialization hit the community hard, contributing to rising unemployment rates that persist to this day. By this time, the population was majority Latino, which continues to hold true: 90 percent of the area’s population consists of people of color, with the majority being Latino and a small population of African Americans.

Today, Pacoima is surrounded on three sides by freeways, and industrial uses are scattered within single-family neighborhoods. It has a larger amount of industrial zoning than other areas of the Valley, and an airport and rail line are located there. Though most of its residential land is zoned single-family, the area’s suburban appearance hides a high level of density. It has a population density twice that of the City of Los Angeles as a whole, and it has a high percentage of overcrowding. As of 2022, 24 percent of housing units in Pacoima are overcrowded (defined as more than one occupant per room). Nearly 30 percent of residents live in rented rooms or converted garages, many of which are illegally constructed units on single-family residential lots. (Sources: Jean-Paul deGuzman, “‘And Make the San Fernando Valley My Home:’ Contested Spaces, Identities, and Activism on the Edge of Los Angeles” (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2014); Geoffrey Mohan, “Black History Month/Valley Retrospective: Perspectives on the Past – and the Future,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1994; Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Architectural Resources Group, “Arleta-Pacoima Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey Report,” March 2014, rev. January 2021; Dora Armenta et. al, “A Community of Casitas: Fighting Displacement in Pacoima with ADUs and CLTs,” (Masters thesis, University of California Los Angeles, June 2019); Pacoima Beautiful and La Más, *Pacoima Urban Greening Vision Plan*, February 2016; Max Podemski, “Pacoima Beautiful: Reorienting a Neighborhood That No Longer Suits Our Needs,” KCET, February 28, 2014; Brittny Mejia et al., “L.A.’s love of sprawl made it America’s most overcrowded place. Poor people pay a deadly price,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 2022)

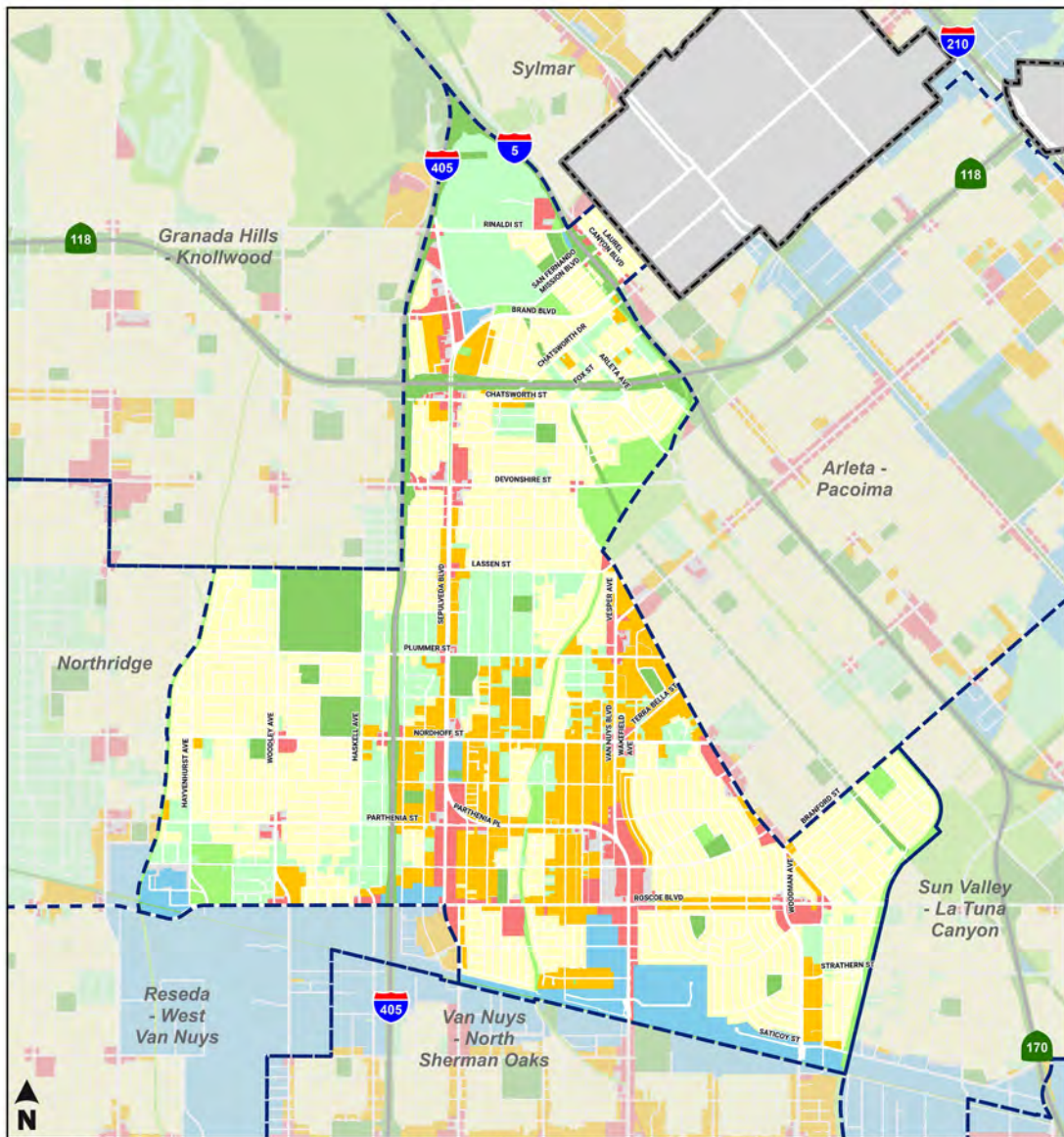


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Zoning in Pacoima today remains dominated by single-family zoning, which belies its density, and the area has a high percentage of industrial uses compared to other parts of the San Fernando Valley (Map courtesy of Los Angeles Department of City Planning).

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### Generalized Zoning

#### Mission Hills - Panorama City - North Hills Community Plan Area

- Agricultural; Suburban
- Single Family Residential
- Multiple Family Residential
- Commercial
- Manufacturing
- Open Space
- Parking
- Public Facilities
- City Boundary
- Community Plan Boundary

- Agricultural, Suburban
- A, RA
- Single Family Residential
- RE, RS, R1, RU, RZ, RW1
- Multiple Family Residential
- RZ, RD, RMF, RW2, R3, RAS3, R4, RAS4, R5
- Commercial
- CR, C1, C1.5, C2, C4, C5, CW, ADP, LASED, MU(EC), NMMU(EC), CEC, USC
- Manufacturing
- CM, MR, CCS, UW, UL, UC, M1, M2, LAX, M3, SL
- Hybrid Industrial
- HJ(EC), HR(EC), NI(EC)
- Parking
- P, PB
- Open Space
- OS, GW
- Public Facilities
- PF



In comparison, the zoning of neighboring Panorama City has less industrial zoning (Map courtesy of Los Angeles Department of City Planning)

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to focus on poor Latino communities, they existed across a diverse range of communities by class and race.<sup>304</sup>

In the midst of the rising inequities and desperate measures to secure housing in Los Angeles, the interests of suburban homeowners continued to dominate the planning process. Very gradually, White homeowners were joined by people of color, who slowly moved to Los Angeles' suburbs. During the 1970s, despite the continuation of racialized poverty in America, Los Angeles had seen a drop in the Black-White segregation index at double the average rate for northern cities.<sup>305</sup> This reflected a rise in Black suburbanization in Los Angeles at a rate that led the nation. In addition, the Latino and Asian populations were moving from the city center into growing suburbs such as those of the San Gabriel Valley, a trend which had begun after World War II.<sup>306</sup> Even as racial segregation endured, the suburbs were becoming spaces of ethnic and racial diversity in Los Angeles.<sup>307</sup>

In the meantime, local officials across California began devising ways to raise revenues in the wake of Prop. 13 defunding. These took a variety of forms including “developer fees, recreation

and arts fees, ‘Mello-Roos’ tax districts,<sup>308</sup> parcel taxes, excise taxes on new development - even a revival of little-used ‘assessment districts’ originally authorized by state legislation seventy years before.”<sup>309</sup> Communities used these tactics to utilize the limited revenue source available to them after the passage of Prop. 13, and areas in which new development did not occur (often communities of color which had begun to see disinvestment as a result of redlining) continued to suffer.

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<sup>304</sup> Mukhija, “Outlaw In-Laws,” 43-46; Becky Nicolaides, “From Resourceful to Illegal: The racialized history of garage housing in Los Angeles,” *Boom California*, January 31, 2019, <https://boomcalifornia.org/2019/01/31/from-resourceful-to-illegal/>.

<sup>305</sup> Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 47, 64, and 68-69.

<sup>306</sup> Wendy Chang, “A Brief History (and Geography) of the San Gabriel Valley,” KCET, accessed June 2022, <https://www.kcet.org/history-society/a-brief-history-and-geography-of-the-san-gabriel-valley>.

<sup>307</sup> Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, “Suburbanization and Segregation in U.S. Metropolitan Areas,” *American Journal of Sociology* 94, no. 3 (November 1988), 610; Nicolaides, *The New Suburbia*, chapter 2.

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<sup>308</sup> A Mello-Roos district is a special tax assessment district created in California to finance local infrastructure or services.

<sup>309</sup> William Fulton, *The Reluctant Metropolis: The Politics of Urban Growth in Los Angeles* (Solano Press Books, 1997), 226.

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### *The Cultural Politics of Housing: The Estrada Court Murals*

In the 1970s and 1980s, people of color assumed unprecedented roles in housing policy. The growing social complexity of Los Angeles brought communities with little prior involvement into participatory planning. In response to the exclusionary effects of the homeowner-driven slow growth movement, as well as policing, redevelopment, and other similar threats, some activists of color developed their own unique means of neighborhood preservation. In Boyle Heights, for example, dozens of Chicano painters covered the outward-facing walls of Estrada Courts in murals in 1973. The public housing complex, dating to World War II, was an early example of a racially integrated facility. By the early 1970s, Boyle Heights was majority Latino. This “muralization of public housing” became a powerful way to articulate Chicano community pride and claim cultural stewardship over this space. With at least \$1,300 in funding from HACLA and free paint from the fire department, fifty youths spent the summer of 1973 painting colorful, stylized references to Latinidad on walls they had previously graffitied. Along the lower-left wall, the recurring pattern “VNE” referenced the Varrio Nuevo Estrada gang. Plausibly illegible to government officials, the artists conveyed “a sense of pride, possession, and protection” over homes which belonged to the public in a technical, bureaucratic sense, but meant something deeper to its residents. Indeed, Estrada Courts artists viewed the murals as a way to warn away other gangs and non-locals from the housing complex. (Sources: Holly Barnet-Sanchez and Tim Drescher, *Give Me Life: Iconography and Identity in East LA Murals*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2016; Louie Flores, “The Mural,” LA County Library, December 6, 2014)



Murals covering one of the buildings at Estrada Courts. (Source and date unknown.)

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### *Koreatown: An Ethnic Nexus*

The ever-evolving complexity of Los Angeles as a diverse, globally-connected city was reflected in its urban neighborhoods in the 1970s and 1980s. Areas became more racially complex, and new factors including transnational investment and migration emerged as driving forces shaping the city's communities, especially those of Asian Americans and Latino people. Asians and Asian Americans became influential in efforts to develop the urban landscape. Koreatown has long had a copious amount of housing, though the area has never housed a Korean American majority. The origins of this "ethnic nexus," to quote Kyeyoung Park and Jessica Kim, were commercial. In 1971, immigrant entrepreneurs founded the Olympic Market on Normandie Avenue and rented out 40 units in VIP Plaza. The Koreatown Development Association lobbied the City to declare Koreatown an official district in 1980, and the area was popular with suburban Korean American and White consumers, who came regularly to Koreatown by car. The area also has tremendous housing capacity; in 2008, the area had 100,000 residents, almost all tenants, packed into 2.5 square miles. The majority Latino community there supplied labor for a cultural renaissance in nightlife, dining, and personal services. (Source: Kyeyoung Park and Jessica Kim, "The Contested Nexus of Los Angeles Koreatown: Capital Restructuring, Gentrification, and Displacement," *Amerasia Journal* 34, no. 3, 2008)

### **The Evolving Role of Government in Housing**

As the federal government retreated from its role of providing low-income housing, a variety of other agencies which had previously focused on public health, aging, law enforcement, immigration services, and code enforcement stepped in to fill the need. The actions of these public agencies had mixed results, for they unevenly provided housing for seniors and reduced housing for marginalized populations. Access to housing for these latter groups became even more precarious.

Through the redevelopment of downtown, a disproportionate number of White residents gained access to affordable housing based on age and disability. Housing returned to Bunker Hill as a series of mixed-use developments, the first of which was Angelus Plaza, a Section 8 complex of more than a thousand units. When it opened in 1981, the *Times* dubbed Angelus Plaza a "Vertical Leisure World."

So many applied before the opening date that the operator created a system of racial quotas: "50% Caucasian; 24% Hispanic [or Latino]; 20% Black; 5% Asian; 1% American Indian, in order to come up with a balanced community."<sup>310</sup> Despite promising housing for a racially-integrated group, Angelus Plaza came under fire from a Pulitzer-winning exposé on segregation in public housing by the Dallas Morning News in 1983. Journalist Craig Fournoy noted differences between the public housing complex of Nickerson Gardens, constructed in 1955 in Watts, which housed younger households of color, versus Angelus Plaza, which housed White seniors and boasted lavish amenities, including a six-story recreation center, library, 24-hour security, emergency health services, parking, free psychological and

<sup>310</sup> Lynn Simross, "A Vertical Leisure World on Hill St.," *Los Angeles Times*, November 12, 1979.

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Angelus Plaza under construction, 1980. (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)

financial counseling, and inexpensive meals.<sup>311</sup> Two years later at a public hearing to mark the anniversary of the Watts rebellion, members of the Black community reminded city officials of a 20-year-old promise to build 600 housing units. Only 300 had been constructed.<sup>312</sup>

During this time, policing also became entwined with housing policy and its enforcement. These initiatives often targeted people of color, which reflected policing practices in general in Los Angeles.<sup>313</sup> One example was the Crenshaw Apartment Improvement Program, a public-private partnership with the LAPD formed in 1985 which focused on an apartment-dominated section of Crenshaw Boulevard. Police officers

<sup>311</sup> Craig Flournoy, "The Fair Housing Act: Enacted Despite the Mainstream Media, Neutered by the Federal Government's Unwillingness to Enforce It," *Cardozo Law Review* 40, is. 3 (2018).

<sup>312</sup> *McCone Revisited: A Focus on Solutions to Continuing Problems in South Central Los Angeles* (Los Angeles County and City Human Relations Commissions, January 1985), 8.

<sup>313</sup> Max Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 202; John H. Lee, "L.A. Vows Faster Razing of Abandoned Houses," *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1989.

were enlisted to help carry out evictions for landlords wanting to remove tenants with convictions. Termed "Operation Knockdown," the program's goal was "to rid neighborhoods of abandoned, unsafe buildings... which [were said to] often serve as drug centers or gang hideouts."<sup>314</sup> In 1988, the program resulted in the demolition of 35 properties, and police helped identify another 400 or 500 for removal. These efforts used the built environment to reduce gang activity but, as historian Max Felker-Kantor notes, led "only to an increased police presence and a barricading of inner-city neighborhoods."<sup>315</sup>

### Continued Suburban Protectionism

In 1986, Angelenos passed Proposition U, a popular anti-growth initiative.<sup>316</sup> In an unexpected alliance, Valley and Westside homeowners who opposed "development of all kinds" and "South Los Angeles citizens opposing the operation of only the most offensive land uses" united to support it.<sup>317</sup> The proposition limited the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) on much of the city's commercial and manufacturing zoned land. The proposition prevented the construction of mixed-use developments along commercial corridors, which the city had recently made possible by allowing the subdivision of airspace over commercial lots and thereby the construction of residential uses above commercial.<sup>318</sup>

At the same time, the effects of decades of segregation were coming to the fore. Environmental dangers in Los Angeles have long been emplaced in a pattern that geographer Laura Pulido has called environmental racism.<sup>319</sup>

<sup>314</sup> Felker-Kantor, 202.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>316</sup> Rich Connell, "Growth-Control Victory Hailed as 'Dawn of a New Era,'" *Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 1986.

<sup>317</sup> Whittemore, "The Regulated City," 329.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

<sup>319</sup> Laura Pulido, "Environmental Racism and Urban Development," in *Up Against the Sprawl*, 71-98.

## Chapter 4. Fair Housing and the Homeowner Revolution, 1964-1992

Decades of land use policy resulted in working-class residents and people of color living in the vicinity of heavy manufacturing, busy transportation routes, and other so-called nuisances. However, residents there were successful in pushing back against environmental racism. In 1985, Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles (CCSCLA) formed in opposition to the city's plan to construct a waste incinerator next to a residential area at East 41<sup>st</sup> Street and Long Beach Boulevard. The group was successful in protesting the plan, and it went on to fight other environmental hazards in South Los Angeles.<sup>320</sup>

Activists had spent a century in struggle against two kinds of racism in zoning and other kinds of city governance. They fought what Whittlemore has called the “exclusionary effects” of the stringent zoning to keep out low-income tenants and homeowners and the “expulsive effects” of the inadequate zoning that made neighborhoods of color especially vulnerable to redevelopment.<sup>321</sup> Decades of segregation and discrimination in land use policy left an unequal housing landscape in Los Angeles, and activists would continue to fight for access to housing on behalf of low-income residents, recent immigrants, and communities of color.

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<sup>320</sup> CCSCLA, a nonprofit, continues to exist to this day.

<sup>321</sup> Andrew Whittlemore, “The Experience of Racial and Ethnic Minorities with Zoning in the United States,” *Journal of Planning Literature* 32, no. 1 (2017): 16-27.

## Chapter 4. Fair Housing and the Homeowner Revolution, 1964-1992



A parking lot, formerly a home, at 736 East 22nd St. This was where Mayor Bradley and Chief Gates announced Operation Knockdown in 1989. (Map by ARG. Base image courtesy of Google Maps)





**Chapter 5.**  
**The Recent Landscape: Zoning and Land Use**  
**in Los Angeles after 1992**

*Opposite: Downtown Los Angeles in 1982 (Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library)*

## Chapter 5. The Recent Landscape: Zoning and Land Use in Los Angeles after 1992

On April 29, 1992, a second urban revolt rocked Los Angeles. Approximately a year earlier, four Los Angeles police officers – three of them White – were charged with the beating of Rodney King, an African American man, following a car chase. The incident, in which King was beaten nearly to death, was caught on video and broadcast nationwide. The four officers charged with the beating were acquitted by a Ventura County jury. Within hours of announcement of the acquittal, unrest erupted across the city, resulting in 54 deaths and nearly \$1 billion in property damage. Although the unrest rippled throughout the city, it originated in South Los Angeles, where years of police brutality against the majority Black community, high rates of unemployment, a drug epidemic, frustration with the criminal justice system, decades of civic disinvestment, and social and economic inequality had brought tensions to a peak. Rather than an all-Black revolt, the 1992 civil unrest involved a significant number of Latino people: 51 percent of those arrested, which roughly correlated with the area’s more general population make up.<sup>322</sup> Residents set fires, looted stores, and targeted passing motorists.<sup>323</sup> Over the course of five days, at least 1,120 buildings were damaged, 94 percent of which were commercial. Mayor Tom Bradley and Governor Pete Wilson committed to repair or replace these buildings and to revitalize the inner-city economy through an “extra-governmental task force” called “Rebuild LA.” Their goal was to heal the city through public-private partnerships and incentives such as tax credits rather than state-administered or state-funded social programs. Similar strategies would be invoked to approach

other problems, including an affordable housing shortage.

### Zoning Regulation and Housing After 1992

In another blow to the city, the Northridge earthquake struck the Los Angeles area in 1994. It remains one of the costliest natural disasters in U.S. history. In the days after the earthquake, it was found that more than 77,500 homes and businesses were damaged.<sup>324</sup> More than 65,000 housing units were significantly damaged and more than 19,000 were vacated. Some areas, dubbed “ghost towns,” saw high vacancy rates due to earthquake damage.<sup>325</sup> Federal assistance came through a variety of programs, including HUD in the form of emergency Section 8 vouchers for low-income renters of damaged properties and other grants and loans. HUD funding was instrumental in providing financial assistance to low-income renters and owners of multi-family buildings. Multi-family building owners could apply for Small Business Administration (SBA) loans, which were also a large portion of federal assistance in the wake of the disaster.

A study of the distribution of federal funding by zip code revealed definite trends.<sup>326</sup> As is to be expected, areas with higher levels of damage received larger amounts of federal funding. Though the agencies involved made concerted efforts to reach a broad and diverse audience, the actual administration and distribution of funds was not even across Los Angeles or housing type.<sup>327</sup> The largest portion of federal funding was allocated to owners of single-family homes (59

<sup>322</sup> Approximately 45.5 percent of the area’s residents self-identified as Hispanic or Latino, according to the 1990 U.S. Census.

<sup>323</sup> Anjali Sastry and Karen Grigsby Bates, “When LA Erupted in Anger,” National Public Radio, accessed October 27, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2017/04/26/524744989/when-la-erupted-in-anger-a-look-back-at-the-rodney-king-riots>.

<sup>324</sup> Nabil M. O. Kamel and Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, “Residential Assistance and Recovery Following the Northridge Earthquake,” *Urban Studies* Vol. 41, 3 (March 2004), 538.

<sup>325</sup> Patrick McGreevy, “5 Years Later, Valley Showing Strong Recovery Signs,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1999.

<sup>326</sup> Kamel and Loukaitou-Sideris, “Residential Assistance and Recovery.”

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 544.

## Chapter 5. The Recent Landscape: Zoning and Land Use in Los Angeles after 1992



Damage sustained to an apartment building on Hollywood Boulevard as a result of the Northridge earthquake in 1994. (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)



Damage sustained to a commercial building on Hollywood Boulevard as a result of the Northridge earthquake in 1994. (Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library)

percent) while only 16 percent was set aside for multi-family housing. The inequitable distribution of funds was due to several factors. First, federal assistance after the earthquake was designed to be a temporary measure that enabled full recovery in the future. It was allocated purely based on losses resulting from the disaster. A property with more financial value was likely to show higher losses and more likely to receive more assistance from federal grants and loans than a property with a lower value. Second, the programs did not have clear guidelines for identifying those areas in greatest need and then prioritizing them. As such, the designation of areas for need was often the result of political maneuvering, and lower-income areas and communities of color which historically had less power to influence political decision making were left at a disadvantage. Third, eligibility for funding was unequal. Federal assistance was not available for undocumented immigrants, and the eligibility requirements for SBA loans (including credit, income, and profitability requirements) were difficult to meet for those in low-income and low-rent areas.<sup>328</sup>

The study found that the housing, socio-economic, and demographic characteristics of an area (divided by zip code) were “significant determinants of the distribution of federal assistance.”<sup>329</sup> The concentration of multi-family residences, renter-occupied units, low-income households, those who were non-U.S. citizens, and Latino and Spanish-speaking households were all associated with an area receiving less federal funding, due in part to eligibility requirements and the way federal assistance programs were designed.<sup>330</sup> These areas had limited local financial resources and were less likely to see private investment that would have aided their recovery. They were “more likely to suffer reduced property

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 543-544, 557.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 545.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 534, 545.

## Chapter 5. The Recent Landscape: Zoning and Land Use in Los Angeles after 1992

values, temporary and permanent loss of population and business, increases in abandoned properties and rise in crime, that generated a spiraling negative feedback of urban decay.”<sup>331</sup> Areas with less federal assistance following the earthquake tended to recover more slowly and saw losses in population and housing units.<sup>332</sup>

Slow growth advocates continued to drive land use planning, despite the need laid bare by the damage of the 1992 civil unrest and the Northridge earthquake. In 1996, the Citywide General Plan Framework replaced Concept Los Angeles. The new plan, however, reiterated many of Concept’s goals, including the maintenance of low-density single-family residential areas and the accommodation of growth in high-density mixed-use districts near transit corridors. The Framework encouraged growth outside of established single-family residential districts. It also provided buffer zones between low- and high-density development and used other mechanisms to protect single-family residential zones. Despite these provisions, the Framework proved to be unpopular with homeowners in the Valley and Westside, and its implementation was variable due in part to competing interests, varying priorities of City Council members, and differing goals of residents across the city.

Homeowners continued to exercise outsized power in the planning process. The 1999 City Charter allowed for the creation of Neighborhood Councils, voluntary organizations which were “intended to enhance community presence in decision-making.”<sup>333</sup> They became advisory community liaisons between neighborhoods and City Hall officials, and they provided homeowners with a platform for their concerns and preferences. Though they were not intended

to focus solely on issues of land use, many cited this as their priority.<sup>334</sup>

By the late 1990s, Los Angeles found itself in the midst of an affordable housing crisis. The homeownership rate in Los Angeles stood at 39 percent, while it was 57 percent nationwide.<sup>335</sup> The city’s poverty rate rose from 13.4 percent to 17.9 percent between 1980 and 2000, a period in which the national poverty rate stood at 12.4 percent. At the same time, property values and rents continued to increase while median income decreased overall. This resulted in an increasing percentage of residents who were rent burdened, which refers to a household that spends more than 30 percent of its income on rent. The number of rent burdened households in Los Angeles rose from 31 percent in 1970 to 45 percent in 1990 and then to 60 percent in 2010.<sup>336</sup> This was felt most acutely by low-income residents, leading to a host of issues – including overcrowding.

Nowhere was this problem more apparent than in the city’s immigrant communities of color. Homes among people of color were increasingly composed of extended family households – a trend explained in part by changing demographics. Immigrants of all ages came to California to work, establish households, or join existing ones. Their homes had a higher density of residents per unit, 3.5 compared with 2.5 for residents born in the U.S. While extended family households – sometimes including more than two working adults – expanded earning power and led to higher rates of homeownership, this trend also led to overcrowding and sometimes broke with the residential use-based code by housing more

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 557.

<sup>332</sup> Kamel and Loukaitou-Sideris, “Residential Assistance and Recovery,” 534.

<sup>333</sup> Whittemore, “Zoning Los Angeles,” 405.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 405.

<sup>335</sup> Whittemore, “The Regulated City,” 362.

<sup>336</sup> Katz et al, “People Are Simply Unable to Pay the Rent,” 14-15; Los Angeles Department of City Planning, “Housing Element 2013-2021,” Adopted 2013, 1-44.

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than a nuclear family per unit.<sup>337</sup> In 1999, City Council's Housing Crisis Task Force estimated that 30 percent (or 372,000 units) in Los Angeles were overcrowded and 8 percent (or 102,000 units) were severely overcrowded. These numbers were the product of a decade's population growth of 300,000 accompanied by the addition of only 30,600 units of housing.<sup>338</sup>

Meanwhile, the population of people experiencing homelessness grew to such a point that the city became known as "the homeless capital of America." During the Reagan Administration, cuts to public funding for social services like rent subsidies, child welfare, job training, mental health care, and substance use disorder treatment put large numbers of people at risk of losing housing. The average person experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles had been housed until circumstances such as a rent increase, loss of income, a violation of lease terms, release from jail or prison, or court-ordered demolition put them outside. The legacies of segregation, including economic inequality and lack of access to affordable housing, had placed people of color at increased risk of such setbacks, so the population of people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles switched from mostly White to disproportionately Black during the 1980s.<sup>339</sup> Other factors contributing to this trend included "over-policing, underemployment, and housing inequality" as well as issues accessing mental health services, the effects of the crack epidemic, and the trend towards "increasing policing and

surveillance as part of the war on drugs."<sup>340</sup> In 1993, a joint agreement between the County and City of Los Angeles led to the formation of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA). In partnership with police and nonprofits, this agency coordinated emergency shelters, provided health care, and helped rehabilitate housing insecure people for transition back into permanent housing.<sup>341</sup>

Even as the population of people experiencing homelessness in downtown increased, HACLA began renovations on the Aliso Village housing project in Boyle Heights. The complex provided 685 units of housing to predominantly Latino working-class families. The project was part of a larger federal funding program that aimed to renovate or replace aging public housing complexes around the country called HOPE VI, an acronym for Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere. This HUD program began in 1992 and aimed to replace aging public housing projects with mixed-income complexes. However, the plan did not include the long-standing requirement that the government replace every unit of housing that it demolished. In many instances, smaller public housing complexes replaced the older ones.<sup>342</sup> It provided Section 8 housing vouchers to some of the displaced residents, enabling them to rent units in the private market during construction, with the hope that these residents would opt to remain in privately owned units.<sup>343</sup> When Aliso Village reopened as the privately-managed Pueblo del

<sup>337</sup> Hans P. Johnson, Rosa M. Moller, and Michael Dardia, *In Short Supply? Cycles and Trends in California Housing* (Public Policy Institute of California, 2004).

<sup>338</sup> Johnson, Moller, and Dardia, *In Short Supply*; L.A. City Council Housing Crisis Task Force, "Report of the Housing Crisis Task Force," 1999, 9.

<sup>339</sup> Kirsten Moore Sheeley et. al, "The Making of a Crisis: A History of Homelessness in Los Angeles," UCLA Luskin Center for History and Policy, January 2021, 38.

<sup>340</sup> Sheeley et. al, 32, 35.

<sup>341</sup> Forrest Daniel Stuart, "Policing Rock Bottom: Regulation, Rehabilitation, and Resistance on Skid Row," (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2012), 18.

<sup>342</sup> Melissa Healy, "Cities Get Funds to Reform Public Housing," *Los Angeles Times*, October 9, 1996, OCA3.

<sup>343</sup> Hector Tobar, "Residents Fear Being Left Out of the New Mix," *Los Angeles Times*, June 4, 1997, B3; Society of Architectural Historians, "Pueblo del Sol," accessed May 2022, <https://sah-archipedia.org/buildings/CA-01-037-0004>.

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Sol in 2004, it had 377 rental units and 93 market rate units for sale.<sup>344</sup> Though the new design had improvements in design and layout, the reduction in density and the implementation of mixed-income units resulted in a net loss of affordable housing.<sup>345</sup> The last three decades have also seen the disappearance of existing affordable housing, including rent stabilized units from the market under the Ellis Act, and the conversion of affordable housing to market rate housing through market forces.<sup>346</sup> Local legislation in recent decades has aimed to address Los Angeles' ongoing housing shortage. This has included the adoption of an Adaptive Reuse Ordinance, the Small Lot Subdivision Ordinance, and the implementation of the State Density Bonus Law.

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<sup>344</sup> Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, "Pueblo del Sol," accessed May 2022, <https://www.hacla.org/en/development-services/development/pueblo-del-sol-phase-i-and-ii-resyndication-and-rehabilitation>.

<sup>345</sup> Susan J. Popkin et. al, "A Decade of Hope VI: Research Findings and Policy Challenges," Urban Institute, May 2004, 21.

<sup>346</sup> Shashi Hanuman and Nisha Vyas, "Race, Place, and Housing in Los Angeles," *Journal of Affordable Housing and Community Development Law* (2021) 29, no 3, 456; California Housing Partnership, "California's Affordable Rental Homes at Risk," February 2019, accessed May 2022, [https://1p08d91kd0c03rlxhmhtydpr-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2019-State-Risk-Assessment\\_Final.pdf](https://1p08d91kd0c03rlxhmhtydpr-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2019-State-Risk-Assessment_Final.pdf).

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## Conclusion

This document has explored how housing and land use policies have intersected with segregation, exclusion, and racialized processes to create unequal access to opportunity and housing in Los Angeles. The unequal housing landscape is the result of more than a century of land use policy and private sector forces that, influenced by prevailing racism and classism, marginalized and disenfranchised communities of color. Despite fair housing initiatives that have aimed to legally level the playing field, and despite activism on the part of communities of color themselves, for much of the century, political influence remained largely in the hands of a White, middle-class and affluent, home owning population who sought to maintain the status quo.

City planning and homeowner activism have long promoted the ideal of Los Angeles as a suburban city, dominated by low density residential construction. Detached single-family residences cover a disproportionate amount of the land zoned residential. This has resulted in an unaffordable housing market due, in part, to a pervasive lack of supply and the fact that single-family homes are more expensive than multi-family residences. Los Angeles has some of the highest housing costs in the country as well as the second lowest vacancy rate (and the lowest of US major metropolitan areas), indicating that demand outweighs supply.<sup>322</sup>

At the same time, Los Angeles remains a city characterized by its diversity and housing inequalities that continue to disproportionately affect communities of color. Household income levels remain unequally distributed throughout the city, with lower income households concentrated in places historically occupied by people of color.<sup>323</sup> The combination of high housing costs and lower incomes leaves people of color more “cost burdened” and at risk of being unable to afford housing or losing it

altogether. This has resulted in chronic issues including overcrowding and a substantial population of unhoused people – problems that disproportionately impact people of color. These issues remain linked to historic patterns of housing discrimination and racialized land use policies.<sup>324</sup>

This study has sought to lay out the factors which have contributed to Los Angeles’ complex and inequitable housing market that persists today. Historic land use and planning policies have too often prioritized the concerns of White privileged communities and interests over the marginalized, denying communities of color access to resources and excluding them from access to housing and wealth-building opportunities. While the study highlights the exclusionary policies of the past that fueled patterns of segregation, displacement, inequity, and exclusion, it also makes us keenly aware of their impacts today. Though numerous barriers to inequality have been removed through the course of the twentieth century, unequal opportunity, racism, and their legacies continue to affect communities of color throughout the city. This study is meant to serve as a resource to inform housing and land use policies that positively transform these historic patterns for a more equitable and inclusive Los Angeles.

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<sup>322</sup> “2021-2029 Housing Element,” 58, 82.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

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<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

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