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The Bunker Hill Story: Welfare, Redevelopment, and Housing Crisis in Postwar Los Angeles

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THE BUNKER HILL STORY: WELFARE, REDEVELOPMENT, AND HOUSING CRISIS IN
POSTWAR LOS ANGELES

by

STEPHEN C. JONES

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2017

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Stephen C. Jones

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The Bunker Hill Story: Welfare, Redevelopment, and Housing Crisis in Postwar Los Angeles

by

Stephen C. Jones

Advisor: Dr. Karen Miller

In 1955, Miss Elizabeth McClellan, an elderly resident of Bunker Hill, Los Angeles, handwrote a letter to her city councilman. Her rapidly increasing rent was untenable, she explained: “I find \$24.00 is too high on an income of less than \$40.00 per month.” She asked the councilman if there was a place in Los Angeles where she could live affordably and within walking distance of a church (McClellan, 1955). As she wrote, a bitter fight over Bunker Hill’s fate was underway. To resolve what they characterized as “blighted conditions conducive to [high] rates of disease, crime, and juvenile delinquency” (CRA, n.d.) the City was poised to evict the Hill’s 9,000 residents, demolish its buildings, and regrade the steep incline as part of a massive Urban Redevelopment Project.

Between roughly 1940-1970 pro-Renewal advocates defeated left-liberal bids for low-rent subsidized housing and successfully promoted a plan for private redevelopment underwritten by public funds (Parson, 2005). The story of Bunker Hill concerns displacement of working-class residents like Ms. McClellan and redistribution of wealth from middle-class property owners and taxpayers citywide to downtown business elites, developers, and city agencies. But this story is somewhat more complex than the manufacture of profit.

By exploring primary and secondary sources, an inquiry into Urban Redevelopment in Bunker Hill, Los Angeles facilitates a nuanced understanding of how political power is made and maintained. Nearly every U.S. city was transformed in the years following WWII by an expanding state, significant demographic change, and political economic flux. As the balance of power swayed, the state and society were pressed into reconfiguration. Such periods of change are occasioned by moral and ideological struggles that ultimately “influenc[e] the conception of the world of the masses” (Hall, 1996 [1989]: 419). Across city council hearings, newspaper broadsides, film and television, and personal and political relations, the extent and significance of “urban decline,” “blight,” “slums,” and “moral delinquency” was defined and contested. These struggles recast political formations and class solidarities in postwar Los Angeles, with long-lasting consequences for the provisioning of the social wage.

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INTRODUCTION

Bunker Hill, Los Angeles

In 1955, Miss Elizabeth McClellan, an elderly resident of Bunker Hill, Los Angeles, handwrote a letter to her city councilman. Her rapidly increasing rent was untenable, she explained: “I find \$24.00 is too high on an income of less than \$40.00 per month” (McClellan, 1955). She asked the councilman if there was a place in Los Angeles where she could live affordably and within walking distance of a church. At the time that she wrote, the largest Urban Redevelopment project in the US was slated for her neighborhood. McClellan and every other Bunker Hill resident would have to move elsewhere. Despite her increasingly unaffordable rent, McClellan and other elderly residents enjoyed the convenience of living near downtown. For the cost of a nickel, Bunker Hill residents took the short ride on Angels Flight, a small incline railway, to the center of downtown. Grand Central Market, directly across the street from the Angels Flight station, supplied fresh groceries. One could walk a few blocks to Pershing Square to sit in the sun or shade, chat with neighbors, or stroll around the park. And Los Angeles’s famous department stores were nearby. Bunker Hill residents, it seemed, had everything near at hand.

In 1959, when evictions from Bunker Hill were imminent, another resident wrote to her councilman to express the desire to stay put. She relayed her and other residents’ frustration “at the idea of living any further from the immediate downtown than [we] now do, at possibly paying higher prices for the same groceries than [we] get at the Grand Central Market” (Starr, 1959). Starr and her husband did not want to move.

This, despite the increasing disrepair of their apartment. She described to her councilman that the apartment's flooring was warped, the linoleum on the bathroom and kitchen floors was cracked. There were worsening cracks in the walls and ceilings. When it rained, she wrote, "the downpour gets 'in.'" With each rain, she explained, "the plaster would get sloppy-wet and later dry to crumble on the floor. [...] In past weeks, a large chunk of plaster fell abruptly to the floor." But this was home. She had lived there with her husband for "more years than we care to recall."

Bunker Hill's residents did move, whether they wanted to or not. The dilapidated apartments were torn down. Rather than new housing for Bunker Hill's longtime residents and other middle- and low-income downtown dwellers, luxury apartment buildings, hotels, and banks were constructed.

Bunker Hill was a dense residential neighborhood on the western edge of downtown Los Angeles. It was seen as a problem by business and city officials since the early 1900s. The Hill was very steep, and its roads were very narrow. Early city maps listed the area as "Impassable For Teams" – the narrow, uneven, and dangerously steep roads were not safe for horse-drawn carriages (Adler, 1964). So, in 1901 the city decided to simply drill through the Hill to ease travel into and out of Downtown from the West. Two additional tunnels in 1924 made it possible for automobiles to avoid Bunker Hill entirely while traveling in or out of downtown. This solved a problem for commuters, but it also isolated the Hill from downtown and the West side, since one simply did not ever have to step foot on the Hill if she didn't live there.

At the end of the 19th century Bunker Hill was a swanky residential district – Los Angeles's first suburb. Wealthy industrialists settled on Bunker Hill in the boom years following the Civil War. They built lavish Victorian mansions on the Hill, above the din and dirt of the

growing city. As the new century dawned and L.A. grew, Bunker Hill's wealthy residents left for new suburban enclaves west of the city where they were definitively sheltered from Downtown's bustling commerce and growing labor class (Adler, 1964). In the first two decades of the 20th century, Bunker Hill transitioned to a working-class neighborhood. The mansions were subdivided into apartments, and dozens of rooming houses and hotels were built (Dawson, 2008). Workers arriving from the Midwest, Europe, and Mexico found affordable and centrally-located housing on Bunker Hill.

Situated, as it was, so close to the central city, Bunker Hill's dense, working-class make-up was viewed as problematic for profitable downtown development. As early as 1929 a local developer proposed the total erasure of Bunker Hill using hydraulic mining equipment – the hill would simply be washed away. “Bunker Hill,” the developer proclaimed, “has been a barrier to progress in the business district of Los Angeles, preventing the natural expansion westward” (Qtd. in Adler, 1964: 29). The stock market crash of that year and the ensuing Depression put a damper on those grand designs. But his threats presaged Bunker Hill's fate.

For several reasons, Bunker Hill came to be viewed as an out-of-place urban anachronism. The area was dense, most residents did not drive cars, and the buildings were relatively old. Los Angeles was supposed to be a city of sunshine, wide open space, and automobiles – a modern city. Bunker Hill's residents were almost exclusively low-income and newly-arrived immigrants. According to the 1940 census, Bunker Hill's population increased 19% between 1930 and 1940 at the same time that rental space decreased. Twenty percent of the residents were foreign-born, predominantly Mexican immigrants. More than seventy-five percent of residents had less than eight years of schooling. And Bunker Hill's housing was the oldest in the city, with the median date of construction 1895 (Adler, 1964).

In the late-1940s, Bunker Hill's drab exterior and impoverished inhabitants became the backdrop for many brooding films noir. As Jim Dawson writes, directors chose Bunker Hill to frame their "troubling, starkly lit, almost documentary-style dramas about down-on-their-luck, hard-hit people in postwar urban America. None of the human characters were ever more desperate looking – or compelling – than the Bunker Hill locations themselves" (Dawson 2008: 87). Bunker Hill's on-screen fame ensured that many Angelenos regarded the neighborhood as a decrepit, dangerous place.

A number of solutions were advanced for Bunker Hill, each one the subject of intense political controversy and struggle. Contemporary liberal reformers argued that Bunker Hill's condition was symptomatic of systemic issues relating to aging infrastructure and economic inequality across the city. Reformers proposed large-scale planning that would "modernize" the city. Specifically, they envisioned a modern capitalist infrastructure that would facilitate growth – more specifically, infrastructure and property redevelopment that would raise land values and spur tax revenue (Alexander & Bryant, 1951). Ports and highways would provide for the transport of goods and people; a redeveloped downtown would reinvigorate commercial consumption and raise municipal tax revenue; and a large-scale housing program including low-rent public housing near Downtown and other manufacturing districts would sustain Los Angeles's laboring class. Liberal reformers proposed that Bunker Hill be completely redeveloped, its old structures removed and replaced with large, market-rate apartment houses. The current residents of Bunker Hill would be relocated to a low-rent public housing project just beyond the downtown area.

Pro-redevelopment real estate elites (both within and without city agencies) broadly agreed with reformers' vision of modern Los Angeles, but vigorously opposed public housing.

Representatives of prominent banks, insurance agencies, downtown department stores, real estate interests, the *Los Angeles Times* and other newspaper publishers agreed that updated infrastructure and a redeveloped downtown were necessary components of a modern capitalist Los Angeles. But the coalition – which held substantial investments in downtown real estate – organized an intense opposition to proposals in the early 1950s to construct thousands of public housing units near downtown. They viewed public housing as a direct threat to current and future real estate investments. Thus, they organized a successful lobbying campaign that equated public housing with communist threats to the American way of life (Parson, 2005). Downtown real estate interests organized instead a publicly-funded redevelopment project in which Bunker Hill was transferred to private real estate developers below market value, which was approved by City officials in March 1959 (Community Redevelopment Agency [CRA], 1970). Whereas liberal reformers had planned Bunker Hill as a middle-income apartment housing district, pro-redevelopment elites advocated for luxury high-rise apartment housing, office space, up-market hotels, parking facilities, and a Civic Trade Plaza & Auditorium (Babcock, 1956). Pro-redevelopment interests noted that redevelopment on Bunker Hill would spur growth for business and real estate in L.A.'s Central Business District (Babcock, 1956).

Owners of property on Bunker Hill opposed both factions, insofar as redevelopment would force them to sell their lucrative rental units. Owners organized to oppose both public housing and redevelopment. Instead, they advocated a rehabilitation program, wherein Federal Housing Administration loans would be provided to owners who wished to rehabilitate their dilapidated properties or construct new ones (McInerney, et al., n.d.).

The Bunker Hill story demonstrates a major shift toward the commodification of housing. Liberal reformers viewed redevelopment as a tool to sustain the modern capitalist city through

housing, infrastructure, and commerce. Their grand plans for public and private housing would have institutionalized inequality and segregation by displacing low-income residents from the central city to a consolidated public housing project. Their plans, nevertheless, would have allowed thousands of low-income people to secure decent, stable, and affordable housing. Liberal reformers, furthermore, believed that housing was the basis for making a better world (Parson, 2005). Liberal planners and architects in Los Angeles experimented with the form of housing as part of their vision of social reform. In other words, liberal reformers rejected the commodification of shelter. Housing was valuable in its capacity as a social lynchpin, far beyond its capacity to generate profit.

Pro-redevelopment real estate elites, on the other hand, accelerated the commodification of housing in Los Angeles. Elites were aligned with reformers' plans to raise land values on Bunker Hill. Their vision of urban development also exacerbated inequality and segregation. But, whereas liberal reformers' plans for public housing and other provisions would have ensured a measure of security for some low- and middle-income residents, real estate elites provided no such protections. Redevelopment on Bunker Hill displaced low-income residents from the central city and forced them to seek housing wherever they could find it. New housing developments on the Hill were, furthermore, luxury high-rises which would have been affordable only to L.A.'s wealthy residents. Real estate elites dispensed with reformers' broader social goals. For them, real estate development was valuable only insofar as it produced return-on-investment. They organized to gain control over the pattern of urban development. Through legislation, real estate elites transferred power from the federal and state to the local level. For local elites, the purpose of political struggle over redevelopment was to gentrify the central city and amplify real estate investment.

The Bunker Hill story also disrupts commonsense tropes regarding liberal and conservative political activities. It is often claimed that liberals want to grow the government, whereas conservatives seek smaller government. The historical evidence from postwar Los Angeles does not support this assertion. Local actors across the political spectrum - reformers, business elites, and property owners - each organized at the city, state, and federal levels. They leveraged federal and state housing legislation, and attempted (sometimes successfully) to introduce and reform welfare state laws in ways that would advance their specific political economic goals. In other words, both liberal and conservative factions built and tweaked the state's capacity to build Bunker Hill in their image.

In 1945, at the height of the housing crisis in Los Angeles, the California Redevelopment Law was created. Redevelopment was a significant turning point in the state's approach to the housing question. With public housing, the state directly addressed the provision of housing for low-income people and exercised maximum control over the planning, construction, and management of these developments. Redevelopment, on the other hand, grew the responsibility of private entities with regard to housing provision and urban development. At the same time, while private entities were allowed to profit from redevelopment, public agencies shouldered a great deal of the costs for acquiring and preparing land in redevelopment areas. The shift from public housing provision to redevelopment was, broadly speaking, a shift from social service provision to subsidized profit. California, which established the first redevelopment agencies in the US, was the breeding ground for this political economic shift.

The pages that follow are focused on the U.S. welfare state, especially the redevelopment provisions of the 1949 Housing Act. I disregard popular debates regarding so-called "deserving" or "undeserving" poor. Instead, I focus on structure. More specifically, I highlight how political

coalitions organized to build the welfare state for their own benefit. In the arguments that follow, I consider the following question with regard to welfare, redevelopment, and housing in postwar Los Angeles: Whose welfare was ensured by the state? I argue that federal, state, and local welfare legislation provided only minimum protections and opportunities for poor Americans. From its inception, the U.S. welfare state was concerned with sustaining capitalist growth, along with its corollary, inequality. Of course, liberal provisions such as roads, schools, parks, and public housing represented modest downward redistributions of wealth. But welfare state provisions have more often distributed wealth upward, into the hands of private real estate interests and suburban families, to name two examples.

In my discussion of welfare state structure, I hope also to counter popular arguments regarding so-called “government incompetence,” or the “failure” of the welfare state. The historical evidence from postwar Los Angeles demonstrates that the welfare state was, in fact, in great working order. It succeeded in what it was designed to do, namely, the upward transfer of public and private wealth. Again, the contours of the U.S. welfare state were not shaped incidentally, but through deliberate and organized political struggle, the specifics of which are explored in some detail below.

Bunker Hill in Context: Los Angeles, CA 1870-1970

Bunker Hill emerged as a “problem” for political action as Los Angeles was undergoing wide-ranging political economic changes. By the end of the Second World War, L.A. had witnessed unprecedented transformations in demographics and economic development. Spurred by rapid growth, political groups of all stripes – workers, reformers, and various capitalist factions – organized fiercely to gain power. Bunker Hill was one arena, among many, where this struggle was waged.

In the immediate postwar, downtown Los Angeles was in decline. According to City officials, “blight” was rampant in the city. In particular, they pointed to substandard housing; falling tax revenue; rising social service costs; and health, fire, and moral hazards. Downtown business elites agreed. “We are disturbed over the blight conditions in our City,” stated one bank executive. These conditions, he added, “are sapping economic and tax-producing strength” throughout the downtown area (Braunschweiger, 1955). Amid fervent suburbanization, many felt Los Angeles was losing coherence. “The city has to have a center to it,” stated one department store owner, “you have to have a hub like a wheel. If you let the hub deteriorate, you haven’t got much to be suburban to” (Qtd. in Gottlieb & Wolt, 1977: 307). Thus, business elites hoped to reassert downtown Los Angeles as the commercial and cultural center of the region. Beginning in the late 1940s, they organized themselves both within and without City agencies to redevelop downtown. This coalition sought to replace downtown’s aging housing stock – as well as its low-income residents – with a music center, luxury housing, and corporate headquarters.

Bunker Hill, just west of the central business district, was identified early on as a primary focus for redevelopment. The area was long understood to impede the growth of downtown business interests. “Bunker Hill has been a barrier to progress in the business district of Los Angeles, preventing the natural expansion westward,” stated one developer in 1929, as part of a proposal to completely erase the Hill using hydraulic mining equipment (Adler, 1964). With steep, narrow roads, the area was mostly inaccessible to cars. To facilitate automobile travel, the city alternatively tunneled through and paved over Bunker Hill. Third Street tunnel in 1901, Broadway and Second Street tunnels in 1924, and the carving of the Harbor Freeway into Bunker Hill’s western edge in the late 1940s contributed to the area’s isolation and deterioration.

By the 1950s, city officials claimed the Hill was a hotbed of crime, disease, fire, and structural decay. Los Angeles Police Department's Central Vice, in a report submitted to the City Council, stated, "this section [...] has become the place of abode for pimps, prostitutes, narcotic peddlers, addicts and the too numerous to mention petty gamblers and thieves who ply their respective trades in the areas adjacent to the Bunker Hill district" (Carter, 1956). According to a survey conducted by the Health Department, a majority of residential structures in the area were either substandard or extremely substandard and needed to be demolished. (Health Department, 1956). The City Planning Department stated Bunker Hill's mixed use development and obsolete street pattern were depressing land values in the downtown area (Planning Department, 1956). An official from the Community Redevelopment Agency (the city bureaucracy responsible for organizing renewal projects) advocated for "the elimination of the health, fire, and police problems on Bunker Hill and the redevelopment of the area into a multiple-residence area providing housing adjacent to [downtown] and returning a high tax yield to the city" (Sesnon, 1955). In the end, the City Council agreed that redevelopment was "urgently needed for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health and safety" (Ordinance No. 104,408, n.d.).

While pro-redevelopment interests emphasized social disorder and structural deterioration, they did not discuss wide-ranging shifts in political economy that were underway. Since 1870, Los Angeles's historical geography had been shaped by expansions in population and urban development whose pace and intensity were unmatched by any other U.S. metropolis. Rapid economic development between 1900 and 1920 quadrupled the region's population; between 1920 and 1940 the population doubled again. This massive influx laid the foundation for what would become the nation's leading industrial metropolis (Scott & Soja, 1996). According to historian Eric Avila, industrialization of the regional economy during the second

quarter of the twentieth century drew to L.A. a labor force that was racially and ethnically diverse. These newcomers arrived as L.A.'s New Deal political culture coalesced around "public spaces such as factories, street fronts, streetcars, nightclubs, amusement parks, ethnic neighborhoods, community centers, and parks." Thus, urban culture in LA during this period was characterized by what Avila describes as a "heterosociality of public life" that undermined Progressive era visions of a generation prior which sought "to create a racially and ethnically homogenous society" (Avila, 2004: 25-6).

L.A.'s rapid demographic growth brought workers from across the U.S., southern and central Europe, Japan, and, especially, Mexico. "In 1920," write geographers Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja, "Mexicans had become the largest immigrant group in Los Angeles." Intense successions of migration centered on L.A. "reinforced the character of Los Angeles as the most racially diverse – and racially segregated – of Pacific Coast cities" (1996: 6) The Depression years, especially, set L.A. apart. Unlike other U.S. cities, L.A.'s population and economy continued to grow in the 1930s. By the end of the decade, Avila writes, "Los Angeles County ranked first nationally in agricultural income, as well as in the production of airplanes and motion pictures, second in auto assembling and retail trade, fourth in women's apparel, and fifth in the overall value of industrial production" (2004: 26). While L.A. cemented its status as a major manufacturing city, brutal class warfare and an open shop that lasted well into the twentieth century kept the region's accelerating wealth out of the hands of L.A.'s working-class (Scott & Soja, 1996: 7).

Industrial and agricultural development centered on particular neighborhoods such as Watts, Boyle Heights, and El Monte, where workers forged political alliances across barriers of work, race, and ethnicity. Although L.A.'s labor movements were comparatively weaker than in

the large industrial cities of the East and Midwest, the 1930s nevertheless occasioned powerful labor organizing. At the height of the Great Depression – as joblessness, homelessness, and hunger became widespread – communists organized rural and urban workers to stage strikes and demonstrations. Radical and reformist political pressure mounted while California promoted piecemeal responses or looked the other way. In L.A., the Communist Party, historian John Laslett states, “was the first to tackle unemployment head on, [...] and it was the only one to take the special plight of racial minorities into account” (2012: 113). Organizers established broad-based networks across the city to protest evictions, unemployment, and the inadequacy of welfare (Laslett, 2012). During this period, Avila states, “Mexican American men and women struggled alongside blacks, Jews, and whites to improve the workplace conditions for longshoremen and cannery and defense workers, and to elect public officials who defended the interests of the city’s working class” (2004: 26). Grassroots struggle pushed the Democratic Party leftward – a move underlined by socialist Upton Sinclair’s nearly successful 1934 gubernatorial campaign, End Poverty in California. Although Sinclair lost his bid, the New Deal coalition had gained significant ground in L.A. by 1936. “In 1930,” writes Laslett, “all of the city’s twenty-two state assembly were held by Republicans. But after 1936, the Democrats held sixteen assembly seats, whereas the Republicans held only six” (2012: 129).

The nationwide postwar economic boom also fueled disproportionate growth in L.A. Between 1940 and 1970 the region’s population tripled - Los Angeles County grew from 2.8 million to more than 7 million (Scott & Soja, 1996). During this period, housing, highways, and industry expanded in earnest beyond Los Angeles City. Helped along by segregationist federal housing policy, many whites of all classes migrated from the city center to suburban peripheries further and further afield (Avila, 2004). Changing job structure also exacerbated inequality.

African-Americans were pushed out of high-wage aerospace, electronics, and defense jobs by whites returning from the Second World War. While public and private money flowed to L.A.'s fledgling residential and industrial suburbs, Downtown and East L.A. suffered disinvestment. Thus, "extreme poverty" concentrated in L.A. where Black people had settled (Gilmore, 2007: 39).

In sum, as Los Angeles grew to new heights of industrial power, political economic conditions were organized to keep wealth out of reach for most workers – especially workers of color and immigrants. Housing policy was an essential tool in this regard. Political struggle surrounding the "problem" of Bunker Hill, which I explore in detail in Chapter 2 below, illustrated the ways that various factions proposed to shape and utilize federal and state housing policies to wage this class war.

CHAPTER 1

Growth, Liberalism, and U.S. Welfare

In the following pages I discuss in some detail a number of local cases where U.S. welfare state policies – particularly as it related to housing – was implemented in ways that exacerbated inequality and residential segregation. I also broadly survey the history of the U.S. welfare state.

When the United States entered the Great Depression, much of the nation’s housing was obsolete by government standards. Officials characterized the conditions in which millions of Americans lived as deleterious to health, safety, and morals (Bellush & Hausknect, 1967). Quality of life problems were compounded foreclosures. To alleviate the housing crisis, the federal government stepped in to an extent unprecedented in the nation’s history.

Establishment of the Public Works Administration (1933) and Federal Housing Authority (1934) created powers to clear substandard housing and provide funds to homeowners and developers for repair and construction (Bellush & Hausknecht, 1967). Amid local opposition, large-scale clearance and low-cost public housing construction proceeded. While many poor urban dwellers did benefit from new construction, Bellush and Hausknect state, “the focus [was] not on dealing with the problems of urban dwellers as such, but on stimulating the economy” (1967: 8). In the absence of a simultaneous building program, the clearance of dilapidated housing actually exacerbated the housing shortage and raised rental prices. The provision of federal funding in the 1930s boosted a lagging economy; but the housing crisis remained acute.

The 1949 Housing Act extended these shortcomings. In concession to public housing opponents, Title I of the Act created provisions for urban redevelopment. Under Title I, federal

money was provided to municipal housing authorities to plan and execute redevelopment projects. Cities purchased land in areas identified as “blighted” (i.e., dilapidated and in need of redevelopment) and sold it to private developers at a mark-down. “In other words,” Bellush and Hausknect explain, “Title I subsidized the purchase of prime land by private entrepreneurs, with the federal government paying the lion’s share of the subsidy” (1967: 12). Developers were free to construct luxury housing, low-rent private housing, commercial or industrial development, or other uses. As a result, swathes of aging, but low-cost housing was demolished, working-class residents were displaced, while commerce, industry, and middle-class housing took their place.

Urban historians refer to this period of intense government involvement in urban development as “growth liberalism” (Hirsch, 1978; Miller, 2014; Self, 2005). In theory, growth liberalism was an optimistic attempt to fashion a more democratic and egalitarian city through large-scale planning. While growth liberals were optimistic reformers, they were still capitalists. Economic growth, especially property value and tax revenue increases, mattered a lot for growth liberals. In practice, liberal federal housing policy beginning in the 1930s worsened the national housing shortage and deepened inequality in at least three ways. First, as I mentioned above, “slum clearance” by the Public Works Administration demolished low-cost (though dilapidated) housing and replaced it with fewer units whose rents were unaffordable to poor urban dwellers. Second, in the absence of adequate relocation provisions, displaced residents were removed from centrally-located urban areas and relegated to crowded, deteriorated, and racially segregated residential areas. Third, suburbanization and urban redevelopment accumulated wealth in the hands of white property owners and business elites at the expense of working- and middle-class urban dwellers, especially African Americans and immigrants.

Federal, state, and local governments have consistently and extensively participated in the construction of racial geographies. In *Managing Inequality: Northern Racial Liberalism in Interwar Detroit*, Karen Miller shows how slum clearance and low-cost housing projects “upheld and formalized residential segregation in Detroit” (2014: 11). Through activism, African Americans won concessions from the New Deal state. They fought for political autonomy and unfettered access to the city’s resources, including housing, sidewalks, buses, and social service provisions (2014: 240). But, while white northern liberals promoted racial equality in rhetoric, they fashioned a state and city that “was neither politically nor economically redistributive” (2014: 13). Slum clearance displaced poor black residents who were not guaranteed relocation. Construction of segregated public housing formalized black Detroiters’ residential isolation.

These strategies were reproduced by cities across the U.S. in the years following World War II. The ghetto of postwar Chicago, for example, Arnold Hirsch states, was “reinforced with tax payer’s dollars and shored up with the power of the state” (1978: 10). Again, residential segregation was the result of deliberate policies carried out by the state – urban redevelopment, suburbanization, and public housing policies, in particular. Although white racist terrorist violence in the first half of the century largely shaped Chicago’s South Side ghettos, the sheer numbers of southern African Americans who migrated to Chicago beginning in 1940 led blacks to settle in previously all-white neighborhoods (1978: 5). Subsidized by the Federal Housing Authority and Home Owner Loan Corporation, whites migrated to the suburbs. In their wake, block busting, housing shortage, and landlord speculation precipitated the physical decline of Chicago’s mostly-black South Side neighborhoods. Chicago’s city government, then, touted crowding and substandard residential conditions as reasons to demolish neighborhoods, move

residents to other segregated and deteriorated neighborhoods, and use the land for middle-class housing and institutional expansion (1978: 10).

Postwar Oakland also witnessed wide-ranging “redistributions” of power, wealth, and people. “Jobs, investment, and taxable wealth left the city,” Robert Self states. “Redevelopment transferred property from residents to private developers. African Americans, displaced by urban renewal, moved into new neighborhoods. Tens of thousands of whites left for the suburbs, others remained in the city but moved away from their black neighbors” (2003: 138). The state gave particular shape to these redistributions. Segregationist housing policies provided means and incentives for whites to migrate to Oakland’s suburban periphery. Redevelopment in West Oakland displaced working-class residents (especially African Americans), dispossessed middle-class property owners and small businesses, and enriched private developers. A more segregated and unequal city resulted from these dislocations.

It is important to recognize the political economic factors that pushed and pulled people, capital, and government in tumultuous interwar and postwar years. The introduction to the Northern political economy of the automated assembly line, “and its counterpart, an aggressive Americanization program among workers by the beginning of the World War I, [...] helped support the rhetoric of racial equality, since it assumed that individual workers should not be differentiated from each other based on their non-work-related identities” (Miller, 2014: 8). In other words, to facilitate economic growth both capitalists and state officials innovated political ideologies regarding “racial equality”. Analogously, administrators of Detroit’s slum clearance and low-income housing programs saw themselves as allies of African Americans; but “their vision meant the removal of the poorest black residents from the city’s downtown district, as well as the expansion and formalization of residential segregation” (Miller, 2014: 240). The

language of “racial equality” was amplified as unequal class and racial hierarchies were simultaneously ushered in.

United States cities were remade politically, economically, geographically, and racially in the years following World War II. The upheavals of this period included large-scale demographic redistribution within the U.S., state expansion at all levels, and political economic flux characterized, in part, by industrial restructuring, suburbanization, and urban redevelopment. These changes threatened the hegemony of many powerful elements. As whites left for the suburbs, downtown business elites and municipal governments suffered lagging property values and decreased business and tax revenues. “Powerful, but severely threatened,” business elites lobbied municipal powers to devise and implement redevelopment strategies (Hirsch, 1978: 101). In cities across the U.S. – including, as we shall see, Los Angeles – redevelopment was neither concerned with housing the city’s most vulnerable residents (the elderly, low-income, and war veterans), nor easing persistent housing shortages. Redevelopment was intended, on the one hand, to attract middle-class and wealthy consumers and, on the other, to enrich private interests situated downtown.

The outcome of political struggle is never predetermined, however. As Hirsch states, “the postwar era provided, theoretically at least, an opportunity for dismantling, instead of expanding, the ghetto. [...] Indeed, the real tragedy surrounding the emergence of the modern ghetto is not that it has been inherited but that it has been periodically renewed and strengthened” (Hirsch, 1978: 5-6). Americans of every race, class, and region struggled to direct the form and meaning of growth liberalism. As Self shows, for example, African American Oaklanders “imagined the city and its possibilities, reacted to urban decline and decay, and fashioned politics and social movements with the ambition of making their neighborhoods and cities better places to live”

(2003: 13). The question, then, for scholars and activists is what constitutes the political power necessary to shape the urban environment?

At present, business and real estate elites have largely succeeded in shaping national, state, and local housing and welfare state policies. One example of this success is the mortgage-interest deduction for homeowners. Sociologist Matthew Davis's profile of upper-income families showed how this works.

Ohene Asare, founder of a technology consulting company, and Régine Jean-Charles, tenured professor at Boston College, lived with their four children in Milton, MA. They owned a beautiful, four-bedroom house worth \$665,000 and earned a combined annual income of about \$290,000, which put them in the top 5 percent of national household incomes in 2017. Sociologist Matthew David (2017) profiled Asare and Jean-Charles and many other families, to shed light on the kinds of structural support wealthy homeowners receive from the government. Asare and Jean-Charles were helped along by a tax break called the mortgage-interest deduction (MID) that allowed U.S. homeowners to deduct mortgage interest and other real estate costs such as property taxes. In 2015, the family claimed \$21,686 in MID, which translated to a savings of \$470 per month. For homeowners nationwide in 2015, the MID and other real estate tax breaks amounted to a \$134 billion subsidy – greater than the combined budgets of the Departments of Education, Justice, and Energy that year. Desmond dubbed the MID and associated deductions, “a generous public housing program for the rich” (2017).

Crisaliz Diaz lived with her two sons in a two-bedroom apartment not far from Asare. She worked for HomeStart, a nonprofit focused on ending and preventing homelessness, where Asara served on the advisory board. Unlike Asare, however, Diaz earned \$38,000 a year (putting her near the bottom third of American household incomes) and paid \$1,385 each month in rent

alone (more than 40 percent of her paycheck). Diaz had virtually no savings and relied on credit cards each month to afford necessities like toilet paper and soap. Any unforeseen expenses would have placed her and her family at risk of eviction. Despite this, Desmond wrote, “Diaz receives no housing assistance.” He continued,

The last time Boston accepted new applications for rental-assistance Section 8 vouchers was nine years ago, when for a few precious weeks you were allowed to place your name on a very long waiting list. Boston is not atypical in that way. In Los Angeles, the estimated wait time for a Section 8 voucher is 11 years. In Washington, the waiting list for housing vouchers is closed indefinitely, and over 40,000 people have applied for public housing alone (2017).

Low-income renters like Diaz face the private rental market alone, where soaring costs claim more and more of their income.

A prevailing assumption, said Desmond, is that most low-income families receive some form of government assistance – such as public housing or Section 8 subsidies. The opposite, however, is true. He wrote, “nationwide, only one in four households that qualifies for rental assistance receives it.” In 2017, he continued, more than half of all poor U.S. families spent more than 50 percent of their income on housing, while one in four spent in excess of 70 percent (Desmond, 2017). A staggering number of working Americans who receive no housing assistance, simply transfer the majority of their income to landlords and utility companies.

Real estate capitalists receive rental payments from their tenants in addition to generous federal and state subsidies. Journalist Alec MacGillis showed how this works (2017). He investigated rental properties in Baltimore, MD, where there is no public housing for a population of 825,000. MacGillis dubbed the roughly 20,000 tenants of rental properties he investigated “the modern precariat – [...] casino workers, distribution-warehouse pickers, Uber drivers, students at for-profit colleges.” While some of these individuals received Section 8 housing vouchers, most paid their own rent, ranging from about \$800 to \$1,300. High costs for

these Baltimore residents were greatly compounded, MacGillis wrote, by the landlord's aggressive rent-collection practices. Tenants were slapped with excessive fees, and many were dragged through court to recover late payment. Management was also negligent with property maintenance, MacGillis wrote. Tenants reported broken appliances, pest infestations, holes in the walls, mold, leaks, and cracks which let in rain and snow. In these situations, residents paid exorbitantly for housing that may have harmed their health.

Most tenants did not know, according to MacGillis, that their negligent landlord was Jared Kushner, President Donald Trump's son-in-law and, until recently, chief executive of a sprawling real estate empire. Following the housing market collapse in 2007, Kushner Companies purchased tens of thousands of foreclosed middle-range rental units. In 2012, according to MacGillis, "a Kushner-led investment group bought 5,500 multifamily units in the Baltimore area with \$371 million in financing from Freddie Mac, the government-backed mortgage lender." Generous government lending, in other words, buoyed Kushner companies as it scooped up properties at foreclosure prices.

These brief examples illustrate large-scale, government-sanctioned upward distributions of wealth. The accumulation of real estate by wealthy entrepreneurs is subsidized by generous federal loans. Homeowners with larger mortgages save more money each month on housing costs. Renters, on the other hand, face stagnant wages and find greater proportions of their income scraped into the hands of landlords and service providers. How and why do government subsidies flow so easily to wealthy homeowners and real estate capitalists, while low-income renters are largely left to fend for themselves?

As we have seen, government subsidies are political economic tools intended to stimulate growth. Housing policy in the U.S. has historically been structured to push funds into the hands

of real estate interests and wealthy homeowners. The modern U.S. state, in other words, is principally concerned with the accumulation of wealth and the maintenance of inequality. The Bunker Hill story demonstrates the nuts-and-bolts of how local capitalist interests organized to shape housing policy for precisely this purpose. Before ratcheting down to the local level, however, it may be helpful to broadly review how the U.S. welfare state developed at the national level.

The Emergence of U.S. Welfare

The U.S. welfare state was organized to address problems associated with industrialization, urbanization, and rapid population growth at the beginning of the twentieth century. Mass migration to cities strained infrastructure and posed serious problems for U.S. city dwellers and governments. City and town governments stumbled over deepening crises of housing, transportation, sanitation, water-supply, healthcare, schooling, and poverty. Harms associated with these living conditions, such as disease and crime, boomed in densely populated working-class residential areas. These soon spread beyond the “slums,” threatening all city dwellers (Garland, 2016).

Economic crises of the 1890s and 1930s greatly compounded problems of urban inequality. Mass unemployment and runaway inflation were met by labor opposition. Workers organized to oppose their living and working conditions – some organized poor relief, others articulated anti-capitalist alternatives to social and economic inequality. “The events of these years,” wrote sociologist David Garland, “shifted the balance of political power and the character of social relations, increasing the influence of trade unions and working people” (2016: 38). Thus, New Deal policies emerged as an answer to extreme inequality and political-economic instability.

Social welfare programs that present-day readers may take for granted took shape as a response to this political economic flux. Social insurance against income loss; income supports through food stamps, Earned Income Tax Credits, Medicaid, free school meals, and General Assistance; publicly-funded social services such as public schools, affordable housing, parks, and transportation; social services such as probation, social work, and child services; and government of the economy through tax laws, fiscal policy, minimum wages laws, etc. – these and many other measures were inaugurated with the U.S. welfare state. It is important to consider, Garland wrote, that welfare programs were aimed at preserving the status quo. “Social welfare,” he wrote, “was made to humanize capitalism – but also to make it more resistant to socialist challenge” (2016: 42). While welfare programs did – and continue to – alleviate suffering and provide opportunities for many poor people, the principal concern was, Garland continued, to “stimulate demand, keep money circulating, prompt investment, and sustain commerce” (2016: 42).

Federal housing policy, which took shape in the wake of the Great Depression, is one part of this legacy. In 1929, the nation’s wealth soared to unprecedented levels. At the same time, about 50 per cent of all U.S. families survived on minimum subsistence income. Over the next several years, following the economic collapse, hundreds of thousands of homeowners lost their property through foreclosures. Real estate construction stagnated while housing needs became increasingly dire (Bellush & Hausknecht, 1964). Thus, in the early 1930s, poverty and instability worsened for poor Americans and grasped many more.

To stimulate growth, quell dissent, and alleviate the plight of some, the federal government greatly expanded its involvement in real estate. In 1933 the Roosevelt administration established the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC). The HOLC loaned billions to homeowners and

refinanced existing mortgages at lower interest rates and longer repayment periods. In other words, the HOLC redistributed wealth downward to homeowners, securing modest housing stability for many. Renters and other poor urban and rural dwellers, however, were not extended similar subsidies. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) was established in 1934. The FHA insured new mortgages and loans for repair and construction with low interest rates and long repayment periods. FHA loans subsidized repair and construction undertaken by landlords, developers, and other real estate entrepreneurs. FHA-insured mortgages also shielded property owners from risk. If homeowners defaulted on mortgages, the government would cover the cost instead of banks or landlords. Through FHA and HOLC outlays, the federal government bailed out homeowners and shielded real estate entrepreneurs from risk.

The Public Works Administration (PWA) (established 1933) and the United States Housing Authority (USHA) (established 1937 as part of that year's Housing Act) created powers for cities to clear aging residential sections and construct low-rent public housing. In addition to providing shelter for urban poor, the PWA and USHA administered many publicly-funded social services such as public schools, libraries, parks, transportation, and other amenities. These amenities were distinct from public housing in that they were provided equally to all, not just low-income residents. For this reason, public works represented the most egalitarian aspects of the welfare state, akin to "social rights." Public infrastructure was not, however, politically neutral. New Deal reformers designed, organized, and implemented "decommodified" amenities in ways that both alleviated and ensured inequality; stimulated economic growth; and opposed anti-capitalist organizing (Garland, 2016).

Public housing and slum clearance represented modest downward redistribution of wealth that benefited many poor urban dwellers, but worsened the plight of others. More rental units

were demolished than created, thereby deepening the housing shortage; new units were generally too expensive for those who had occupied cleared housing; and public housing increased and institutionalized racial segregation in many cities (Garland, 2016; Miller, 2014; Hirsch, 1989). By the end of the decade, public housing construction had largely tapered off, as the nation's productive energies shifted to the war build-up (Bellush & Hausknecht, 1964). In general, 1930s federal housing policy was aimed at preserving the capitalist order by stimulating the economy; concern with the housing problems faced by poor urban and rural dwellers was largely ancillary.

In its capacity as a reformist institution, the welfare state maintains a contradictory and extremely complicated relation to capitalism. "In welfare state societies," Garland wrote, "privately-determined economic action and publicly-determined social protection are shackled together. The result is a contradictory hybrid in which each structure works to sustain but also to undermine the other" (2016: 52). Welfare programs buoy capitalism by providing a level of basic subsistence for some. They institutionalize inequality by distributing resources unevenly by race, class, gender, and geography. At the same time, however, they provide a measure of protection and opportunity to some. Welfare programs are meant simultaneously to stimulate growth, prevent radical organizing, and alleviate social and economic harms. For this reason, the meaning and extent of welfare programs are the object of intense struggle. Workers organize to force downward distributions of wealth through tax reform; minimum wage increases; legal protections; and the provision of social services like housing, transportation, General Assistance, and many other means. At the same time, capitalist factions organize (often at cross purposes) to build states and tweak policy for their own benefit. For example, as Desmond showed, the National Association of Realtors has lobbied for decades to preserve the MID: "a government subsidy that increases the prices of homes they build and sell" (Desmond, 2017).

In the late 1940s, real estate interests successfully organized to increase federal outlays for private housing activities. In 1945, a representative of the National Association of Real Estate Boards asserted before the US Senate that the current housing shortage should be addressed through deregulation. The government should intervene in labor disputes and streamline the production of materials so that a large-scale private homebuilding program could progress uninhibited (Farr, n.d.). The role of the federal government, according to real estate interests, should be to clear the way for private construction; this, as opposed to federal, state, and local housing authorities building housing directly. The Housing Act of 1949 reflected this sentiment. “There [was] apparent in the law,” wrote Bellush and Hausknecht, “a not-too-subtle shift to concern with private enterprise rather than the very real housing need of the society” (1967: 13). The major responsibility for the provision of housing was placed with private real estate interests. As before, federal money was provided to clear aging residential districts; but after 1949, the requirements for public housing construction were substantially decreased. The private real estate industry surely produced more market-rate housing as a result of these provisions. But the “slums” where poor people lived were demolished and redeveloped with few requirements to provide displaced residents with affordable replacement housing. Following the Housing Act of 1954, this trend was increased. In addition to private housing and some public housing, federal funding was diverted to redevelopment for non-residential uses, such as civic and commercial expansions.

In 1937 public housing in the US advanced myriad purposes. The program was intended, in part, to provide decent shelter to poor urban dwellers; diffuse radical anti-capitalist demands; and stimulate the private construction industry, which was then, as now, an integral facet of the national economy. By the end of the following decade, however, with the Second World War

ended and the economic crises of the 1930s no longer directly threatening elites, real estate and other private interests organized to dismantle the modest redistributions of wealth instituted between 1932 and 1937. These political reorganizations were institutionalized, in part, by the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954, which directed federal, state, and local resources toward the private housing industry and away from poor urban dwellers. Said differently, elites, through political struggle, built and reformed the state's capacity to redistribute resources upward.

The ramifications of this political struggle were observable surrounding the housing crisis in postwar Los Angeles.

CHAPTER 2

From Public Housing to Private Redevelopment

In postwar Los Angeles, housing was a serious problem. There was widespread lack of affordable housing for L.A.'s working class. As a result, workers were often crowded into dilapidated buildings, or wherever they could find shelter. Factions from across the political spectrum proposed solutions to this problem. But most solutions provided scant relief for ill-housed Angelenos.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, liberal reformers held powerful positions in L.A. Reformers proposed large-scale planning and redevelopment, including public housing construction for thousands of low-income families. In the early 1950s, however, an insurgent faction of real estate and other business interests organized to oppose public housing by equating it with Communism and Socialism. Elites successfully pushed for federal, state, and local legislation that prioritized private redevelopment over public housing construction. Los Angeles business interests were ultimately successful in their bid for power. In the immediate postwar, the city was a national leader in public housing provision. After a spectacular debate over public housing in the early 1950s, however, L.A. definitively ended its public housing campaign. As a result of their political organizing, local elites managed to restructure in significant ways the priorities of the federal, state, and local welfare state in order to subsidize real estate speculation and Central Business District gentrification.

In 1945, at the height of the housing crisis in Los Angeles, the California Redevelopment Law was created. Redevelopment was a significant turning point in the state's approach to the housing question. With public housing, the state directly addressed the provision of housing for

low-income people and exercised maximum control over the planning, construction, and management of these developments. Redevelopment, on the other hand, grew the responsibility of private entities with regard to housing provision and urban development. At the same time, while private entities were allowed to profit from redevelopment, public agencies shouldered a great deal of the costs for acquiring and preparing redevelopment areas. The shift from public housing provision to redevelopment was, broadly speaking, a shift from social service provision to subsidized profit. California, which established the first redevelopment agencies in the US, was the breeding ground for this political economic shift.

Affordability, Growth Liberalism, and Public Housing

By 1945 the housing shortage in Los Angeles was acute. About 162,000 families, including 50,000 veterans, writes historian Donald Parson, “were living in tents, garages, trailers, and firetrap hotels. They were doubled- and tripled-up in existing houses, sleeping on boats in the harbor or in buses without tires” (Parson, 2005: 76). Returning veterans were given priority for public housing. But, in that year, not a single vacant public housing unit was available and the waiting list had grown to 6,000 families (Parson, 2005: 76). Those displaced by highway expansion therefore were left to fend for themselves in a fiercely competitive rental housing market. As a result, many thousands were prevented from securing decent or stable housing.

In a 1947 report prepared by the Los Angeles City Planning Commission, the California Housing Authority, and Mayor Fletcher Bowron’s Emergency Housing Committee, it was estimated that more than 250,000 additional housing units were needed by 1948. At the contemporary rate of homebuilding, the report went on to state, that number would not be reached for more than seven years – over which time the need would surely increase due to population growth, structural deterioration, and the clearance of housing units for highway

expansion. The Planning Commission doubted the ability of the private housing industry to adequately meet this need (Parson, 2005: 89).

Charles L. Parr, a real estate entrepreneur and representative of the Apartment House Association of Los Angeles, during a public hearing on the matter, disputed the existence of a housing shortage. There was, by Parr's estimate, a surplus of housing – enough to accommodate 170,560 persons. Rent controls imposed by the Office of Price Administration, he asserted, were responsible for the “artificial” shortage (Qtd. in Parson, 2005: 67). Because rent controls minimized returns on real estate investment, he suggested, homebuilders were discouraged from undertaking new construction. Mr. Parr's request for rental market deregulation may indeed have encouraged developers to ramp up housing construction. This, however, would have done little to address the housing shortage. Real estate speculation in the suburbs already exceeded demand (Dear, 1996). But L.A.'s working class, in the aggregate, found this housing to be out of reach. Contemporary economic studies showed average manufacturing earnings in L.A. were almost 30 percent less than the minimum standard of living (Alexander & Bryant, 1951). Thus, at midcentury, the city's poor and working class (disproportionately African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans, but also many poor whites) had few opportunities for decent housing.

L.A.'s “housing crisis” was not precisely a housing shortage; it was a crisis of affordability. There may indeed have been, as Parr asserted, a sufficient stock of housing to provide shelter to the estimated 162,000 persons unstably housed in 1945. But the “surplus” buildings identified by the Apartment House Association of Los Angeles had not been constructed for the purpose of providing shelter. They were intended, rather, to generate profit.

City planners Robert Alexander and Drayton Bryant, in a 1951 publication entitled *Rebuilding a City*, elaborated this point. They were doubtful of the private housing industry's ability to address L.A.'s housing crisis. Private homebuilding, they wrote, entailed "limited public purpose and even less public control" (9). For developers, housing was a commodity. "When private large-scale lenders invest money in housing," Alexander and Bryant explained, "[it is] in order to earn a return on their capital." This imperative to profit was inimical to affordability. "Inability to pay for decent housing," the planners wrote, "is the basic economic fact which chains the great majority of families to slum areas ... [where] not more than 10 to 20 percent of the families can afford to rent or buy existing minimum housing elsewhere" (6).

To fill the void left by the private housing industry, Alexander and Bryant proposed "a broad-scale economic, social, and physical planning program, one part of which is an integrated housing and redevelopment program" (5). In the absence of large-scale planning, speculation would continue unabated; low-income housing needs would continue to be unmet. Even if private developers chose to redevelop aging residential areas (which they rarely did, due to high cost of land downtown) new units would be wildly unaffordable for the low-income residents who lived in these areas. In Alexander and Bryant's view, public housing was the only solution. Municipal housing authorities were prevented from speculating on real estate or garnering profit from housing and their activities were subject to public control. In other words, housing authorities treated housing as shelter rather than commodity.

Public housing was seen as a necessary component of a city-wide redevelopment plan. Between 1940 and 1948 the Planning Department, in collaboration with the Health Department and nascent Community Redevelopment Agency, studied ten "blighted" areas - home to more than 93,000 people - for potential redevelopment (Alexander & Bryant, 1951: 20). If these areas

were redeveloped without a simultaneous expansion of the low-rent housing stock, displaced residents would likely be forced to move to areas where crowding and structural deterioration were equally poor or worse. Alexander and Bryant therefore advocated that less-dense areas should be given priority for redevelopment. Initial projects, the planners asserted, should host a mix of low-rent, medium-rent, and luxury housing, as well as commercial properties – thereby nurturing cross-class communities of mixed use. The availability of low-rent public housing in other areas that were less developed would also ensure that residents displaced from centrally-located neighborhoods by successive redevelopment would have the option to relocate (Bryant & Alexander, 1951).

For example, Bunker Hill, home to 13,882 people on ninety-eight acres in 1940, was the densest residential district in Los Angeles. A great many of the Hill's residents were poor; many received income only from old-age pensions, disability payments, or low-paid or marginal work. The "problem of moving and rehousing" these individuals, Alexander and Bryant stated, "is the chief stumbling block to any redevelopment program for Bunker Hill" (45). Thus, the planners proposed Chavez Ravine should be redeveloped first, in order to provide relocation housing for Bunker Hill's residents. "The Chavez Ravine area," they wrote, "is the one central area which can be of major assistance in the eventual rebuilding of Bunker Hill. Since it is made up largely of vacant land [... it may] be the fulcrum on which to raise the entire long-term redevelopment program" (45). Alexander and architect Richard Neutra proposed the Elysian Park Heights project for Chavez Ravine. The complex would provide housing for 17,000 residents – 3,364 units in twenty-four thirteen-story towers on a 278-acre site. In addition to housing, the project would contain three churches, three schools, kindergartens, nurseries, a Community Hall, a 1,500-person auditorium, and a commercial center (Parson, 2005). This modern facility would

anchor the planner's city-wide redevelopment vision by providing housing for the current residents of Chavez Ravine as well as those displaced from Bunker Hill and other proposed redevelopment sites.

A brief aside is in order here. Alexander, Bryant, and other liberal planners in Los Angeles during the postwar years were interested primarily in growth. Humanitarian concern, though earnest and genuine, was subsidiary to liberal planners' vision of a city nurtured by vigorous and sustained capitalism. In *Rebuilding a City*, Alexander and Bryant expressed at length their concerns over falling tax revenue. Property tax was the major source of local revenue for the city. But, they stated, the city faced a significant tax problem for two reasons. First, rising unemployment coupled with disinvestment in certain neighborhoods. Families faced mounting pressure as wages stagnated or disappeared and housing costs rose. Some secured housing in the area by doubling up with friends or relatives; others moved away. As a result, vacancies, foreclosures, tax delinquency, and a dwindling tax base reduced city revenues. Secondly, rising inflation caused the cost of municipal operations to increase (Alexander & Bryant, 1951). In short, costs rose out of proportion with revenue. "As a consequence," Alexander and Bryant asserted, "the better areas of the city must produce not only enough revenue to pay for the services which they themselves receive, but must produce a large surplus to help carry the load of the tax-deficient areas. The owners of the average and better-than-average properties are thus subsidizing the owners of the tax-deficient property" (1). The problem of falling tax revenues was, the planners stated plainly, "the principal economic justification for rebuilding uneconomic areas" (22). Redevelopment's principal aim, by corollary, was to raise land values and increase tax revenue.

In addition to new, modern, and economically productive buildings, planners hoped that redevelopment would encourage wealthy Angelenos to live and consume in redeveloped areas. Suburbanization had substantially undercut downtown commercial activity. High-end commerce had relocated, along with wealthy residents, to outlying districts. “Many stores which once featured high-priced, high quality goods,” the planners lamented, “now carry cheaper merchandise to attract the trade of the low-income groups in the surrounding blighted and near-blighted areas.” Swaths of dilapidated housing would be removed, according to Alexander and Bryant’s plan, and replaced with “governmental, commercial, or light industrial areas [... as well as] livable, residential neighborhoods that would attract families in the middle, and even some in the upper, income groups” (2). While contemporary planning emphasized highways as the solution to this problem – allowing wealthy residents to travel by car from suburbs to the traditional downtown commercial district – Alexander and Bryant believed that commerce could best be sustained if wealthy residents actually lived in the vicinity.

Despite this, proposals advanced by liberal planners did represent modest redistribution of resources to poor urban dwellers – most clearly through the provision of public housing. Thousands of low-income families in Los Angeles were able to secure inexpensive, stable, and decent housing as a result of public housing construction. Public housing in Los Angeles was racially integrated and served as a platform for working-class solidarity. The modest security and communality provided by public housing allowed workers to build and renovate broad political capacities. “Within the public housing projects,” writes Parson about postwar public housing in Los Angeles, “political expression emerged from the communal experiences of tenants as they organized around issues of self-management, shared housework, day care, opposition to racism, and confrontation of hostile real estate interests” (Parson, 2005: 69). Grassroots organizing was

channeled upward, shaping political organizing on a national scale. The AFL, for example, called for the construction of 500,000 units of housing per year in combination with a nationwide slum-clearance program. The CIO, likewise, advocated for the construction of 1.5 million housing units (at least 500,000 publicly owned) over twenty years (Parson, 2005).

In the immediate postwar, Los Angeles was a national leader of public housing provision. In 1945, 53,469 Angelenos lived in 12,275 units of public housing (Parson, 2005). In 1949 the City of Los Angeles, with unanimous support from the city council, contracted with the federal government to construct 10,000 additional public housing units (Parson, 2005). L.A., according to the City Housing Authority, was on its way to becoming “the nation’s first city free of bad housing” (Qtd. in Parson, 2005: 76). But this goal was to be cut short.

From Public Housing to Private Redevelopment

In 1952 and 1953, a well-organized coalition of real estate interests organized a fierce red-baiting campaign in opposition to the 10,000 proposed units of public housing. With publishing support from the Los Angeles *Times*, which had substantial real estate investment in the downtown area, real estate interests widely distributed pamphlets which dubbed Mayor Bowron’s City Housing Authority the “GESTAPO HOUSING AUTHORITY” (Qtd. in Gottlieb & Wolt, 1977: 260). Local real estate entrepreneur Fritz Burns, founder of Committee Against Socialist Housing (CASH), bought billboards across the city that warned, “Don’t pay somebody else’s rent!” CASH printed ads in the *Times* and other sympathetic papers with headlines such as, “CRIME In Public Housing!” (Qtd. in Parson, 2005: 76). Local real estate interests took to the streets, public hearings, and news media to push the notion that public housing was a dangerous, communistic institution that posed a threat to Americans’ way of life.

In January 1952, amidst mounting political pressure, the Los Angeles City Council unanimously agreed to submit the public housing contract to a city-wide vote. The Council did not have the authority to rescind the approval of the City Housing Authority's contract with the federal government. And if the contract was broken, Los Angeles would owe the federal government over \$13 million. The Council, however, apparently felt that public sentiment against public housing had grown enough since 1949 that their support of public housing construction may undermine their chances for reelection. In June 1952, the majority of voters chose to cancel the public housing contract.

Due largely to his support of public housing, Mayor Bowron lost his 1953 reelection bid to conservative businessman Norris Poulson. After taking office, Poulson, in defiance of a California Supreme Court ruling that stated Los Angeles must carry out the FHA contract, pushed through an Ordinance that officials ended the city's adherence to the 1949 Housing Contract. Only about 4,000 new units were constructed instead of the planned 10,000. And these scant units were the last to be constructed in Los Angeles up to present day.

To better understand what I mean by pro-redevelopment real estate elites it may be helpful to observe the Downtown Business Men's Association (DBMA). A powerful pro-redevelopment advocate, the DBMA represented over 250 downtown businesses – principally, bankers, insurance and energy corporations, prominent newspapers, and department stores (Downtown Business Men's Association, 1959). During one public hearing, Walter J. Braunschwiger (President, DBMA and Executive Vice President, Bank of America) promoted the Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project as “important to the future growth and continuing well-being of the Los Angeles metropolitan area as an active, convenient, functional, attractive, and healthy [city].” A thriving and profitable downtown, according to Braunschwiger, was essential

to L.A.'s growth and well-being. He added that the central business district generated tax revenue and retail sales far in excess of its size relative to the total area of the City. But, he complained, "blight" was "sapping economic and tax-producing strength" (Braunschwiger, 1955). In the opinion of the DBMA, redevelopment would correct "blight" insofar as it would invigorate downtown's tax base and make it an attractive and accessible area for middle-class consumers to reside.

Downtown department stores, perhaps even more so than banking, insurance, and energy corporations, staked their future on downtown redevelopment. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, department stores had enormous influence over L.A. politics, culture, and urban development. As Richard Longstreth writes, "No other kind of business activity and no infrastructural project appears to have matched the impact of [department stores] in setting the main paths and parameters of downtown [L.A.] into the mid-twentieth century" (1997: 24). L.A.'s pattern of development in the first two decades of the century largely coalesced around department stores. This meant, in other words, that department stores had enormous investments at stake in the continued prosperity of downtown L.A.

How, specifically, did investment on the part of department store owners shape downtown? In short, during the first decades of the twentieth century the development of L.A.'s urban core was directly tied to department store expansion – more so, even, than public infrastructural development. Flagship construction was combined with real estate speculation on undeveloped land adjacent to the nineteenth century urban core. This practice secured profits as well as cultural, economic, and political supremacy for several reasons. Owners acquired cheaper land and won greater profits through speculation than retail alone. And, to undercut competitors located on congested downtown streets, new flagships were built along outlying roads –

providing easy access from middle- and upper-class residential tracts. Thus, between 1900 and 1920, the commercial center of L.A. expanded horizontally, drifting several blocks south and west. Central business district expansion was hampered by Bunker Hill on the west side, however, and new areas soon became as congested as the old (Longstreth, 1997).

Bullock's department store is one example of this. Its flagship, constructed 1906-1907, was sited a few blocks south of the commercial center. Over the next ten years, Bullock's expanded its floor area to nearly 460,000 square feet by constructing a new skyscraper and purchasing several adjacent buildings (Longstreth, 1997). Congestion soon followed, however. And, as Angelenos' early love affair with automobiles grew in the late 1920s, retail expansion progressed to areas well beyond downtown to provide convenient access to middle- and upper-class consumers. Bullock's, for its part, opened a branch in 1929 on Wilshire Boulevard, complete with valet parking (Longstreth, 1997).

The imperative to seek new markets further and further afield contributed to the decline of the central business district. This was evident by 1930, when a major tourist guide observed downtown was "experiencing serious competition from the sections developing along main arteries and in the suburbs of the greater city" (Federal Writers Project, 2011: 145). Between 1930 and 1950 construction downtown was at a standstill. Major property owners, led by the DBMA and major department store owners, attempted remodeling. When this failed to stimulate growth, however, they changed course.

In contemporary Chicago, which witnessed analogous development, "powerful but severely threatened" downtown business leaders harnessed expanded state power to implement downtown redevelopment (Hirsch, 1978). This proved to be the case in Los Angeles, as well. P.G. Winnett, Chairman of Bullock's was a major ally of the CRA during the 1950s. During one

Council Public Hearing, he spoke in support of the CRA's plan, stating that redevelopment would "stabilize" property values, which had been stagnant or falling in recent years (City Clerk, 1956). B.O. Miller, president of Great Los Angeles Plans, Incorporated (another business association whose membership largely overlapped with the DBMA) insisted downtown must be improved to increase tax revenue. The CRA's plan, he added, would be completed without cost to taxpayers (City Clerk, 1956).

Between 1954 and 1959, downtown business elites aggressively lobbied councilmembers to support the total redevelopment of Bunker Hill. They accepted the characterizations of blight on Bunker Hill advanced by the CRA and allied city agencies. By replacing low-cost single room occupancy housing with high rise luxury apartments, by replacing low-income and working-class residents with upper-class consumers, the downtown commercial district would, on the one hand, benefit from an influx of well-to-do shoppers, and, on the other, be relieved of burdensome tax rates.

In 1945, at the height of the housing crisis in Los Angeles, the California Redevelopment Law was created. Redevelopment was a significant turning point in the state's approach to the housing question. With public housing, the state directly addressed the provision of housing for low-income people and exercised maximum control over the planning, construction, and management of these developments. Redevelopment, on the other hand, grew the responsibility of private entities with regard to housing provision and urban development. At the same time, while private entities were allowed to profit from redevelopment, public agencies shouldered a great deal of the costs for acquiring and preparing redevelopment areas. The shift from public housing provision to redevelopment was, broadly speaking, a shift from social service provision

to subsidized profit. California, which established the first redevelopment agencies in the US, was the breeding ground for this political economic shift.

According to California Redevelopment Law (CRL) redevelopment agencies, responsible for organizing redevelopment projects, could be established at the local level. Redevelopment agencies were empowered to acquire, sell, and develop land; finance its own operations by borrowing public money and selling bonds; impose land use and development controls; and the obligation to relocate persons by redevelopment. The ideological and structural arrangements of redevelopment policies traced to President Hoover's 1932 Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, which proposed large-scale, centralized "district replanning" at the local level. In the early 1940s, the Federal Housing Authority and Urban Land Institute advocated for replanning and redevelopment to be carried out by state-enabled local redevelopment commissions that would use federal funds to acquire land in dilapidated districts and sell or lease it to private developers (Marks, 2004). In California, redevelopment was seen as a means to entice private investment in "blighted" districts by offering initial public funding. Redevelopment agencies typically borrowed money, through the issuance of bonds, in order to offer this initial funding to developers.

Bunker Hill was the densest neighborhood in Los Angeles. According to a 1957 study by the Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, 60% of the area's 362 properties were "dangerous" and required demolition (Department of Building and Safety, 1957). Before the powers of redevelopment were created, developers would have to purchase individual properties, demolish those structures designated as officially "dangerous," and then build new structures. This process, according to contemporary real estate advocates, was too expensive and arduous. Planners and other city officials argued this incremental process was not sufficient to eliminate

blight in large areas. Redevelopment was advanced as the solution. The CRA bought all 362 properties on Bunker Hill, demolished them, regraded the hill, constructed new streets and other necessary infrastructure, and divided the land into ready-to-develop properties. This preparatory development was funded by federal grants and bonds issued by the CRA. The prepared properties were sold to developers at costs below what the CRA had initially paid.

The Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), created under Mayor Fletcher Bowron in 1948, was the public bureaucracy that organized Bunker Hill's redevelopment. City planners in the 1940s believed private development alone could not work on a scale large enough to provide adequate housing and correct urban decay. Thus, they pushed for state legislation that would institutionalize the power to condemn, clear, and redevelop land (Marks, 2004). The California Redevelopment Law of 1945 made it possible to create local redevelopment agencies with authority to acquire, sell, and develop land; finance its own operations by borrowing public money and selling bonds; impose land use and development controls; and the obligation to relocate persons displaced by redevelopment (Marks, 2004).

As with contemporary federal housing policy, the California Redevelopment Law of 1945 reflected conflicting efforts of advocates for low-income housing and business and real estate interests who sought to rejuvenate lagging commercial districts (Marks, 2004). This tension shaped the resulting pattern of urban growth and development. In L.A., as elsewhere, city officials, business and real estate elites successfully organized redevelopment to increase tax revenue, raise land values, and facilitate middle- and upper-class consumption in downtown commercial districts. Urban Redevelopment policy between 1940 and 1960, state David Madden and Peter Marcuse, "was seen by its proponents as a means of strengthening downtown and eliminating the sight of urban decay nearby. Supporters were not concerned with aiding those

who were poorly housed but with tearing down areas they considered to be slums – at least those located near major business centers.” (2016: 131). L.A. City Planners advanced the construction of low-income housing as justification for the Redevelopment Law (Marks, 2004); but, the resulting redevelopment projects did not resolve the housing shortage or improve the quality of life for poor residents of downtown. Although the CRA would over the next sixty years finance the construction or rehabilitation of more than 28,000 units of low-cost housing, the vast majority of these were sited outside of the central business district (Marks, 2004). In other words, the intent of redevelopment was to secure Downtown L.A. for commercial and luxury housing development, while evacuating thousands of low-income residents.

The CRA’s Board of Commissioners – appointed by Mayor Bowron – was dominated by downtown business and real estate elites. Under their administration, the CRA explicitly and repeatedly stated that federal, state, and city Urban Redevelopment outlays would be used to construct luxury housing and institutional headquarters, thereby raising Bunker Hill and adjacent property values. CRA Chairman and oil and real estate heir William Sesnon emphasized that Bunker Hill’s annual tax revenue would increase more than six fold following redevelopment (Sesnon, 1955b). “The purpose here,” he stated, “is to use the Community Redevelopment Agency’s power of eminent domain to clear out slum and sub-standard housing conditions, and restore the land to its highest use in keeping with its location in the heart of a thriving metropolis” (Sesnon, 1955c). Bunker Hill’s land use was more than just out-of-place; in the eyes of CRA and other pro-redevelopment officials, the Hill undermined profitable developments in the area. “This decaying area threatens both the expanding Civic Center and downtown business district,” stated one CRA pamphlet (CRA, n.d.). The Agency and city social service agencies pointed to the presence of alcoholics, high rates of tuberculosis, fire hazards, crowded and

substandard housing to argue that Bunker Hill was a decrepit anachronism in the heart of a modernizing city. Quite explicitly, the Hill was viewed as a cancer whose spread could only be prevented through removal.

What would the appropriate land use for Bunker Hill be, according to the CRA? Over radio waves, newspaper broadsides, and in public hearings between 1954 and 1956, the Agency promoted their answer to this question. Sesnon summed up the CRA's goals in a presentation to Mayor Poulson, city agencies, and members of the City Council in 1956:

In launching this program, we propose to eliminate a number of extremely sub-standard and poor rooming houses and hotel units which constitute a menace to health and lives. We seek to clear blighted conditions which have raised disease, crime, and juvenile delinquency rates above the community average. We seek the demolition of wooden frame structures, as much as eight stories high, which constitute a serious fire hazard (Sesnon, 1956).

Where “blighted conditions” then prevailed, Sesnon explained, the CRA would erect “modern, privately-owned and operated buildings ... All this, I might add, on the basis of our own free enterprise system” (Sesnon, 1954).

The CRA's Bunker Hill plan featured residential, commercial, and “civic-trade” uses. This included apartments, shopping centers, parking, office buildings, a “major hotel”, and, tentatively, a civic auditorium including “convention and trade show exhibition areas and a music center.” (CRA, n.d.). The Hill's new residents, according to the CRA, would be office workers and civic employees. In addition, several thousand tourists and out-of-town businessmen would find luxury accommodations in a large new hotel. The entire area, stated the CRA in a press release, would have “an almost park-like appearance” (CRA, n.d.); Bunker Hill residents, office workers, and visitors could luxuriate in plazas and planted gardens during lunch breaks, weekends, or visits.

Before the gleaming new buildings could be erected, or the landscaped plazas planted, the CRA would “prepare” the land. The Agency would buy or condemn property; demolish all existing structures; completely regrade the Hill (reducing its elevation by more than 100 feet in places); construct utilities; and adjust the street pattern (CRA, 1970). The plan was, in short, a massive infrastructural project to completely refiguring the area. The erasure of Bunker Hill’s landscape - the removal of people, earth, brick, wood, concrete, and glass – would, according to the CRA’s rationale, erase social and economic problems characterized as “blight,” “disease,” and “crime.”

By exercising maximum control over Bunker Hill’s land use, the CRA hoped that Bunker Hill’s transformation would improve the surrounding area as well. The Agency, in collaboration with city Planning officials, would rezone the area (CRA, 1970). Nearly 20,000 parking spaces would also be created, to facilitate access to the civic center and downtown area for middle- and upper-class white suburban commuters. Pedestrian and automobile traffic would be integrated to facilitate “convenient pedestrian circulation, ... higher land usage,” and the efficient flow of traffic between the Harbor Freeway to the west and downtown streets to the east (CRA, 1970).

The CRA was required by law to relocate displaced residents. Sesnon insisted the CRA would find housing for displaced people “in approximately the same price range” as that available on Bunker Hill (Sesnon, 1954). But he pointed to a similar redevelopment project in New York City where only seven percent of displaced residents “needed help in getting reestablished in new dwellings” (Sesnon, 1954). And, indeed, when it came time for the CRA to set aside funds for relocation the budgeted for only seven percent of the Hill’s population. Nevertheless, he claimed redevelopment would “relieve” the Hill’s elderly residents of their poor housing conditions and relocate them in “new, better designed, and more fitting housing”

(Sesnon, 1955). Whereas “modern, clean and attractive” homes were proposed for 20,000 people on Bunker Hill, it was unclear if these would be made available to the area’s elderly and other residents.

How would the CRA finance the Bunker Hill project? And, more importantly, how would they sidestep accusations of “Socialism” or “Communism” which had undermined the recent proposals for public housing construction? On this, the CRA was adamant: “NO COST TO TAXPAYERS,” they proclaimed in one fact sheet delivered to the City Council (CRA, n.d.). The project costs were explained in a press release following City Council approval of the CRA’s Redevelopment Plan in 1956. It was estimated that about \$40 million would be required to purchase all the properties on the Hill, clear the land, regrade the hill, construct utilities, and realign streets (CRA, 1970). Two thirds of this amount would be provided by federal funds, through both grants and loans. Federal loans, CRA officials stated, would be “repaid in part by the ultimate sale of the land to private developers” (CRA, 1970). Since land would be sold to developers for less than the city paid to acquire it, there would be a difference remaining. The CRA would assume the remaining third of the project cost, estimated at about 7 million. “The local one-third share of the Net Project Cost,” stated the CRA Redevelopment Plan, “is to be provided by the sale of Agency tax allocation bonds” (CRA, 1970). In other words, property taxes derived from Bunker Hill following its redevelopment would be put directly toward debt servicing. Tax allocation bonds, also known as tax increment bonds, would be used to foot the Agency’s \$7 million bill and to repay federal loans and interest in excess of that covered by the sale of land to developers. The final cost to the CRA, according to its Redevelopment Plan, would be “in the neighborhood of \$15,000,000” (CRA, 1970). The use of tax increment

financing, however, allowed Agency officials to suggest that the project paid for itself, thus posing “no cost to taxpayers.”

What is tax increment financing? In short, tax increment financing captures property tax revenue which is then used to service debt and/or finance further redevelopment. Property tax, like any tax, is allocated directly to the taxing authority (in this case, the City of Los Angeles); it is, thus, public money dispensed by the municipality for public purposes. According to tax increment financing, however, after Bunker Hill was redeveloped the City continued to receive the same tax revenue as that generated prior to redevelopment. Any increase in property taxes beyond this amount as a result of redevelopment and subsequent increases in land value, however, was be siphoned directly to the CRA. This mechanism was innovated by the CRA in 1951 following the electoral defeat of a general obligation bond issue that would have financed Bunker Hill and other redevelopment projects. CRA historian Mara Marks has noted that tax increment financing granted the Agency financial autonomy. It was also intended to ease reliance on federal funding, which was seen by local business leaders as “a threat to business influence over local affairs” (Marks, 2004: 258-9).

As Marks stated, the CRA was created as “an important counter weight to the postwar magnetic pull of new suburbs for business and investment” (241). The effect of this counterweight works on many levels. Most obviously, in the case of Bunker Hill, the CRA organized a large-scale infrastructural project that, in effect, focused the dispensation of public money in one area of the city. Secondly, since developers were allowed to purchase property on Bunker Hill at a discount, the transfer of wealth to private hands was underwritten by public debt. Additionally, although the CRA claimed redevelopment would increase tax revenue and thereby benefit “home owners and inhabitants of all other parts of the metropolitan area” (CRA,

n.d.). As we have just seen, this is only partially true - tax increment financing ensured that elevated tax revenue from Bunker Hill and other redevelopment projects would be transferred to the CRA rather than the city at large. The problems with TIF are as follows: Money that would otherwise go into city coffers and (ideally) be used equally throughout the city instead is concentrated in a single area or neighborhood. TIF obscures costs. Yes, the public isn't *paying* for redevelopment directly, but those communities outside of the redevelopment area are prevented from receiving tax dollars that would otherwise be available to them. The public may organize to demand the city pay a more equitable social wage. The CRA, however, is more or less protected from this demand – they aren't the government, they are only responsible for redevelopment projects.

Conclusion

The Bunker Hill story traces the welfare state's expanded role in the commodification of housing. Redevelopment was a significant turning point in the state's approach to the housing question. With public housing, the state directly addressed the provision of housing for low-income people and exercised maximum control over the planning, construction, and management of these developments. Redevelopment, on the other hand, grew the responsibility of private entities with regard to housing provision and urban development. At the same time, while private entities were allowed to profit from redevelopment, public agencies shouldered a great deal of the costs for acquiring and preparing land in redevelopment areas. The shift from public housing provision to redevelopment was, broadly speaking, a shift from social service provision to subsidized profit. California, which established the first redevelopment agencies in the US, was the breeding ground for this political economic shift.

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