

APARTHEID IN AN AMERICAN CITY

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THE CASE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN LOS ANGELES
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By Cynthia Hamilton, Ph.D.

Southward, beyond the highrise towers of downtown Los Angeles a symmetrical grid pattern of streets is barely discernible through the usual dim haze. These streets, stretching south to the horizon (Crenshaw, Western, Normandie, Vermont, Hoover, Figueroa, Broadway, San Pedro, Main, Avalon, Central, Hooper, Compton, Alameda) and east to west (Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Vernon, Slauson, Florence, Manchester, Century, Imperial, El Segundo, Rosecrans) are unknown to most white Angelenos. These are the arteries of South Central Los Angeles. Hundreds of thousands of blacks move along these pathways daily. The fortunate go to places of employment in the metropolitan area, but for most the movement is circular, cyclical and to nowhere. These streets have become the skeletal structure of another "bantustan" in an American city—another defoliated community, manipulated and robbed of its vitality by the ever present growth pressures of the local economy.

Los Angeles has never been an integrated community. The restrictive racial covenants of the prewar years saw to that; the Ku Klux Klan based in Compton and Long Beach saw to that. Old-timers will tell you about the days when they couldn't live south of Slauson, or they reminisce about their teenage years when it was an adventure to transverse the taunting white neighborhoods that separated the Central/Jefferson part of the black community from the black outpost in Watts. Those native to South Central have always known that blacks live south of downtown, Latinos to the east and whites on the Westside or in the Valley. In more than 40 years this fundamental pattern has not changed.

Physically, we are not talking about a "Bedford-Stuyvesant" that looks like the Warsaw Ghetto, with buildings bombed-out. Rather, there is a different sort of emptiness and starkness, one caused by what appears to be a systematic pattern of displacement and removal of all the things that contribute to a liveable environment and viable commun-

ity. If one were to take the very long view, one would have to say that the larger society has denuded the community for the society's own long-term profitable ends. Much like the bulldozing of black encampments on the fringe of Johannesburg or Durban, it can be argued, South Central is inevitably slated by the historical process to be replaced without a trace: cleared land ready for development for a more prosperous—and probably whiter—class of people. For the larger, unspoken malady affecting South Central stems from the idea that the land is valuable and the present tenants are not. This "bantustan," like its counterparts in South Africa, serves now only as a holding space for blacks and browns no longer of use to the larger economy.

On the street you get a different view. First, nobody knows he or she lives in South Central. Nobody calls the area Watts or "Greater Watts". That title is applied to a 2.5-square mile area bounded by Central, Imperial, 92nd Street and Alameda. Nor do people call South Central the "curfew zone" (bordered by Crenshaw on the west, Alameda on the east, Rosecrans on the South, and Adams/Washington on the north) as did the McCone Commission, headed by ex-CIA head John McCone after the 1965 "Watts" uprising. The area is simply home and neighborhood: many neighborhoods centering around churches and schools. These supportive environments, however, have become a shadow of what they once were, as recently as 30 years ago. Many residents recognize the negative changes and deterioration that have taken place over the years, but the specifics are not easily definable. People speak of it as a sort of indistinguishable malaise. "Yeah man. . . things are really getting bad." Drugs, gang-bangers, homelessness, unemployment. . . Like the push of the bulldozer against the shanty wall, the pressure is constant.

South Central (comprising the Southeast and South Central city-planning areas) is 73.9 percent black, 22.9 percent Latino, with a growing number of undocumented. (Planning Department figures for 1982 show 279,019 blacks, 104,826 Latinos and 12,970 whites.) It is a vast wasteland with few jobs, no industry, few functioning services. The largest percentage of L.A.'s homeless population can be found in South Central (particularly in the 9th District). Only 3.6% of the total land mass in South Central is zoned for industry (South Central Los Angeles District Plan, 1981). More industry has moved out of the South Central area since 1971 than has

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moved in (in Avalon 74 companies have left, in South Vermont 97, in Florence Graham 53, in Exposition Park 54, in Watts 43—this according to a 1986 United Way study). The major health facilities—the Hubert Humphrey Medical Center, Martin Luther King Jr. Hospital, the Watts Health Foundation and Health Center—are underfinanced, overused county institutions. The housing stock in the area is older than most in the city. Forty percent of the housing, according to the United Way, was built prior to 1940; only 2 percent of the housing was built after 1970; only 46% of the property is owneroccupied. The vast bulk of those who are employed must commute outside the community to work each day. For the 20 percent who are unemployed, survival

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is a function of subsistence inside the area. With no jobs, the underground economy takes over—that is, crime: theft, drugs, prostitution.

A cursory view of health conditions is equally shocking. The data on blacks in Los Angeles is consistent with the general deterioration reported for blacks around the country. The U.S. now ranks 17th in infant mortality among industrial nations. For every thousand births in 1986, 9.8 babies died; the mortality rate for black babies was 18.2 per thousand, and in parts of South Central the infant mortality rate was 22 per thousand. South Central also suffers a higher death rate due to cancer, heart and liver diseases, and a higher rate of pneumonia and influenza than do other parts of the city. And yet the county Board of Supervisors has slashed health-care budgets and closed trauma centers throughout the area.

These social and economic conditions of deterioration, coupled with the growing volume of abandoned space, make South Central vulnerable to new development because its real estate costs have been reduced to among the cheapest in the city. Rent structure ultimately determines the location of investment. As rents peak across the city developers will seek new opportunities in areas presently undercapitalized. Community residents know this and fear their own displacement—many perhaps to the streets—as a consequence of gentrification (the replacement of workingclass residents with a richer socioeconomic group) and new zoning that could change residential patterns and add new development projects.

The fears of the community are well founded in light of recent experience. Since construction began in 1967, the Century Freeway displaced more than 27,150 people, 7,150 dwellings, 294 businesses, 1,140 community jobs and 38 cultural institutions. One-third of the cultural institutions lost along with entire freeway route were in the black community, as were one-third of the small businesses, 40 percent of the dwellings and one-third of the jobs. To the northeast, USC expansion transformed the Hoover and Jefferson area (with the assistance of the Community Redevelopment Agency [CRA] and through the use of police power, eminent domain and condemnation). Additionally, USC has incorporated a multimillion-dollar real estate company to build student and faculty housing, research and development facilities and commercial projects in the surrounding neighborhood. The CRA has already moved some residents and may have future plans for more. Meanwhile, in the West Adams and the North University Park areas around USC, where blacks fought a long battle against restrictive cov-

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enants, more gentrification is under way, bringing young white professionals in to replace the aging black residents. The area east of USC and south of downtown is the most neglected zone of South Central. Residents worry about losing their homes to the "Central City Enterprise Zone," a Reagan administration idea to give incentives for businesses to locate in "underdeveloped" areas (the state legislature has approved \$10 million to subsidize the relocation of manufacturers and light industry to the west of this area). Residents also fear an ever-expanding garment district to the north (though rezoning was temporarily halted by residents in the Maple Street area).

On the east the city's waste-to-energy proposal (LANCER) was turned back by residents, but a new light rail system, meant to benefit downtown business, will tend to isolate occupants of the Pueblo Housing Project on the eastern side

of Long Beach Avenue as commuters race from Long Beach to downtown L.A. on the new facility. Also, the Los Angeles Unified School District's school expansion plans, which would be welcome under normal conditions, now threaten as many as 500 homes as the School Board prepares to use its powers of eminent domain to remove residents: \$120 million has been set aside for construction in the area bounded by Figueroa and Alameda between 46th Street and Slauson Boulevard.

Proposals to expand CRA's Watts Redevelopment project area north and west, making it at 5,000 acres perhaps the largest such project in the country, threatens to transform three-quarters of the "curfew zone" area. Most of this area

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is residential. The incentive to create large project areas is precipitated, of course, by tax-increment financing that allows the CRA to keep extra tax revenues created by the development. This mechanism for generating capital has been so successful for the CRA that the County Board of Supervisors is considering creating development areas to finance their operations. Yet nowhere in the CRA plans are there any specific assurances that such development will lead to the hiring of blacks from the community, or benefit anyone other than the mostly white developers. Will the CRA projects, residents wonder, merely create a shopping-service, office center infrastructure to lure into the community outsiders who can afford to pay more for existing housing, and so further displace the residents to parts unknown?

PUBLIC DOLLARS FOR PRIVATE GROWTH

How did this dismal picture evolve? A large part of the answer, of course, is jobs and their availability. According to analysts, Los Angeles has become a center for finance-capital and high-technology industries,

attracting engineers, scientists, mathematicians and technical specialists. Despite this, L.A. primarily is still a service economy, and its job structure reflects this. The scarcity of industry and product manufacturing has been a serious handicap for the working class, although the explosion in the undocumented immigrant population has resulted in a temporary expansion in non-aerospace manufacturing (light industry, garment trades) that will continue as long as employers can pay salaries below the minimum wage.

But this kind of economy has little to sustain the black population, whose initial immigration to the West was accelerated by assembly-line war production at the shipyards and aircraft plants. Blacks had to fight racism and sexism in the aerospace industry even in a time of labor shortages. Even though the Roosevelt administration had issued an executive order in 1941 prohibiting racism in hiring practices by firms receiving federal contracts, discrimination prevailed. (Until 1943, sexism among aerospace executives also barred white women from employment.)

In July 1942 the Rev. Clayton Russell of the Independent Church of Christ led a demonstration by thousands of black women at U.S. Employment Headquarters (at 11th and Flower), demanding work. These black women insisted that "our boys are good enough to fight for the protection of our country against invaders; we the mothers and wives of these soldiers are sick and tired of having our right to earn a decent living invaded." For the first time in Los Angeles history

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The success of these women didn't prevent the post-World War II demise of the black community's economic vitality, despite growth and expansion affecting the larger metropolitan community. South Central, like so many other inner-city communities around the country, began to lose its independent economic strength after the war as it was identified as a market, an extension of the larger economy. Without changing their own job-discrimination practices, companies realized that withholding services to the black community was no longer good business practice. Most blackowned businesses collapsed under the pressure of

competition from white-owned giants—and with them, the jobs they had created. Therefore, in the post-World War II period we see in South Central and elsewhere the decline of black newspapers and black-owned centers of entertainment, banks and insurance companies. The irony is that deterioration and loss of black ownership occurred after “Jim Crow” conditions begin to break down here. To date blacks have made few gains in the private sector (in non-managerial capacities). Neither the entertainment industry nor defense employs many blacks. The largest share of the black adult population is employed in the public sector. (Ironically, much of this sector is devoted to support of the business community. California, while it

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may be the ideological home for “no government” forces—Prop 13, Nixon and Reagan ideologues—has developed its economy with public dollars: in defense contracts; federally subsidized development of highways, freeways and infrastructure; city, county and state employment, not to mention subsidies to agriculture.) The location of industrial corporations outside the inner city, which was also facilitated by government subsidies, has been another major factor in the underdevelopment of the black community. As firms found new homes after the war, the relocation of the white population outside of L.A. began. From 1941 to 1965 it was possible for blacks and whites in Los Angeles to live completely separate of one another. Growth of the peripheral areas of Los Angeles County, including the San Fernando Valley and Orange County, boomed during the 1950s. Many Valley residents worked for Lockheed in Burbank or for one of the many subcontractors in the area. In Orange County the number of aircraft workers skyrocketed from 5,100 in 1956 to 73,500 by 1968. The electronics industry made up 40 percent of the manufacturing employment by 1965.

“SLUM CLEARANCE” FOR PROFIT

As the suburban world took shape, another plan for the black-dominated inner city began to emerge. In 1937 the Federal government, responding to the needs of a population in crisis and attempting to preclude more violent disruptions like the ghetto bread riots of the

Depression, decided to build quality public housing and make it available to the working class. In response, to avoid oversupply or even adequate supply of affordable housing, lobbyists for the private housing industry forced Congress to agree to the simultaneous demolition of housing in areas designated as “slums.” In 1949 the Taft-Ellender-Wagner Housing Act was passed, with more provisions beneficial to the private sector (and facilitating greater private ownership). Consequently, more housing units were demolished than built, keeping rents high and fueling profits from continuous land speculation.

In the 1940s, unlike today, there was no stigma attached to living in public housing constructed by the government. The housing was often intended for workers (and their families) employed in war-related industries. This is the background to the projects in Watts. This small community 10 miles south of the central city was one of the nodes of black settlement. Between 1942 and 1947, as more blacks moved into the area to be near their jobs in the aircraft industry, whites (and Hispanics) moved away. Initially, blacks were forced to live in old garages, brokendown store fronts, deserted railroad coaches and thatched tents, all without sanitary conveniences. New housing construction for the new population in this area did not follow the normal community pattern, which was to build single-family dwellings; instead, it took the form of low-cost, two-story projects. It should be noted, however, that the very first new units contracted by the Federal Housing Authority were “for white occupancy only.” Only after a major demonstration by blacks and appeals to the City Council were blacks’ objections

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heard. Even after this effort, cases had to be fought individually in the courts.

Eventually housing and business interests got behind such projects, for two reasons: the construction kept blacks from seeking housing in surrounding white neighborhoods, and it was believed that blacks were only temporary residents who, once their wartime jobs were eliminated, would return to their states of origin.

From 1939 to 1955, 21 housing projects were established in the city and three elsewhere in L.A. County. However, by 1950, opposition to public housing resulted in an amendment to the California Constitution (Article XXXIV) requiring voter approval for all public-housing projects. The

earliest fight against public housing was spearheaded, according to one analyst, by the L.A. Times. A more accurate assessment might be that the members of the Downtown Businessmen's Association (the precursor of all the "informal" formations of the power structure) opposed plans for public housing on Bunker Hill west of downtown. This area of decaying Victorian structures stood in the way of the expansion of the financial district. One has only to look at today's downtown to understand the vision of these early interests. Public housing was opposed not only because it would concentrate the working class downtown, but also because these interests feared public housing would threaten real estate speculation by depressing values. Downtown

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businessmen therefore were among the forces urging the construction of federal housing in Watts in order to contain the black working class there.

The decision by downtown interests to encourage black settlement in the Watts area, 10 miles from downtown, was no accident. The earliest black settlement had been around Central Avenue just a few minutes from downtown. Further expansion this close to downtown would mean that the entire black population would be at the city's center. Odd as it now seems, blacks had to fight to move into what is now a large portion of South Central. From the '20s to the early '50s downtown business interests were allied with real estate blockbusters in maintaining restrictive racial housing covenants in most of the areas surrounding downtown. (In 1929 the Broadway Business Association/White Homeowners Protection Association ran Harry Burke for councilman in the 8th District to "keep the territory between Santa Barbara [now Martin Luther King], Main, Manchester and Vermont streets white," wrote Charlotta Bass in her book *Forty Years*.) Meanwhile, with the Klan active, real estate brokers used racial tensions for profit. Even black movie stars like Hattie McDaniel, Ethel Waters and Ben Carter had to defend themselves against the West Adams "Improvement Association" (near USC) while living in Sugar Hill.

The whites succeeded in keeping the blacks largely confined. In the 1930s and 1940s Central Avenue (south of King and north of Manchester) was home for about 90 percent of L.A.'s black community. But it was a healthy community. The neighborhood's vitality was recorded by no less a cultural figure than Lionel Hampton, in "Central Avenue Break Down," and was paid tribute in Chester Himes' novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. Central Avenue became the major

cultural center for blacks throughout the city, with theaters like the Lincoln, the Rosebud and the Florence Mills, as well as clubs like the Red Feather and the Alabam. But by the late 1950s these independent cultural institutions began to disappear under the crunch of white corporate competition throughout the community.

THE DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

While residential segregation has been maintained in most of Los Angeles—it remains one of the two or three most segregated major cities in America—and while real estate interests have prospered from strategic blockbusting, a peculiar development pattern for South Central has emerged in recent years as a result of such housing manipulation.

In the early-1970s post-"War on Poverty" era, after the Nixon administration eliminated most of the low-income housing programs, government subsidies became more plentiful for commercial rehabilitation and development. New construction of badly needed low-cost residential units has therefore been minimal. According to the City Planning Department, 816 new units of private single-family housing were built in South Central between April 1980 and September 1986, while 700 units were demolished. Only about 200 apartments have been added per year.

Most of the housing units in South Central therefore remain single-family units built before 1940. The depreciation of values that results from redlining, from lack of services and from the area's general deterioration compounds the problem: neither private financial institutions nor the Federal Housing Authority consider the "curfew zone" an attractive market. Little federally supported low-cost housing has been built since the '50s.

Los Angeles remains one of the two or three most segregated major cities in America.

After the 1965 Watts riots, the McCone Commission addressed the discrepancies in availability of housing and affordability of home ownership for blacks. In its proposal, the commission urged liberalization of the Federal Housing Authority requirements for FHA-insured loans in disadvantaged areas to facilitate ownership and restoration. It also recommended that "regulations applicable to savings and loan institutions be revised in order to offer an incentive to such institutions to participate in financing the purchase, development and rehabilitation of blighted areas." Despite those honorable intentions, residents today still face redlining, and home ownership is even further beyond the reach

of most black families. (In 1980 an annual income of \$50,000 or more was required to make monthly payments on a \$115,000 home, the median price of a home in South Central at the time.) And although Congress passed bank-credit reform in the wake of the riots, little credit is extended to local residents or to local business, and the banks don't invest in the area. The law has proved to be toothless.

Congress also passed open-housing legislation in the wake of the major urban disturbances. The response to openhousing opportunities in L.A. was immediate. Many blacks moved west, away from the oldest nodes of settlement. This signaled some economic success for blacks as well, as California became a major economic beneficiary of the Vietnam War

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and expanded employment created new opportunities for home ownership. However, by 1975 the local economic boom ended with the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, and black migration out of Los Angeles began. Researchers now predict that L.A. will become like other major metropolitan areas (like Chicago, Philadelphia, New York and Detroit), with more blacks leaving the city—and South Central—than moving in.

JOBS AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The elimination of public housing wasn't the only blow to South Central from the larger society and economy after World War II. Some effort was made to address the questions of jobs—but even these stirrings were wedded to profits for private corporations. And the “anti-poverty” network established to minimize the impact of joblessness proved to be more palliative, at least in South Central, than substantive.

Even as the 1965 Watts rebellion began, the “War on Poverty” turned out to be serving an important publicrelations function. The Job Corps had provided a work-training program for 363 youths; Neighborhood Youth Corps had provided part-time work for 1,500 youths in South Central; Neighborhood Adult Participation Project employed 400 people; the Department of Labor had opened Youth Opportunities Centers to counsel youths in disadvantaged areas and assist them in finding employment; the State Employment Service had opened an office in Watts to provide more convenient job-placement services to nearby residents.

Valuable as these jobs were, these programs and private-sector initiatives failed to alter the state of unemployment in the black community, which remained 26 percent—this because of scant jobs in the larger economy and because of racism.

While these programs and their private-sector counterparts made great PR, the governor was advocating a better solution: a national public works program that would provide a minimum of 50,000 jobs for California. No response was forthcoming. Much as with the public-housing program, industry lobbyists defeated many public-job programs lest they in any way “compete” with private opportunities for profit.

Even after Congress passed the Community Self-Determination Act in 1968 to facilitate community development, methods were found in South Central, as elsewhere in the country, to enhance corporate planning and control, principally through the creation of a black capitalist/managerial class tied directly to white corporations. For example, Aerojet General, a subsidiary of General Tire and Rubber Company, set up Watts Manufacturing, an independent, blackmanaged company. The company (organized in 1966) made tents for the government and wooden crates and metal components for conveyors. Although the company provided employment for a time, little skills training was transmitted

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to the community. Little that might have some long-term positive consequences for the community was passed on. Moreover, by setting up “black” companies like Watts Manufacturing industry ducked out of pressure to integrate black workers into their existing plants. When these black firms were no longer economically viable, everyone went their separate ways.

There were other efforts to create black capitalism during the Nixon administration. Chrysler Corporation, for example, with much fanfare deposited over a million dollars in L.A.'s black-owned Bank of Finance to help stimulate black capitalism. It did the same in Atlanta and Detroit. But when you measure the results by looking at black America's equiv-

alent to the Fortune 500, only one local business makes the list: Motown. In fact, black capitalism in Los Angeles has remained tied to the creation of very small individual entrepreneurs, service providers and consultants, all with few employees, rather than companies producing goods and sizable numbers of good workingclass and white-collar jobs.

More needful of social services than other communities because of the lack of jobs, South Central in fact gets less, and many are from agencies outside the traditional government apparatus. Basic needs are not being met by state, county or city agencies. Some sections of the 9th District have never been visited by the Bureau of Sanitation's regular weekly trash trucks and street sweepers. This is a neigh-

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borhood where individuals and families try desperately to solve their problems alone because there is little or no help. Little for elderly grandparents tending to mentally impaired adult grandchildren, no help for the elderly or youthful handicapped as they struggle to take care of their own shopping and cleaning, no assistance for those on Social Security who spend hours on the third of each month trying to get their checks cashed and get home safely, no help for mothers who work but must leave their children on their own because of a lack of day care.

The explanation given—and accepted—is that conditions of severe poverty routinely plague the “underclass,” a group separate from the general population whose problems are largely a consequence of their own cultural past and habits. Even the McCone Commission identified “marginal people, the unemployed, ill-educated, delinquent, uprooted sector,” whom they dismissed as “small and unrepresentative.”

“Underclass,” of course, is simply the latest rationalization for the racism and neglect of the larger society. It conditions both residents of South Central and the public at large to accept government passivity, corporate hostility and citizen apathy to conditions of homelessness and unemployment. Furthermore, it prepares the population to accept repressive legislation—everything from L.A.'s police sweeps to the mayor and police chief's order to sweep the homeless away from downtown business fronts.

THE BIG PLAN

Los Angeles is becoming the model American city. It exemplifies the corporate growth that all urban areas have sought to achieve since World War II in an effort to overcome the industrial flight to the suburbs. Cities have relied on the growth process to facilitate consolidation of their central business districts; they have relied on urban-renewal strategies to transform and transplant old residential communities that in another era encircled downtown areas. Growth has become the primary concern of government.

Business interests have had a major role in making growth a government function. In L.A. growth interests have transmitted their vision of the city through their own political organizations, beginning in 1924 with the formation of the Downtown Businessmen's Association. This evolved into the Central City Association of Los Angeles (1966), the Committee of 25 (1967), the Community Committee, and the Committee for Central City Planning (1969). The actors have remained the same: major owners of real estate, developers, banks, utility companies, oil companies, insurance companies, aerospace executives, along with strategic educational, publishing (the *L.A. Times*) and legal interests. (The consistency of membership is reflected in

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the new L.A. 2000 Committee as well.) No candidate could (then or now) expect to be mayor of Los Angeles without their approval. Before Tom Bradley's successful bid to become mayor, he was critical of the power of the “growth interests.” Today the corporate city model of growth has become L.A.'s identity—many of the developers who have received CRA financing and other benefits help fill the war chests of the mayor and council members.

However, this growth strategy has also created a contradictory role for local government. It can no longer guarantee peace and cohesion (witness the gangs) while advocating a central-city development that simultaneously displaces a constituency, South Central, that's no longer considered

important. The consequences to the city—increased crime, social breakdown, a poisoning of the local atmosphere—have become dramatically obvious. The consequences to South Central go on apace. Public money that should have been available to build and maintain that community, rather than let it slip into blight, has been absorbed by the more profitable downtown building binge. Meanwhile, largely working-class black neighborhoods adjacent to downtown are being gentrified, with a huge push from the city and developers.

By eating up resources and manipulating the community for its own ends, corporate development has precipitated the dispersal, and in some cases the destruction, of the com-

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munity infrastructure, such as churches, schools, parks, local restaurants and clubs, and thereby all of the organizational affiliations they support. Before 1965 activities within the community were independently initiated by parents (scouting, social clubs and athletics), but often activities for children were facilitated by public (city and county) facilities in the area. Recreational facilities had paid staffs that offered everything from ballet lessons to swimming classes and team sports. Schools, too, were the center of much community spirit, with their long lists of extra-curricular activities for students: drama clubs, debate teams, science clubs, service organizations, organized athletics.

These institutions also provided alternative sources of social justice, servicing their residents when government did not. Now, when the Reagan administration has forced local communities to pick up the social welfare burdens of government, black communities like South Central—already undermined by the downtown crowd—find themselves no longer structurally able to heed this call.

The “big plan” response of the city establishment to the blight of lost jobs, lost local business and lack of housing has been to sponsor a “development” of sorts within the South Central community. However, development has meant one thing for residents and quite another for growth interests in the city. Financiers, real estate interests and politicians have been supporting investment that increases the value of land and from which a profit can be made. Using these criteria, a strategically placed parking lot can be considered a better investment than low-income housing. It is no acci-

dent, therefore, that the limited development South Central has experienced has been commercial. These become “low-risk” investments for outsiders because of the assistance offered by CRA and the city, which includes assembling land to create larger parcels (using the power of condemnation).

Examples of commercial development in South Central are the new shopping centers at Vermont/Slauson, the Martin Luther King Shopping Center in Watts, and the Willowbrook/Kenneth Hahn Plaza. The Baldwin Hills-Crenshaw Plaza has completed its renovation. Sales revenues from the black community are an incentive for outside investors. Mini-malls housing video-rental, donut, and nail shops and, of course, check-cashing services have also appeared. They are constructed with syndicated financing and predictably tend to take money out of the community without investing back in its infrastructure, as the merchant structure of the period from the '40s to the '60s used to do.

While local politicians justified their support for such development by emphasizing the jobs to be created (both during construction and after completion), in fact blacks have not benefited in this area either. The shopping centers are mostly supermarkets surrounded by small shops owned and run mainly by people from outside the community, hiring few people from within it. A few black entrepreneurs and their firms have received contracts, but this has not translated into significant numbers of permanent jobs for blacks in the community.

The projection of South Central residents now is that the area will experience little new housing construction and

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service maintenance until there is a demographic transformation. This has been the case in gentrified areas like West Adams that were allowed to deteriorate until costs were lowered and new residents moved in; afterward, city services, including police protection, were resumed. South Central residents suspect the “region” will only be improved if the black population is no longer in the majority—much like the development patterns that characterized the “New South.” When Northeast industry went South in the postwar decades, it invoked what became known as the “30 percent formula”—if the black population in a county or area exceeded 30 percent, industry refused to move in. Thus, most of the Black Belt remained underdeveloped, just as before

the war.

When communities such as South Central are physically dismantled, political transformation is automatic and social justice is denied. Far more than a reference to physical space, "community" is a source of identity, of values, of socialization, of strength; it is created and sus-

tained by its residents. Communities therefore will not resist change and growth, if it is indigenous. If it helps to sustain, communities adjust. But alas for South Central, corporate conceptions of growth have excluded the poor—and indeed growth has been predicated on the destruction of community.

The Way Out

With effort and an entirely different strategy and philosophy, South Central can be reclaimed. L.A. can be saved. Here's how.

T earlier forced ghettoization of blacks—and now the displacement of blacks from the South Central region—reflects the aims of the corporate dream. Blacks have been lured into the cultural mainstream through integration, but they have been separated from the larger economic and political structure. And while blacks maintain symbolic roles within the establishment (both corporate and political), they have no independent base of power or action. It is the politics of individualism personified: individualism for the working class and collectivism for corporate interests.

The late chairman of the board of ARCO, Thornton Bradshaw, has best expressed this vision. Bradshaw engineered his company headquarters' move from New York to Los Angeles in 1972 because, he said:

"The United States for a long time consisted of fairly rigid groups characterized by the farmer, the small businessman, the New York intellectual, the Jews, the Hamtramack Polish. They were expected to act as groups. That has changed. The West is now the place where history is being made. It's due largely to radio and television. We're developing a common culture. We are no longer these groups bound together. We are individuals... This kind of breaking out, that's what California and the West represent." [from California Inc. by Joel Kotkin and Paul Grabowicz; Avon, 1983.]

Bradshaw's ideal of the future is a society/city characterized by a culture dominated by the mass media and homogenized by it—one of unity based on disdain for government interference and "a passion for private solutions." His ideal is a West where neighborhood, community and ethnicity have crumbled. This vision should cause us all to reassess.

L.A.'s current approach to political decision-making and economic advance only serves to reproduce this vision. To counter it, a new commitment to social justice through real democratic procedures is necessary. Only then can working-class interests dare to compete with business interests for influence in the city's political arena. Only with new

decision-making structures can a people's vision of "appropriate development" emerge.

Los Angeles has been on a steady course of capital-intensive growth. There has been almost no organized resistance to growth. There has been no political will or courage by local officials to say no to profit and yes to human need. There are, however, clear limits to growth, particularly when viewed from the vantage of South Central Los Angeles—a community whose residents are being systematically forced out and their environment allowed to become less livable.

Far more than a reference to physical space, "community" is a source of identity, of values, of socialization, of strength; it is created and sustained by its residents

The survival of South Central demands that the residents empower themselves to ensure accountability by the political and corporate structures. The avenues to empowerment and community leverage are few. However, residents have shown the will to change and the potential for success in community efforts against the trash-burning LANCER project and against school expansion through eminent domain. One of the few remaining opportunities for change and leverage, the currently underway revision to the city's General Plan and to the supporting 35 community plans (in which South Central and Southeast districts are numbered), can provide a needed forum for South Central residents.

There is no question that South Central needs development, but development to meet community needs, not to continue to generate profits for growth interests, as the

current CRA "shopping center" model will do. There is no way to ensure that this will happen without community input. Although the city has announced plans to establish Citizen Advisory Panels for each of the 35 planning districts, unless residents are democratically elected to these panels they will become a mere rubber-stamp apparatus. The panels also must have more than advisory functions. They must be given the legal and political authority to monitor and control development.

Although such democratically elected units would be a major step forward, the planning districts are too large and diverse to be easily manageable. Therefore, neighborhood councils are also necessary for each of the areas (in South

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Central this would include a council each for Watts, Avalon, Exposition, Crenshaw, etc.). These individuals should also be elected and have legal powers. These community representatives may then work together to sponsor public hearings and forums on issues, keeping residents informed of development throughout the city. (Similar community planning boards exist in many parts of the country and have proved to be viable units of decision-making.)

Such apparatus to guarantee citizen input into the regular channels of government will do more to integrate blacks into the politics and economy of L.A. than any amount of good will. The problem in the past has been that separate service, economic and political systems were set up for South Central, further isolating blacks from the mainstream of society.

The objective of community development must be to sustain the community, not dismantle it. This means that new development has to stimulate the circulation of capital within the community. It isn't enough to promote a few entrepreneurs or home owners—the quality of life for the average resident must be improved. Tax dollars must be spent to serve residents. (It's time we realized that *everyone*, poor and middle class, deserves to benefit from the taxes they've paid.) Traditional services that are available to the middle class must be made available to the poor.

Most important, housing has to be made available to accommodate L.A.'s growing working class. In many cities throughout the U.S. fees for low-income housing are col-

lected from developers of new projects. L.A. is way behind in doing this. The Jesse Jackson campaign also suggested worker-financed funded home construction (through pension funds), backed by federally guaranteed securities.

Government will have to play a role in public housing similar to that in an earlier era, but with greater accountability to the recipients of the housing rather than the industry. The city and CRA can begin to perform the same service to individual home owners that they perform for developers—that is, they can absorb the initial cost to create the conditions for investment. Publicly held properties can be sold to individuals while government absorbs any shortfalls.

The city can also act as a financier, taking out first mortgages and allowing individuals to pay them back directly. Under no circumstances should CRA's tax-increment cap—the amount of money it can keep from taxes generated by development—be lifted. This agency, though mandated to build new and replacement housing that is affordable, has not done so. There is no evidence that raising the cap would cause its managers to change this historic course. This quasi-governmental agency should be reorganized and its enabling legislation of 1951 rewritten to restrict its powers and enhance its accountability.

Banks must also be held accountable, forced to extend credit in deposit areas to both residents and merchants. The Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 has mandated this but has little or no enforcement power. Therefore, communities must simply organize and present demands. They may demand from banks copies of annual reports to regulating agencies, in order to evaluate the amount of deposits and how they are being invested. Banks must also

The objective of community development must be to sustain the community, not dismantle it.

be open to innovative ownership forms, including collective ownership. There must also be more careful monitoring of credit fraud, which undermines working-class home ownership.

New forms of purchasing power must be attempted to deter inferior quality at escalating prices. Co-op markets for food shopping may be helpful.

Local employment can be and has to be generated. It can be used to serve the many needs inner-city communities have: home repair, infrastructure maintenance, rehab, new construction. All are labor-intensive and would provide longterm employment (as well as some skill training) rather than short-term payment. New industry, for example that

which will be brought in by the enterprise-zone legislation, should be oriented not only to hiring local residents, but also to providing goods and services from local areas.

The existing municipal apparatus must be forced to address the overwhelming ills of education, health and crime. These cannot be solved through isolated service providers. The resolution of these problems must be seen as a necessity for the society at large, not simply the black community. All of these ills are a creation of the larger economy and politics and must be treated as such.

Unlike many of the major political battles of the 1960s, which were fought against violations of civil rights, the culprits of the 1980s who are responsible for dismantling

stitutional interpretations were modified and transformed. Today corporations use the courts to protect their private-property rights at the expense of the human rights of many. Therefore the new national agenda for communities must be drafted at the neighborhood level first — one arena corporations don't control. Our major political objective *must* be to take back the decision-making apparatus from corporate special interests. Government must be made responsive once again to the people rather than to campaign contributors.

The most pressing problems of the black community may be subsumed under the questions of where growth will occur and what type of growth it will be. Citizens must take back the decision-making power if they are to answer these questions themselves. Apart from the community and neighborhood planning boards mentioned above, political mechanisms in L.A. for the return of democratic procedures could easily include the following: use of "specific" community plan designations, an enlarged city council and county board of supervisors, the establishment of a public clearing house for data and information on the working of the city, enforcement of existing laws that require evaluation of potential development, and accountability by government to communities to carry out findings. Human rights must be redefined to include the right to food, clothing, shelter and work.

In sum, residents of Los Angeles must resist the corporate philosophy of isolation and individualism. It is only through group efforts that the new apartheid can be overcome. ■

*Our major political objective
must be to take back the
decision-making apparatus from
corporate special interests.*

communities are more elusive. While in the 1960s government, especially the federal government, was an ally in black struggle, today government is the cloak behind which the real adversary, corporate interests, hides. In the 1960s laws beneficial to blacks and the poor were passed and old con-

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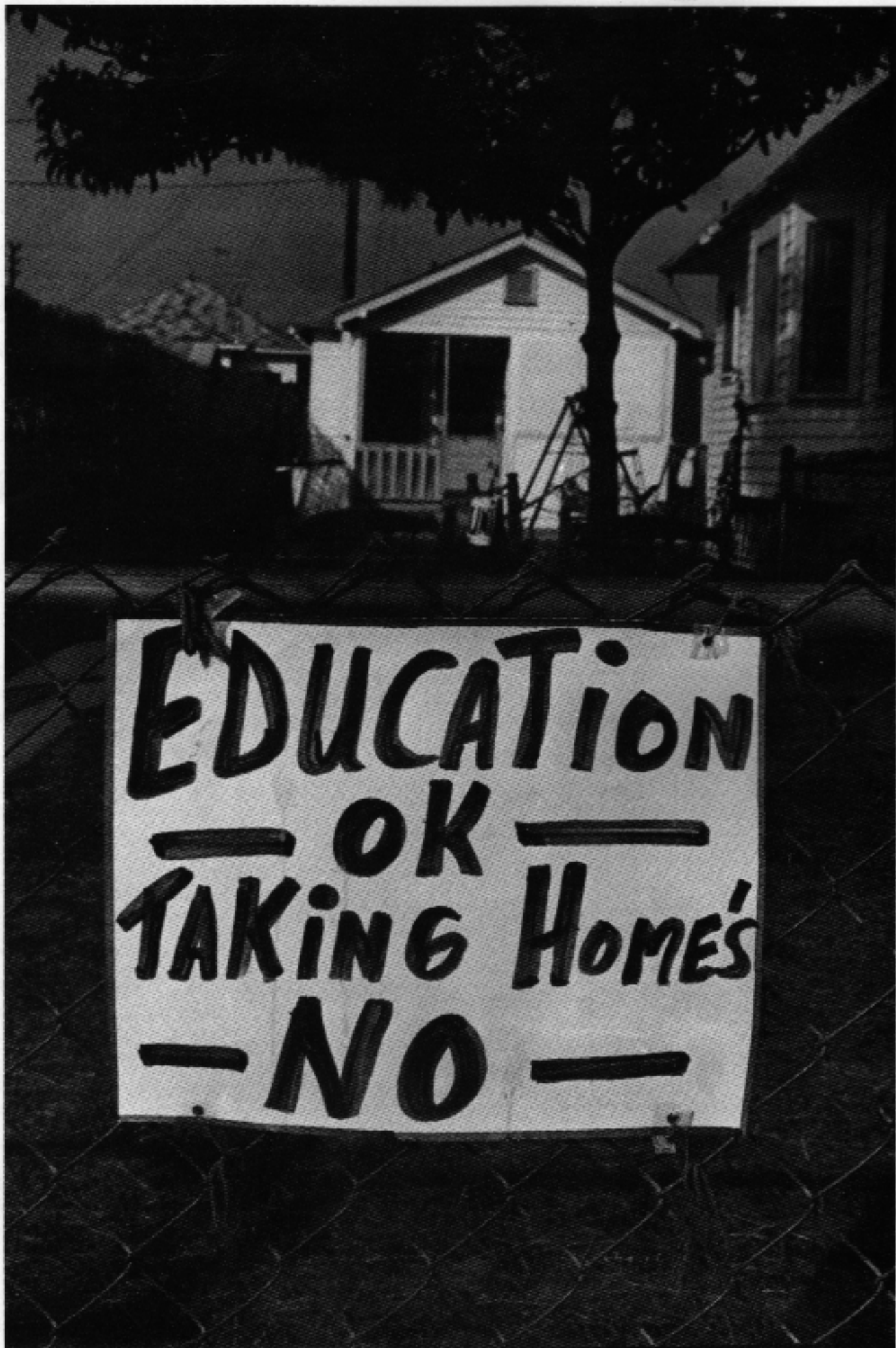
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