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Restoring a River to Reclaim a City?: The Politics of Urban Sustainability and Environmental Justice in the Los Angeles River Watershed

By

Esther Grace Kim

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Environmental Science, Policy, and Management

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Jeff Romm, Chair
Professor Nancy Peluso
Professor Richard Walker

Fall 2017

Restoring a River to Reclaim a City?: The Politics of Urban Sustainability and Environmental Justice in the Los Angeles River Watershed

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by

Esther Grace Kim

Abstract

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This dissertation examines the intersection of urban sustainability and environmental justice (EJ) in Los Angeles, California. 'Urban sustainability', the idea that incorporating sustainable measures into urban development plans/strategies can ameliorate ecological degradation and social inequality without compromising economic growth, has recently emerged as a powerful discourse with regards to city planning and environmental governance. In this dissertation, I critically interrogate urban sustainability's claims, questioning how equitable socio-spatial configurations can be created through modes of urban governance, which despite its optimistic rhetoric, are still driven by the logic of capitalist economic development and overseen by the racial state. To investigate the ways in which environmental justice, then, is facilitated and/or constrained under the programmatic realization of urban sustainability, I focus on one particular sustainability project in Los Angeles—the restoration/revitalization of the Los Angeles River Watershed. Restoring the L.A. River is an ambitious undertaking by a diverse consortium of state and NGO actors, and consists of an agenda that goes beyond any single urban environmental issue; it has emerged as a symbol of a 'cleaner, greener' Los Angeles. In order to examine this sustainability initiative, I conducted a critical ethnography that consisted of two years of fieldwork in Los Angeles.

Based on this research, I present several arguments throughout this dissertation. I trace the history of the environmental movement to restore the Los Angeles River and sustainably manage its watershed; in doing so, I identify the counter-hegemonic narratives and objectives embedded within this political activism. These activist efforts, I argue, which seek to disrupt the dominant urban land-water management regime in metropolitan Los Angeles, enable the environmental agenda of river restoration to articulate with local environmental justice efforts centered on equitable distribution of greenspace, public health considerations in urban planning, and youth/community development. Despite these achievements, the current plan to restore the Los Angeles River embodies principles of ecological modernization, which rely upon dominant political-economic processes and ultimately stymie a more substantive engagement with the politics of environmental justice. The contradictions of relying upon urban processes—those dictated by capitalist land markets and entrepreneurial forms of governance—that produce environmental injustices, in order to implement sustainability programs that purport to *undo*

those injustices, reveal the inability of this particular urban sustainability project to advance environmental justice. These contradictions reproduce inequalities, which are already observed in the environmental gentrification unfolding in certain riverside neighborhoods. These historically divested neighborhoods are heralded as new sites of urban greening, but often are left unprotected from real estate speculation and housing markets that threaten to displace lower-income residents.

Another major argument of my dissertation is that limited conceptualizations of *environmental justice* prevent even well-meaning state and NGO actors from effectively promoting more equitable environmental conditions for communities. Many actors involved in the environmental projects centered on L.A. River restoration operate from a narrowly-conceived distributive model of justice. Focusing solely on distributions of environmental burdens and benefits throughout a geographic area, I argue, not only falls into the trap of handling urban places as static and bounded, but also precludes meaningful engagement with other aspects of environmental justice politics. In particular, promoting EJ requires understanding how place-based identity formation, histories of structural racism and cultural marginalization, and access to participatory mechanisms differentially impact afflicted communities. I present the case studies of two neighborhoods (Pacoima and Elysian Valley) and two coalitions (the Chinatown Yard Alliance and Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio) to demonstrate how struggles for environmental justice in Los Angeles involve a politics of place, race, and identity. Through these cases, I conclude that urban sustainability agendas that *actually* advance environmental justice, then, must move beyond distributive myopia to recognize the underlying socio-spatial processes that create inequitable and unjust places.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Alianza	Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio
ARBOR	Alternative with Restoration Benefits and Opportunities for Revitalization
BOE	City of Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering
BOS	City of Los Angeles Bureau of Sanitation
CASP	Cornfield Arroyo Seco Specific Plan
CCC	California Coastal Conservancy
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
CSP	California State Parks (California Department of Parks and Recreation)
CUGU	Clean Up Green Up Initiative/Ordinance
CWA	Clean Water Act
CWH	Council for Watershed Health
CYA	Chinatown Yard Alliance
DCP	City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning
DWP	City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
EVAC	Elysian Valley Arts Collective
EVRNC	Elysian Valley Riverside Neighborhood Council
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FoLAR	Friends of the Los Angeles River
IRWMP	Integrated Regional Water Management Plan
LACBC	Los Angeles County Bicycling Coalition
LACDA	Los Angeles County Drainage Area
LACDPW	Los Angeles County Department of Public Works
LACFCD	Los Angeles County Flood Control District
LARMP	Los Angeles River Master Plan
LARRMP	Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan
LARWQCB	Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board
LID	Low Impact Development
MRCA	Mountains and Recreation Conservation Authority
MS4	Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System
NELA-RC	Northeast Los Angeles Riverfront Collaborative
NET	North East Trees
NRDC	National Resources Defense Council
PWVP	Pacoima Wash Vision Plan
RIO	River Improvement Overlay
RMC	Rivers and Mountains Conservancy
SMMC	Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy
TMDL	Total Maximum Daily Load
TNW	Traditional Navigable Waters/Waterway
TPL	Trust for Public Land
USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
USGS	United States Geological Survey
UWFP	Urban Waters Federal Partnership

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It would have been impossible for me to have completed this dissertation on my own. As an anxious first-year graduate student navigating the ins and outs of 'academia' at a large university, the thought of finishing a dissertation and completing my PhD program seemed so daunting and far-off that it was hard to even imagine. Now that I *am* finishing, I am filled with both gratitude towards the people who have helped me get here and amazement at their generosity and patience.

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CHAPTER ONE
THE "NEXUS" OF URBAN SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AT THE LOS ANGELES RIVER

INTRODUCTION

Late in 2012, a man-made "eco-disaster" struck Los Angeles. Over the course of several days in December, workers from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers entered the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve and razed over forty acres of thickly vegetated wildlife habitat. The bulldozing, as well as the lack of sufficient public notice, generated intense outrage from the environmental community in Los Angeles. Organizations such as the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society and Friends of the Los Angeles River vociferously denounced the unilateral and destructive practices of the Army Corps, castigating their actions as belying the flood control agency's recent attempts at softening its long-held image as ecological demolisher. Responding to environmentalists' incensed claims that what the Army Corps did was, on top of being environmentally devastating, possibly illegal under federal environmental laws, several state senators called for investigations into the approval and permitting procedures responsible for the project. In response to such rancorous public and political outcry, representatives from the Los Angeles District of the Army Corps provided the not entirely convincing argument that the bulldozing was executed due to "public safety" concerns over purported gay cruising and homeless encampments found in the Basin area (Barrett 2013). Amidst confusion and conflicting narratives from different parties, the Army Corps then explained that the clearing activities were part of an already approved "five-year vegetative management" plan for the Wildlife Reserve, which would thin debris and non-native vegetation in order to improve the habitat and allow engineers easier access to the nearby Sepulveda Dam (Sagahun 2012). While many environmentalists remained skeptical as to the veracity (and sincerity!) of this explanation, the Los Angeles District's highest-ranking leaders apologized for the poor communication and execution of the vegetation clearing project, and made promises for greater oversight and transparency in future maintenance activities. Under the patient care of environmentalists and park volunteers, the devastated landscape began to slowly make its recovery. The birds returned to roost in the trees.

As a researcher concerned with issues of governance, politics, and urban environments, the Army Corps' razing of the Wildlife Reserve appeared to me as one more chapter in the ongoing negotiation between the past and present Los Angeles. Returning to the city after the winter holidays to learn of the entire series of events, I eagerly followed the everyday, on-the-ground politics making up these negotiations. Members of environmental organizations, key informants whom I had been interacting with for months as I conducted fieldwork, patiently filled me in on the details of the incident with such indignation and frustration that I felt at once both informed and indirectly chastised. I attended public meetings specifically formed to facilitate inter-agency communication, where I witnessed environmental activists and mild-mannered birdwatchers harangue the Army Corps' leadership for a variety of transgressions. Not only did these environmentalists question the ecological validity of "vegetation management" that shredded native plant species and destroyed habitat of endangered songbirds, but they also castigated the agency's failure (or intentional silence) to inform them of the approval process that went into greenlighting such a project. Through informal conversations with city bureaucrats on the difficulty of coordinating information on facility maintenance, I divined that inter-governmental cooperation for them was at times scattered, and at other times, one-sided

endeavors. I saw, through the circulation of the dozens of photographs that journalists and environmentalists had painstakingly documented, the extent of the damage; later, after learning about the Sierra Club's organized hike through the impacted area, I joined a dozen nature-lovers and walked through the acres of overturned earth and denuded streambanks of the Sepulveda Basin. Through these everyday interactions and observations, by accessing the spaces where environmental policies were negotiated at the micro-local scale, I gradually came to understand the wider implications and meanings at play in the momentary clash over how to manage urban nature at a single site.

The bulldozing of the Sepulveda Wildlife Reserve—and the reactions it elicited—encapsulate the socio-ecological complexities entangled in the current state of urban watershed management in Los Angeles. The razed site is part of the Sepulveda Basin, an open space complex that includes both the Sepulveda Dam, a crucial structure of the Los Angeles River flood control system, and the Recreation Area, eighty acres of prime wildlife habitat and parkspace, one of the precious few islands of greenspace in the densely urbanized Los Angeles region *(Figure 1)*. Its dual role—as recreational/habitat space and as a flood control dam—embodies the tensions, contestations, and conflicts that arise over how floodplain land should be managed in a region simultaneously lacking in parks/open space, prone to devastating floods, and scrambling to shed its "anti-environment" reputation. Moreover, the clash between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and local environmentalists reveals the ideological standoff between these two parties: while the former possesses jurisdictional authority over the Sepulveda Dam and Basin and carries out its institutional mandate of maintaining flood control capacity at its numerous facilities, the latter have spent the last thirty-five years tirelessly championing for more ecologically-conscious approaches to resource planning and management (Miller 2013). This clash plays out upon new political arenas amidst shifting approaches in water governance. Historically, centralized agencies enjoyed free reign to manage the volatile Los Angeles River watershed according to the dominant flood control paradigm of the day. The Army Corps appeared to have exercised this unchecked power when it drove bulldozers into the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve with minimal public notice and proceeded to, despite the careful wording of its project description, indiscriminately plow up native and non-native vegetation alike. However, in contrast to decades past, the outraged response and public condemnation from environmentalists and select politicians indicate the waning influence of the previous paradigm, as recent years have seen the rise of a strong activist presence around restoration of urban rivers and protection of their watersheds.

Finally, and perhaps most interestingly (to a social scientist such as myself), the rationale that the Army Corps used to justify their demolition—that clearing trees ensured the public's protection from the "criminal elements" and unseemly behaviors hiding in the recesses of the park—reveals the complicated socio-cultural dimensions of L.A.'s urban watershed management. The agency's proffered justifications allude to and reinforce the longstanding associations between criminality/illegality of specifically identified social groups (in this case, classed, gendered, and sexualized subsets of the population) and the landscapes of the L.A. River.[1] Furthermore, they carry implicit messages of who is and is not allowed to access these

[1] The chief of the District's Operations Branch explained that: "Some of the clearing was conducted to prevent lewd conduct, drug dealing, trespassing, and violent crime at the request of public officials…. Some of the transient population and illicit activities impeded the Corp's ability to conduct flood mitigation, and, therefore, impacted public safety from that perspective" (Tomas Beauchamp-Hernandez, quoted in Palmer 2013, 2).

public spaces, and how narratives of danger—whether "naturally" occurring or socially instigated—legitimize the exclusionary practices of management agencies.

Taken together, the events of December 2012, though short-lived, made for dramatic headlines, heated meetings, and damning images, all of which were fascinating research fodder for an eager graduate student. However, they also became a microcosm of L.A.'s urban environmental politics, reflecting the complicated and contested imbroglio of policies and practices, ideologies, and cultural attitudes enmeshed in the "mundane" management of an urban socio-ecological system in Los Angeles (Whitehead 2005). The standoff between Army Corps engineers and Audubon Society bird-watchers provided a snapshot into the new directions of urban environmental governance embarked by Los Angeles, particularly around water and watershed management, and the politics constitutive of that shift in trajectory. What I observed and encountered "in the field" was the passing away of an era of environmental management wherein a federal agency could demolish a nature reserve without facing political repercussions, where a cadre of well-organized environmental subjects demanded both habitat protection and departmental transparency. And over the next eight months, I would continue to encounter these moments of contestation and negotiation that, taken together, was determining what kind of environments would be made and re-made in L.A.'s future, who would take part in making them, and who this would help—or hurt.

Figure 1. The Sepulveda Basin after bulldozing by the Army Corps of Engineers. (Source: Photo taken by author.)

RESTORING THE LOS ANGELES RIVER: AN URBAN SUSTAINABILITY AGENDA

This dissertation, to put it succinctly, is concerned with how urban natures are transformed, by and for whom, in Los Angeles. It sets about exploring these inquiries by focusing primarily on the changes to one particular urban socio-nature, the Los Angeles River Watershed. It does so because the environmental history of Los Angeles reveals the inextricable

relationship between the city and its rivers, and that the transformation of the region shapes and is shaped by the transformation of its waterways. At the current conjuncture, Los Angeles appears to be entering into a new stage in this crucial relationship. Therefore, it is important to examine how this socio-ecological reconfiguration is unfolding and what impacts it makes on the socio-spatial relations of the region's diverse and growing population.

What, then, is exactly happening with the Los Angeles River? I contend, throughout this dissertation, that the Los Angeles River Watershed is currently at the center of a major urban sustainability initiative in L.A. that is materially and discursively-symbolically reconfiguring the region's environment. Encased in concrete structures, ecologically degraded, and diminished in popular consciousness—all in the name of flood protection—the river is enjoying a recent surge of environmental activism. This grassroots activism, begun by artists and environmentalists, has grown into a local environmental movement driven by a coalition of environmental NGOs, state agencies, and community groups. This "river movement" (as I call it) initially positioned the L.A. River watershed as a highly visible and politicized symbol around which existing urban environmental policies were challenged and resisted. Now, an ambitious urban agenda has formed around the infamous waterway.[2] Defying easy categorization, advocates and stakeholders refer to river/watershed improvement by an assortment of terms (at times used interchangeably): *restoration*, *revitalization*, *mitigation*, *redevelopment/regeneration*, *sustainable management*.[3] More than just a water management program or a flood protection program, the agenda for reconfiguring the L.A. River watershed traverses multiple issues, scales, and narratives.[4]

"The river," observed Desfor and Keil, "has become an articulating landscape of social, ecological, cultural, economic, and dare we say urbanist agendas for many citizens, entrepreneurs, politicians, and state bureaucrats" (2004, 138). Ten years later, this assessment continues to be a most accurate one. The L.A. River, over the course of three decades, has surprisingly become a symbol for a cleaner, greener—more *sustainable*—Los Angeles. It is embedded within a network of ideas, imaginaries, programs, and practices aimed at rebuilding and rebranding Los Angeles into a healthier, greener, more livable urban locality. It is involved around a set of initiatives propelled by a collection of state and NGO actors intended to clean up pollution, reduce the region's energy footprint, conserve resources, and eco-aesthetically enhance neighborhoods. Proponents claim that implementation of the multiple projects comprising this broad and variegated agenda will restore healthy ecosystems, promote economic growth, and even reinstate equitable living conditions for urban communities. This is illustrated in the public statement of the mayor of the city of L.A., Eric Garcetti, who in 2014 responded to the recent federal approval of a restoration plan thusly: "As I argued in the White House over and over, it's the right thing for the ecology, it's the right thing for the economy and kids

[2] Restoring the L.A. River and sustainably managing its watershed is currently connected with the following issues: water conservation and local supply in the face of climate change, flood control and stormwater management, water quality and low impact development, habitat restoration, expanding parks/open space/recreational space, green jobs and economic development, neighborhood revitalization and redevelopment, improving alternative networks of transportation, fostering community-driven art, and increasing diverse participation in environmental governance. These various issues will be discussed extensively in Chapter Three.

[3] While I acknowledge the distinctions among the multiple terms associated with efforts around the river, for the sake of convenience and clarity, I will use the term "restoration" throughout this dissertation to refer to the broader conglomeration of intentions and activities presently attached to the agenda.

[4] For example, the literature and research, particularly in the civil engineering and planning fields, linking green infrastructure, multi-use projects, and urban sustainable development is extensive and growing. Texts such as Benedict and McMahon (2006) act as instructional guides on how creating networks of urban greenspaces and retrofitted infrastructure bring about more holistic solutions to social, environmental, and economic problems.

growing up being separated from downtown by a concrete flood control channel" (quoted in Sagahun 2014). The scale of this restoration agenda, and the magnitude of it implications and ramifications, are rhetorically ascribed a grandeur that borders on exaggeration. According to members of the nonprofit Los Angeles River Revitalization Corporation, the city's plans for the river stand as "a symbol of the city's urban regeneration efforts, offering a new framework for understanding urban LA and the important role of urban rivers in sustainable urban ecosystems" (Brownson and Marsh 2013, 14). Re-making the river is about more than just the river—it signifies changing the course of Los Angeles, away from ecologies of fear and toward reclaiming a lost Eden (Davis 1998).

Therefore, this dissertation takes as a starting point the elevation of the Los Angeles River restoration movement from a grassroots effort to an urban sustainability agenda. While the next section defines and interrogates the concept in detail, I present here Checker et. al.'s handling of *urban sustainability* "as both myth and practice" that operate simultaneously as a discourse that "signals a 'modern' way of envisioning the future" and "a set of specific local practices that reflect the beliefs, behaviors, and negotiations that are the stuff of daily life" (2015, 1, 3). These ideas and practices, which shape urban spaces, have the potential to act as "both a strategy for change and for domination" (3); moreover, these "myths of sustainability can come into conflict with—and sometimes conceal—concerns about social and environmental justice" (15). Therefore, in the face of such ambitious ideas and widespread measures concerning the urban sustainability potential of restoring the Los Angeles River, it becomes necessary to critically examine this particular "myth and practice." Will restoring the river and improving its watershed usher in a more just, equitable, and democratic iteration of *sustainability*, or will it manifest as a mechanism by which to dominate subaltern groups and exclude the marginalized?

Given the enormous potential for urban environmental change embodied in the Los Angeles River agenda, this dissertation is guided by the central question(s): *how does the L.A. River restoration agenda articulate with environmental justice issues, advocates, and efforts? In what ways do policymaking, planning, and environmental activism regarding the L.A. River watershed enable, assist, and/or constrain the materialization of environmental justice objectives?* Because the Los Angeles River and its tributaries run throughout the entire county, and because plans to sustainably manage it are so extensive and variegated, it is not a stretch to argue that changes to the watershed will significantly change the places of people's everyday lives. New policies, measures, and initiatives that are rolled out in relation to the river/watershed will *matter* to the communities who live along and within the targeted and affected areas. Furthermore, these material-discursive changes unfold upon urban landscapes that are socio-politically neither neutral nor innocent. Rather, the landscape of Los Angeles is deeply and prevalently marked by spatial injustices that expose racially and socioeconomically marginalized communities to unhealthy everyday environments while largely excluding them from the processes that shape those very environments. The scope and reach of the restoration agenda, along with its implementation upon already unjust landscapes, mean that its ability to advance or hinder environmental justice objectives requires careful and critical scrutiny. As restoration plans and measures have increasingly incorporated the language of environmental justice, their claims and promises to benefit marginalized, disadvantaged communities demand interrogation. This is all the more necessary, given the fraught and complicated relationship between discourses of urban sustainability and environmental justice, which I turn to now.

INTERROGATING THE DISCOURSE OF URBAN SUSTAINABILITY AND ITS COMMITMENT TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Over the last thirty years, *urban sustainability* has emerged as a dominant paradigm for urban planning, development, and policymaking. As reports cited the growing percentage of the global population that now resided in urban areas, the ecological footprint of cities increasingly became the focus of environmental concern. Amidst warnings of impending crisis due to the high resource consumption and industrial pollution production of cities[5], the concept and discourse of urban sustainability—and the closely related concepts of sustainable urban development, sustainable cities, and Smart Growth—appeared as a key strategy for ensuring sustained growth in a rapidly urbanizing planet. While issues relevant to the discourse of sustainability/sustainable development were problematized (and attempted to be addressed) through post-WWII development programs, the most familiar definition of sustainable development was promulgated through the World Commission on Environment and Development's 1987 Brundtland Report. Soon after, initiatives such as the 1990 United Nation's Sustainable Cities Programme and Local Agenda 21 at the 1992 United Nations Rio Earth Summit on Environment and Development positioned sustainable development squarely at the scale of the local, urging local governments to take up the mantle of sustainability by adopting ideas/principles articulated in the Brundtland Report (Portney 2013; Whitehead 2007). For urban localities, the actualization of sustainable development's principles to meet "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" means implementing the right initiatives (Brundtland 1987, 8).

Despite the pedigreed origins and widespread acceptance of the urban sustainability/sustainable urban development discourse, critical inspection reveals it to be an unfixed, slippery concept. I subscribe to the critical scholarship which posits that "the notion of sustainability is not ontologically fixed" (Krueger and Gibbs 2007, 6). Rather, (urban) sustainability/sustainable development "is a chameleon-like discourse which has been (re)interpreted and deployed by a range of interests to legitimate and justify a range of often contradictory and divergent agendas" (Raco 2005, 329). In this way, (urban) sustainability is "a seductively ambiguous term", one that can carry wholly different meanings and priorities among those invoking its name (Checker et. al. 2015, 1). Indeed, the "wide range of initiatives and associated meanings and hopes which are attached to sustainable urban development" encourages the avoidance of "accepting a pre-determined definition of the sustainable city" (Whitehead 2003, 1186). Its very malleability, rather than preventing its adoption by planners and policymakers, serves to amplify its appeal and utility, as it has "become an all-embracing 'meta-narrative' that has spread across both developed and less developed countries in recent decades" (Raco 2005, 324). This meta-narrative, more than being simply popular or globally accepted, "has become hegemonic" (Campbell 1996, 301).

As "seductively ambiguous" as urban sustainability remains, there are some commonly-held conceptualizations of what it involves and hopes to achieve. According to Vormann (2015a):

> Definitions of sustainability commonly consist of an environmental, a social, and an economic component. Sustainable development is seen as that overlapping political space, where these three

[5] Perhaps the most oft-cited statistic is the United Nations' 2010 conclusion that 50.5%—over half the world's population—now resided in urban areas.

> elements are in equilibrium. This implies more generally that the objective of environmental friendliness needs to be complemented by concerns for social justice and economic growth (2).

In practice, this particular definition of sustainability also frequently includes a particular assortment of projects, policies, and practical measures. Krueger and Buckingham (2012), asserting that "urban 'sustainability' agendas have been widely adopted in many North American and European cities and regions", catalog some of these measures:

> The most common sustainability strategies are those that revolve around brownfield redevelopment, open space preservation, public space development, housing strategies, transit oriented development, and 'mixed use' or 'new urbanist' developments. Increasing density by building in city centres, the argument goes, preserves open space, puts people near public transit and brings much-needed investment to the urban core (487).

The logic at the center of these urban sustainability agendas is that deploying these programs enlist smarter, more efficient planning and ultimately achieve cities that reduce resource consumption, pollution, and sprawl. In doing so, urban centers simultaneously "sustain" economic growth without compromising the health of human populations or ecological systems. Thus, sustainable urban development achieves the optimal triumvirate of economic prosperity, environmental protection, and equitable societies.

Again, critical examination of the beliefs, assumptions, and narratives endemic to the urban sustainability discourse reveals the questionable nature of its claims. The promotion of urban sustainability, or the spatial imaginaries and material practices which work to establish "sustainable cities", oftentimes operates as a local development strategy, cloaking itself in universally appealing language to conceal the power-laden socio-ecological processes that produce spatial inequalities (Bunce 2009; Checker et. al. 2015; Checker 2015; Krueger and Buckingham 2012; Krueger and Savage 2007; Raco 2005; While et. al. 2004; Whitehead 2003).[6] Some argue that these local sustainability measures are artefacts of ecological modernization, a paradigm espousing the ability of existing political and economic institutions/structures to solve environmental problems (Browne and Keil 2000; Keil 2003; Keil and Desfor 2003).[7] Others dismiss sustainable urban development as a "paradox", given that its basic premise believes that "the market, properly defined, incentivized, and reflecting real costs of development, is the most desirable institution for delivering human prosperity and ecological integrity" (Krueger and Gibbs 2007, 2). The reliance on market forces runs the risk of "writing the story of sustainability in a way that merely fulfills the requirements of capitalist accumulation" and, as a result, "the discourse of sustainability is being more widely deployed as an urban and regional development strategy than ever before" (6).

Other scholars critique the sustainability discourse by examining the role and workings of the local state, arguing that the strategic deployment of urban sustainability is part of an "eco-state restructuring process" whereby "a 'clean and green' image becomes increasingly important for local economic development" (While et. al. 2010, 81). During this restructuring process, the local state promotes the enrollment of environmental issues into economic development

[6] These authors point out that the idea/concept of "sustainability/sustainable development" arose during a time of neoliberal restructuring. For example, Bunce argues that: "The incorporation of sustainability principles into urban policy, planning, and development processes, however, is also situated within broader political-economic contexts of contemporary neo-liberal urban economic restructuring and governance changes that facilitate private sector involvement and investment in urban planning and urban land development" (2009, 652).

[7] I use Hajer's definition of ecological modernization, which is "the discourse that recognizes the structural character of the environmental *problematique* but none the less assumes that existing political, economic, and social institutions can internalize the care for the environment" (1995, 25).

strategies that attempt to achieve an "urban sustainability fix", or, "the search for a spatio-institutional fix to safeguard growth trajectories in the wake of industrial capitalism's long downturn, the global 'ecological crisis' and the rise of popular environmentalism" (While et. al. 2004, 551). As globalized interurban competition and neoliberalization of urban governance pressure the local state into finding this fix, they attempt to gain a "sustainability edge" by branding themselves as green and eco-friendly; thus, "the pursuit of sustainability has increasingly become 'instrumentally rational' or the means to a larger end, namely the pursuit of profit and competitive edge" (Greenberg 2015, 125). According to these critiques, *urban sustainability* quite often becomes reduced down (whether in actual practice or in conceptualization) to local growth strategies that capitalize on environmental values/concerns in order to facilitate capital accumulation rather than uphold the triad of beneficial outcomes.

This, of course, means that these sustainable development practices do little to actually challenge or disrupt processes that (re)produce urban environmental inequalities. Despite its rosy rhetoric and ambitious 'win-win-win' claims, practicing this version of urban sustainability oftentimes means making unfulfilled promises of advancing social and environmental justice. Interrogations into the realization/actualization of environmental justice through implementation of urban sustainability agendas reveal how often it is that concerns of social reproduction and environmental justice gets short-shrifted (Krueger and Agyeman 2005; Krueger and Savage 2007). While environmental justice goals are increasingly incorporated into cities' sustainability plans, these programs still operate under "a constrained if not superficial interpretation of environmental justice", which is problematic, given that "sustainability becomes an increasingly pervasive framework within which to discuss urban environmental issues" (Pearsall and Pierce 2010, 579). Given that "pursuing environmental justice is manifestly encompassed within, if not central to, the broader framing of sustainable development", it is dangerous and unacceptable that "the environmental and social dimensions of sustainability have tended to be separately pursued, neglecting their interactions and attendant equity and justice implications" (Walker and Bulkeley 2006, 657). Rather than treating social and environmental justice as a tertiary objective or fortunate byproduct, sustainability agendas must be foregrounded in justice considerations:

> Hitherto, the two discourses and traditions of environmental justice and sustainability have developed in parallel, and although they have touched, there has been insufficient interpenetration of values, framings, ideas and understandings. […] What is now needed is for governments at local, regional, national and international levels to learn…and to seek to embed the central principles and practical approaches of environmental justice into sustainable development policy. Whilst many if not most governments at all levels have adopted some kind of commitment to sustainable development, few—if any—recognise the importance of placing this within a context of social justice, equity and human rights. The need to ensure that public policy—environmental or otherwise—does not disproportionately disadvantage any particular social group must be a precondition for a just and sustainable society (Agyeman et. al. 2002, 88).

The lack of urban sustainability agendas to be placed within a "context of social justice, equity and human rights" signals the failure of the discourse to generate practices promoting justice. Despite the claims of this powerful "myth and practice", the nexus between urban sustainability and environmental justice remains underdeveloped and worthy of continued scrutiny (Agyeman and Evans 2003; Krueger and Agyeman 2005).[8]

[8] These scholars also remain open to the idea that combining the principles of ecological modernization—efficiency, technological innovation, preventative measures, green economic development—with that of environmental justice, will push the former discourse into more equitable modes of environmental governance and protection. Even though "[ecological

As environmental justice is shown to be such an integral component of the discourse of urban sustainability—as both promises made and failed outcomes—it is important to understand what defines and constitutes it. What exactly is meant by the term *environmental justice*, which, like urban sustainability, has become increasingly accepted, adopted into policy, and discursively attached to a variety of practices? And how does it carry different meanings based on the different actors who invoke its ideas/arguments? These are the questions I address in the next section, through a discussion of the literatures I utilize to provide a theoretical framework for my dissertation analysis. I handle environmental justice as more than a straightforward, static, or standalone term, and elucidate the ideas behind environmental justice, the evolution of its conceptualization, and its relationship to the ideas of another scholarly body of work, urban political ecology.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RELEVANT LITERATURES

Environmental Justice: Developing a Critical and Multivalent Framework

The primary body of scholarship I draw from in this dissertation is the academic literature on environmental justice (EJ). Since the rise of environmental justice mobilization in the U.S. several decades ago, the concept of 'environmental justice' serves both as a collective action frame for activists and an environmental discourse that is widely utilized in academic and governance institutions. The idea of environmental justice—that inequality and injustice, based on axes of social difference such as race/ethnicity, class, age, gender, are manifested within ecological and spatial, as well as political and economic, contexts—formed in the 1980s in the United States with the political mobilization around toxic contamination in Love Canal, NY and hazardous facility siting in Warren County, NC (Bullard 1990; Cole and Foster 2001). In particular, the case of Warren County stands as the keystone event leading to the creation of the concept of environmental racism, or the disproportionate exposure of environmental hazards borne by communities of color.

Alongside activist mobilization, environmental racism gained widespread political attention with the release of several reports—the 1983 U.S. General Accounting Office's report on hazardous facilities siting and the 1987 United Church of Christ's Toxic Wastes and Race report—which documented the pattern of unequal exposure and clearly provided the correlation between proximity to hazardous/toxic facilities and poor communities of color (USGAO 1983; UCC 1987). These early articulations of environmental, racial, and social justice concerns developed into an environmental justice discourse and movement, which, while recognizing the central role of racism in the early movement's problematization of environmental impacts, expanded its focus to consider other social categories upon which inequality unfolded (DiChiro 1996; Taylor 2002). Therefore, the EJ movement resulted from the convergence of several distinct political-cultural movements in the U.S.: the civil rights movement of the 1960s (which foreground racial discrimination in early analyses of injustices); the environmental movement, which had gained ground in the 1970s; and the anti-toxics and labor movements, which rose to prominence in the 60s as well (Cole and Foster 2001; Taylor 2000).

As a powerful framing discourse that built upon existing social justice concerns and political movements, the environmental justice paradigm "effectively bridged environment,

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modernization] can be seen as limited and reformist", nevertheless "it can be radicalised and democratised with attention to related issues of social justice" (Schlosberg and Rinfret 2008, 271).

labor, recreation, and social justice issues" into a single master frame which "clarified (amplified) the relationship between racism, civil rights, environmental policies and practices, and communities of color" (Taylor 2000, 562). Equipped with a paradigm that gave a name to the inequality expressed through environmental conditions of socioeconomically vulnerable communities, the EJ movement not only called out the noxious mix of industrial capitalism and systemic racism which produced these inequalities, but also challenged the very notions of *what* kinds of places were included under 'environmental protection' and *whose* experiences and expertise counted toward assessing and solving these problems. This multifaceted approach to justice is illustrated in the Preamble to the Principles of Environmental Justice, created by the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, which outlined the multiple objectives of a movement working:

> …To respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages, and beliefs about the natural world…to insure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic, and cultural liberation that has been denied…resulting in the poisoning of our land and communities and the genocide of our peoples… (Principles of Environmental Justice 1991).

The Principles of Environmental Justice demonstrate, conceptually, that the discourse of environmental justice is expansive, fluid, and flexible, capable of incorporating multiple issues, places, and spatial scales.

This somewhat porous conceptualization of environmental justice has allowed it to be adopted in many other geographic contexts, by various communities, and mobilized against a spectrum of sources of harm (Walker 2009b). In academic discussions, the permeability and flexibility of the EJ paradigm has raised criticisms as to the usefulness of a framework without a delineated definition; yet many scholars determine that EJ remains a valuable discourse precisely for its situatedness and consideration of multiscalar dynamics at play in producing inequitable spatialities (Debbane and Keil 2004; Holifield 2001; Schlosberg 2013). Keeping environmental justice "contextually situated" is to occupy a theoretical position "which acknowledges the far-reaching political, economic and ecological networks that create specific instances of environmental injustice" (Bickerstaff et. al. 2009, 593). Likewise, Holifield (2001) concludes that "instead of assuming that claims about environmental justice refer to a universal, monolithic agenda, we should ask what the term means in different contexts" (82), further urging that scholars "must look beyond distributive patterns of pollution and address the diversity of issues that [social groups] include within their interpretations of environmental justice" that will reveal "how urban environmental justice issues vary across space and time" (86).

The evolution of the scholarly literature reflects the contextually situated nature of the environmental justice paradigm, as a body of research that initially focused primarily on the siting of hazardous/toxic waste facilities near poor and nonwhite communities branched out into new avenues of inquiry. Much of the early research set out to quantitatively measure and map out various sources of pollution in order to statistically prove/disprove claims of discriminatory impacts (Boer et. al. 1997; Cutter et. al. 1996; Downey 1998; Pastor et. al. 2001) as well as to clarify the determinations of race and class in an impacted community's exposure to environmental harms (Cutter 1995; also, see Pulido 1996 and Egan 2002 for a discussion on these 'first generation' studies). This branch of research continues with newer and more sophisticated methods of risk assessment and mapping. Another branch of research, grounded in public health perspectives and epidemiological analyses, examined the cumulative health impacts of exposure to multiple sources and pathways of socio-environmental harms, including

proximity to freeways, occupational hazards, and even sources of diet (Corburn 2002, Evans and Marcynyszyn 2004; Lee 2002; Morello-Frosch et. al. 2001; Pearce et. al. 2010).

Gradually, EJ scholarship expanded the scope of what constituted unjust environments and spatialities, moving beyond toxic facilities and sources of environmental contamination. Studies branched out to investigate the distribution of environmental resources/benefits/amenities as well as environmental harms, assessing communities' access to parks/open space, clean water, modes of transit, and sources of healthy food (Balazs et. al. 2012; Boone et. al. 2009; Bullard 2007; Deka 2004; Gottlieb 2009; Gottlieb and Fisher 1996; Lucas 2004; Ranganathan and Balazs 2015; Sister et. al. 2010; Wolch et. al. 2005).[9] Aside from exposure to environmental hazards and access to environmental resources, academic EJ literature also examined new manifestations and contributors to environmental harm, including the rising exposure to natural disasters and effects of climate change (Cutter 2006; Ikweme 2003; Maantay and Maroko 2009; Tsosie 2007) as well as emerging inequalities in the global context (Anand 2017; Martin et. al. 2013; Pellow 2007). In relation to this development, the EJ framework and discourse moved to new geographic contexts (including the Global South), adapting to the particular histories, conditions, social relations, and identities constituting injustices in places outside of the U.S. (MacDonald 2002; Schroeder et. al. 2008; Urkidi and Walter 2011; Walker 2009b). Research also sought to document the regulatory and policy responses to the rise of environmental injustice awareness (Bassa 1998; Cole 1993; Brulle and Pellow 2006; Holifield 2004) and the cases of community resistance to unjust everyday environments as well as efforts toward empowerment by inserting themselves in political decision-making and knowledge production processes (Bullard and Johnson 2000; Corburn 2005; Robyn 2002; Shepard 2002).

Though the EJ scholarship proliferated in the decades following the GAO and UCC reports, it came under criticism early on for its overly quantitative approach, heavy dependence upon legalistic and/or scientific analyses, static handlings of space, the under-theorization of racism, and reliance on liberal theories of justice in the construction of inequitable environments (Bullard 1996; Foster 1993; Harvey 1996; Pulido 1996, 2000). In response to critiques that the EJ literature was under-theorized and too focused on quantitative measurement, scholarship also began to develop greater theoretical insights into capitalist and urban processes, racialization and racism, spatial and scalar politics, and notions of what constituted "justice" (see Holifield et. al. 2009 and Sze and London 2008 for thorough reviews of new directions in EJ research). Moreover, investigations of EJ also adopted a socio-historical approach in order to uncover how particular injustices came about in particular urban places (Hurley 1995; Pellow 2002; Sze 2007). Branches of academic environmental justice research, in the last fifteen years, delved into social theories in order to provide explanatory analyses of the prevalence of unequal environments, demonstrating that a "major focus of environmental justice scholarship has always been a move beyond the simple description and documentation of inequity into a thorough analysis of the underlying reasons for that injustice" (Schlosberg 2013, 39).

Specifically, one major development within EJ scholarship has been the utilization of more sophisticated theorizations of race and racism. A common critique of the early EJ research

[9] Central to EJ claims and arguments is the concept of the "community". I fully recognize that this is a socially constructed term that carries a host of complex and contested meanings that may change over time and within different situations/contexts. I subscribe to the position of other EJ scholars, who contend that the "community" is a dynamic, constructed idea that is a useful unit of analysis for researchers and term of mobilization for activists (Pierce et. al. 2011; Williams 1999). A "community" may, therefore, refer to the residents and stakeholders of a particular neighborhood or locality, or may also be expanded to include a certain subpopulation or socially-categorized group, such as the term "communities of color" to refer to specifically classed, raced groups (Pulido 1996b). Throughout this dissertation, the term "community" applies to both situations.

was its failure to clarify and operate from nuanced conceptualizations of racism, specifically those that understood it as more than discrete, intentional, and maliciously-motivated acts of discrimination by a discrete entity. This failure to conceptually and analytically engage with the structural and systemic nature of racism in the post-Jim Crow era of U.S. cities was a "fundamental weakness" of EJ, demonstrating an anemic grasp of how "contemporary racism cannot be understood apart from the historical and social contexts that influence discriminatory outcomes", since these very "outcomes in the environmental context rarely result solely from inherently discriminatory environmental rules or the 'prejudiced' behavior of individuals within government institutions" (Foster 1993, 733-734).[10] Pulido, in particular, has extensively and compellingly called for environmental justice scholars to adopt theoretically robust conceptualizations of racism (1996, 2000, 2015). She concludes that reductive ideas of racism as manifested solely as "a specific, conscious act of discrimination" contributes to a "monolithic understanding of racism" that "obscures a nuanced understanding of how racism interacts with various economic forces, including, relations of production and regimes of accumulation, to create highly oppressive circumstances" (1996, 148). In response to arguments that EJ research must handle racism as structural in nature and operating within economic, political, and cultural processes, subsets within the literature adopt theories from critical race studies (such as Omi and Winant's (1994) model of racial formation) in order to identify the multiple ways in which racial projects and racialization operate within institutions and social structures to produce environmental injustices to communities of color (Anguiano et. al. 2012; Gibson-Wood and Wakefield 2013; Kurtz 2009; Sze 2007; Teelucksingh 2007).

Additionally (and partly related to this more critical handling of race), subsets of EJ research increasingly turned to critical social theory to interrogate and ultimately expand what the 'justice' of environmental justice entailed. As stated, the EJ literature drew criticism for its reliance on liberal notions of what justice encompasses and how it is obtained. Essentially, these critiques argued that much of the environmental justice literature handled justice as solely a matter of distribution of goods/benefits and harms, and that this distributive model of justice (perhaps best demonstrated in John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*) relied on liberal ideas of universal fairness, equal distributions of goods, and abstracted populations (Walker 2009a). Scholars like Sheila Foster argue that limiting conceptualizations of justice within a narrow, Rawlsian framework of distribution neither fully captures how communities experience environmental injustice/racism on the ground nor adequately provides for measures that will address the forms of harm that these communities face. Foster (1993) concludes that:

> The distributive model of justice…is limited in its ability to attain justice in the environmental context, particularly if disparate environmental outcomes are seen as reflecting institutional and structural racism. […] Moreover, because distributive justice myopically focuses on particular patterns of distributions at particular moments, it allows the reproduction of a regular distributive pattern over time without ever understanding and evaluating the processes that produce that pattern (748).

And while "there has always been a strong procedural justice dimension to stated environmental justice principles and objectives" (Walker 2009a, 617), much of the research conducted around environmental justice—perhaps due to its emphasis on 'proving' or 'debunking' injustice claims through statistical analysis and cartographic methodologies—tended to focus solely on the distribution of environmentally harmful facilities/land uses across differently raced and classed

[10] I discuss in greater detail, in Chapter Five, the arguments from critical race studies and theories of racialization of urban space, and how it relates to environmental justice both within and beyond Los Angeles.

populations. Focusing on outcome over process, therefore, is inadequate to explain how injustice is produced and how it could be combated (Boone 2008).

In response to these critiques, a growing subset of the EJ literature draws upon theories of justice in order to develop a framework of environmental justice beyond a Rawlsian distributive model. David Schlosberg (2003, 2004, 2007), in particular, has committed to developing a framework of environmental justice that goes beyond distributional justice. Drawing from the works of Young, Fraser, Honneth, Sen and Nussbaum (among others), Schlosberg advances a conceptualization of justice that "is articulated and understood as a balance of numerous interlinked elements of distribution, recognition, participation, and capability" (2007, 12). This multivalent model of justice, which understands the multidimensionality of injustices, proposes that in addition to equitable distributions of environmental harms and benefits, environmental justice entails that communities receive political-cultural recognition of their particular positionalities and access to full participation in the decision-making procedures that impact them. Achieving these forms of justice, ultimately, builds communities' capabilities by endowing them the means to shape their own spaces of everyday life and "live lives that they consider worthwhile" (Edwards et. al. 2016, 755). By developing a theory of justice, Schlosberg argues, that includes considerations of recognition, participation, and capabilities, the result is "not on *replacing* distribution, but instead on exploring the possibility of *combining* numerous concerns into a broad and multifaceted approach" that accommodates the complex and entangled ways in which race, class, gender (among other categories of social difference) produce environmental inequalities (2007, 12, original emphasis).

This multifaceted approach to justice—including environmental justice—is able to address the underlying forces and uneven power relations that produce vastly different environmental conditions among different populations. One such aspect of justice, recognition, is crucial toward justice-as-distribution, since:

> a *lack* of recognition in the social and political realms, demonstrated by various forms of insults, degradation, and devaluation at both the individual and cultural level, inflicts damage to oppressed individuals and communities in the political and cultural realms. This is an injustice not only because it constrains people and does them harm, *but also because it is the foundation for distributive injustice* (Schlosberg 2007, 14, emphasis added).[11]

According to certain political theorists, institutional and cultural recognition as a form of justice—and conversely, *mis*recognition as an *in*justice—directly contributes to gaining material equality, though they cannot be reduced to one another.[12] Because matters of recognition are inherently and integrally connected to matters of distribution—as theorists such as Young, Fraser, and Honneth work from the premise that economic, political, and cultural factors are interrelated in the production of structural inequality—these arguments bypass the oft-raised criticism that integrating recognition as a central component of justice succumbs to feeble identity politics and promotes a multiculturalism unmoored from material considerations.

For example, Fraser (1995) argues for advancing "a *critical* theory of recognition" (69) that takes seriously the multidimensionality of injustice (and redress for that injustice); this theory is necessary due to the fact that:

[11] Schlosberg goes on to discuss the recognition arguments of Young and Fraser, who contend that "while theories of distributive justice offer models and procedures by which distribution may be improved, none of them thoroughly examines the social, cultural, symbolic, and institutional conditions underlying poor distributions in the first place" (14).

[12] According to Fraser, "misrecognition cannot be reduced to a secondary effect of maldistribution, as some economist theories of distributive justice appear to suppose" and vice versa (2010, 16).

> In the real world…culture and political economy are always imbricated with one another; and virtually every struggle against injustice, when properly understood, implies demands for both redistribution and recognition (70).

Likewise, both Young and Fraser link recognition and participation, claiming that recognition of subordinated groups allows for greater procedural justice as well, since recognizing that certain groups are demeaned, marginalized, and/or rendered invisible on the cultural sphere can lead to efforts for their participation in a political and deliberative sphere. According to Young, the ideal of the "universal citizen" is meaningless in the face of institutional and historical outcomes of inequity and exclusion, and recognition of these differences cannot be ignored when convening a space of democratic decision-making. For Young (1989):

> a democratic public, however that is constituted, should provide mechanisms for the effective representation and recognition of the distinct voices and perspectives of those of its constituent groups that are oppressed or disadvantaged within it (261).

Embedded in this argument is both the recognition of different experiences, values, and societal positionalities among historically disadvantaged groups, and accommodations for those social differences in forming democratic spaces. Therefore, the politics of (environmental) justice must assume recognition of social difference as a critical factor in the production of distributional inequity, and decision-making procedures must engage in a "politics of positional difference" to promote participation, inclusion, and access for specific groups (Young 2008, 273).[13]

Therefore, "theories of justice must become three-dimensional, incorporating the political dimension of representation alongside the economic dimension of distribution and the cultural dimension of recognition" (Fraser 2010, 16). It is this framework of environmental justice that I employ in this dissertation and its analysis of environmental politics around the Los Angeles River watershed. The developments within the EJ scholarship demonstrate how critical inquiries into spatial and socio-ecological inequities are analytically equipped with more nuanced understandings of race, space, and power. Troubling the static and legalistic notions of race and racism allow more sophisticated analyses of how racialized institutions and social structures create and perpetuate the disproportionate exposure of nonwhite communities to poorer environmental conditions. Moreover, utilizing a model of justice that understands the economically, politically, and culturally interconnected nature of environmental injustice embraces an intersectional approach to inequality and renders pointless the race-versus-class debates. As Pulido called for an understanding of environmental racism that accurately understands the race-class dynamics embedded within processes (re)producing urban space, a multidimensional model of environmental justice can illuminate and address these dynamics. This framework, furthermore, provides useful tools toward examining how environmental inequalities proliferate not only on the material terrain but also in the discursive-representational one, since injustice through mis- or nonrecognition "is rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication" (Fraser 1995, 71).

Adopting a framework that positions environmental injustice as persisting in multiple forms and operating on multiple dimensions allows for a fuller examination of how communities experience and respond to injustices. For communities struggling to achieve some sort of justice for themselves, their efforts are, of course, targeted towards achieving more equitable

[13] Arguments for procedural justice are also clear to point out that participation includes those spaces outside of the formal state. Schlosberg states that "numerous others who advocate a model of discursive or communicative democracy" insist that "participation needs to happen in a variety of social and cultural institutions, as well as in the more specific context of politics and government" (2007, 24).

distributions of both environmental burdens and benefits. However, the struggle for equitable distribution of environmental conditions are inextricably tied to achieving recognition and participation as well, since being seen as occupying a socially differentiated societal position/status (whether based on race, class, gender, age, or some combination of these) works toward undoing the cultural-symbolic marginalization or diminishment, and promoting inclusion in mechanisms/avenues for environmental planning and decision-making. Walker, in particular, describes how cultural and institutional misrecognition becomes spatialized in instances of environmental injustice, as environmentally degraded or unhealthy places can be stigmatized; this "place stigmatisation and misrecognition…also underlie the processes through which certain spaces get to be chosen for development in the first place" (2009a, 626).

Therefore, communities struggling to achieve environmental justice want to reclaim their places and place-based identities in material and cultural-symbolic ways, as achieving places that promote well-being involve being free from subordination, stigmatization, and devaluation, as well as gaining control over procedural mechanisms that will determine how their places will change. Re-conceiving environmental justice through this multidimensional framework places the struggle for justice into the realm of ideology and representation, as well as the material inequalities based on race and class that distributional aspects of EJ look into. This entails a community-based practice of "subaltern environmentalisms" (Egan 2002) where communities resist socio-ecological processes that denigrate their identities and deny them full political representation. My case study relies upon the theoretical insights provided by this interrelated framework of justice, and argues that in specific instances, certain groups are unable to fully receive procedural justice not only due to the limitations imposed upon them via unequal distribution of resources, but also because they are excluded from and/or not fully recognized as equal stakeholders in avenues designed for environmental decision-making and participation in planning.

The City as Material-Discursive Socio-Nature: An Urban Political Ecology Framework

In addition to the environmental justice literature, my dissertation draws from the field of urban political ecology (UPE). UPE as a scholarly body of work is informed by political ecology, critical urban geography, and critical race and cultural studies, and as a result, its insights complement, refine, and expand upon the ideas within the EJ literature I discussed above. A relatively new body of scholarship, UPE emerged in response to both a growing concern that urban geography/sociology were not seriously engaging with issues of nature in their analyses of urban dynamics, as well as a push to apply the conceptual and analytic tools of political ecology to urbanized/urbanizing settings (Braun 2005; Keil 2003; Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003). Claiming that there is 'nothing *a priori* unnatural' about the urban, its contributors have relied upon critical social theory—particularly a Marxist political economy stance, Lefebvrian ideas of space as socially constructed, and poststructuralist arguments on nature as sociopolitical artifact—to investigate the socio-ecological processes involved in the production and spatialization of urban natures.[14] Of course, the production of urban nature

[14] Investigating environmentally unequal urban spaces through a UPE lens also involves adopting a critical and constructivist stance on space. Much of UPE research adopts the social production of space thesis, as argued by Henri Lefebvre (1991). Rather than view space as a blank container in which social processes and relations play out or adopt a Cartesian notion of space as pre-given and static, I understand space as produced and reproduced by uneven processes involving the physical configurations of objects, discursive and symbolic representations of space that impart meaning, as well as everyday practices that unfold within these material-representational constructs. Those who explore the production of urban space via Lefebvrian arguments do so in order to uncover how unevenness and inequality are produced through socio-spatial processes steeped in imbalances of power

changes over space and time, as the urban metabolism of nature is mediated by shifting sets of social relations that are historically- and geographically-contingent.[15] Taken together, UPE's core thesis of the production of urban natures sought to challenge the Nature/Culture dualism within urban contexts, promote anti-essentialist analyses of nature by historicizing the forms it occupies and meanings it holds, and defy conceptualizations of space and scale as static and pre-given (Heynen 2017).

Acknowledging that "the production of urban 'nature' is highly contested terrain", UPE's main analytic agenda is uncovering and understanding how power-laden social relations inflect socio-ecological processes and ultimately produce uneven development and unequal everyday environments (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003). Indeed, according to Heynen et. al., "the central message that emerges from urban political ecology is a decidedly political one", since it "asks questions about who produces what kind of socio-ecological configurations for whom" (2006a, 2). This central concern of UPE positions it in close alignment with environmental justice scholarship, as the former is committed to revealing how uneven power relations produce unequal urban socio-ecological configurations, and the latter has long been occupied with documenting, explaining, and challenging these unjust configurations. In the fifteen to twenty years since its formal inception, UPE scholarship has investigated a plethora of environmental inequalities, including: uneven urban greenspace (Brownlow 2006; Heynen 2003; Heynen et. al. 2006c; Perkins et. al. 2004), exposure to pollution and waste (Buzzelli 2008; Gandy 2002; Njeru 2006; Veron 2006), inequitable distributions of water supply (Bakker 2003; Kaika 2005; Loftus 2009, 2012; Smith 2001; Swyngedouw 2004), increased vulnerability to flooding/disaster (Gandy 2014; Ioris 2011; Pelling 1999; Ranganathan 2015), and food insecurity/injustice (Agyeman and McEntee 2014; Heynen 2006; McClintock 2011; Tornaghi 2017). All of these environmental issues are, of course, also areas of major concern for environmental justice scholars and activists.

Despite these parallel agendas, incompatibilities between UPE and EJ have been elucidated by researchers from both fields; one major critique by UPE researchers has been the lack of or incompatible theorizations between the two bodies of work (a critique that will sound familiar at this point):

> Although much of the environmental justice literature is sensitive to the centrality of social, political and economic power relations in shaping processes of uneven socio-ecological conditions, it often fails to grasp how these relationships are integral to the functioning of a capitalist political-economic system. *More problematically, the environmental justice movement speaks fundamentally to a liberal and, hence, distributional perspective on justice in which justice*

(Goonewardena et. al. 2008; Loftus 2012). A critical spatial production approach therefore provides analytic and theoretical tools by which to uncover how environmental injustices are not unfortunate side effects of the urban spatial formation process, but rather are the central expressions of spatial forces working towards the consolidation of hegemonic powers. Asking why and how environmental injustices are produced necessitates asking how urban spaces are socially produced, and how nature and power are caught up in those spatial processes.

[15] A core concept in UPE is *metabolism*, or the specific ways in which nature is transformed by forces of urbanization. Although the ideas of metabolism and metabolic processes have long been used in the biological and ecological sciences, it has only recently been adopted by Marxist scholars who understand metabolism as the exchange of materials and mutual transformations between man and nature, as mediated by labor in a particular mode of production and under certain conditions of social relations (Foster 2000; Moore 2011). Metabolism (and the related concept of metabolic rift), then, serves as a conceptual tool for understanding how nature interacts with human activity in the production and re-production of urban environments, landscapes, practices, and social formations over space and time (Swyngedouw 2006). Cities, because of their specific socio-spatial forms, have specific human/nature metabolic interactions which dialectically intertwine the social and the ecological until they mutually constitute one another into historically- and geographically-specific socio-natural forms (Gandy 2004; Robbins 2007; Swyngedouw 2004).

> *is seen as Rawlsian fairness and associated with the allocation dynamics of environmental externalities.* Marxist political ecology, in contrast, maintains that uneven socio-ecological conditions are produced through the particular capitalist forms of social organization of nature's metabolism (Heynen et. al. 2006a, 9, emphasis added).

According to these critiques, while UPE and EJ share common concerns—unequal and uneven environmental conditions among those with and without power—the lack of analytical engagement by EJ scholarship on capitalist dynamics starkly differs from UPE's overwhelmingly Marxist leanings. Despite its validity and applicability to certain subsets of EJ research, this critique is less salient to the discussion today, due to the EJ literature's move towards a more theoretically-informed direction. Ranganathan and Balazs (2015) acknowledge this trend, concluding that:

> While some have argued that the liberal political philosophy underpinning EJ is at odds with the Marxist roots of UPE, we find this to be a narrow conception of both literatures, and one that is perhaps more true about their origins than their emerging trends (405).

Ultimately, I agree with the authors that both EJ and UPE are becoming more reconciled in their theoretical underpinnings and can be valuable in complementing one another in the examination of unequal urban environments. A significant subset of the EJ literature utilizes critical political economy analyses in order to reveal how environmental and spatial injustices become embedded into landscapes and perpetuated by forces of capital accumulation.[16]

Conversely, the UPE literature has also grown and branched out, intersecting with other scholarly literatures, some of which have long been related to or grounded in EJ research. This expansion and diversification of the field appear to be welcomed by those working from within its framework, as UPE came under criticism for its overreliance on Marxist political economy approaches while underutilizing other analytic frameworks, such as critical race theory, postcolonial theory, feminist theory, and science and technology studies (STS). In response to these criticisms, however, the recent turn in UPE literature deliberately expands the scope of inquiry beyond that of its earlier texts, to situate studies away from the Global North (Lawhon et. al. 2014) and from constrained conceptions of the "urban" that equated it with the "city" (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2004). Moreover, these recent works strive to draw from the foundational frameworks of political ecology rather than just from critical urban geography; as a result, they emphasize the relations found at the scale of the local, the anti-essentialist arguments toward nature, and the inclusion of anti-racist, feminist, queer, and postcolonial political ecologies (Doshi 2017; Gandy 2012; Heynen 2016; Lawhon et. al. 2014). Still others look to the fields of the nonhuman/animal studies (Gabriel 2014; Wolch 2002), and posthumanist perspective, STS (Monstadt 2009), and also the ethnographic (Rademacher 2015) in order to enhance the analytical rigor of UPE. As this field of research continues to grow in range of topics and adopted analytic frameworks, it opens up potential for more substantive intersections with EJ scholarship, particularly in areas such as gendered envrionmental injustices, embodied experiences of everyday environmental injustice, and the complicated role of the state in addressing these injustices. Exploring these new spaces of intersection are not within the scope of my dissertation; however, I do bring them up to emphasize the ways in which both EJ and UPE research are changing and potentially converging into exciting areas of scholarly investigation.

[16] For some good examples of historically informed, political economic EJ analyses, see the works of Julie Sze, David Pellow, Laura Pulido, Lindsey Dillon, Robert Bullard, and Hilda Kurtz.

By adopting an urban political ecology framework for my dissertation, I handle urban natures/environments as both material and discursive/symbolic. This includes the Los Angeles River, its tributaries, and the entire catch basin. Rather than conceived of as static or essentialized artefacts, urban natures are understood as socio-material assemblages composed of both physical components configured in various ways *and* networks of discourses, symbols, ideas, and representational devices that reflect and produce meanings associated with these material components; furthermore, the material and the discursive/semiotic are interrelated, shaping one another constantly. Related to this conceptualization of urban natures, I also approach these material-discursive artefacts as socio-natures, or, those which are composed of entangled sociopolitical and biophysical processes that dialectically produce urban landscapes. As such, adopting a UPE framework means taking seriously the social relations and socio-ecological processes which constitute urban environmental change, subscribing to Gandy's position that "the production of urban nature not only involves the transformation of capital but simultaneously intersects with the changing role of the state, emerging metropolitan cultures of nature, and wider shifts in social and political complexion of city life" (2002, 5). What is happening with the Los Angeles River watershed—its current projects, future plans, multiple re-imaginings—exemplifies the ongoing production of urban natures in Los Angeles, a process that involves the workings of capital, the state, ideologies of nature, as well as active biophysical forces. Ultimately, utilizing this UPE lens offers insights into the actors, power relations, and institutions implementing urban sustainability in Los Angeles, and reveals how they intersect with the ideas, objectives, and efforts of environmental justice. Both EJ and UPE serve as theoretical frameworks that guide my analysis, but they also inform and reflect my methodological approach, one which required critical engagement and immersion into the politics of everyday environmental governance.

RESEARCH METHODS AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL STANCE

I was "baptized" in the Los Angeles River on a sweltering May morning. This deeply embodied, indelible encounter with the very river that I had been studying for several years was an unplanned yet somewhat predictable outcome of my inexperience with boating and poor hand-eye coordination. On the opening day of the widely celebrated River Recreation Zone program—the first legal boating program issued along a stretch of the L.A. River—I joined a kayaking party that would christen the mile-long Recreation Zone with an early morning inaugural trip. Despite the safety measures and instructions I received from the trip organizers, as well as the life vest and helmet strapped to my body, I felt inordinately anxious about embarking on the two-hour boating excursion. As it was my first time kayaking, this anxiety felt completely justified and also self-fulfilling. Sure enough, approximately three minutes after being launched into the river channel, I lost balance of my kayak, overturned, and fell head over heels into the cold, dark, and surprisingly deep waters of the Los Angeles River. Eventually, one of the kayak leaders hoisted me back into my kayak, but not before I had lost my sunglasses, become soaked through multiple layers of clothing, and swallowed several large mouthfuls of river water. The rest of the trip, thankfully, was an enjoyable ride, alternating between scenic and exerting (when shallow waters or numerous rocks required sheer strength to propel the kayak forward). Later, as I dried myself out in the blazing midday sun and recounted my tale to one of the expedition organizers, he laughingly labeled my experience as a baptism, as the river blessed my research endeavors by pulling me into its watery embrace. Recalling that Lewis McAdams, the founder of

Friends of the Los Angeles River, famously shared the story of how the river first "spoke" to him in 1984, I jokingly replied that I had joined the pantheon of individuals with whom the river communed. A few days later, it occurred to me that the Los Angeles River I fell into had been transformed from the one McAdams had waded into thirty years ago, a transformation that perhaps even he could not have imagined. I had come to Los Angeles to study *how* that very transformation had come about.

My boating incident (along with less eventful experiences) came about through opportunities afforded me during my extensive period of fieldwork. Methodologically, I carried out an urban ethnography of environmental policy-making and politics in Los Angeles. The decision to adopt ethnographic methods came from a desire to understand, specifically, how communities were responding to and participating in the changes occurring within the Los Angeles River watershed. Many of the existing academic accounts of urban watershed management in L.A. are environmental histories (Davis 1998; Deverell 2004; Gumprecht 1999; Hise and Deverell 2004; Orsi 2004) focus on one or two specific events related to river channelization or restoration mobilization (Elkind 2011; Gottlieb 2007; Kibel 2004; Lejano and Wessells 2006; Valle and Torres 2000), or employ a structural analysis of the broader patterns of urban governance in relation to environmental policy-making (Davis 1998; Desfor and Keil 2004; Gandy 2014; Keil and Desfor 2003).[17] Though these texts provide valuable groundwork for understanding water/watershed management in L.A. (and which I liberally borrow from in my own analysis!), their central focus is not on how environmental justice specifically intersects with the series of projects, plans, and practices that are carried out under the mission of sustainably managing the Los Angeles River watershed. Though some more recent accounts delve into the environmental politics emerging within this enormous undertaking (Gandy 2006, 2014; Cousins and Newell 2015 and Cousins 2017 to a lesser extent), they nevertheless do not provide ethnographic or on-the-ground accounts of how agencies, NGOs, and residents engage with the transformation of the L.A. River at the level of the micro-local and everyday.

With this gap in mind, I chose to carry out a research project that employed ethnographic methods, as ethnography is concerned with "doing intensive, empirical investigations of everyday, lived cultural realities" (Foley 2010, 473). Rather than focusing specifically on news-worthy conflicts or macro-level structures of power, I wanted to investigate the host of everyday actions, interactions, and negotiations that occurred among diverse stakeholder groups. By doing so, I privileged the ordinary and the mundane, knowing that when examined carefully and by an embedded observant, the "ordinary action turns out to be extraordinary rich" wherein the "thickly layered texture of political struggles concerning power and authority, cultural negotiations over identities, and social constructions of the 'problems' at hand" can be revealed around certain environmental problems (Forester 1992, 47). Moreover, conducting an urban ethnography for a geography-oriented research project entailed employing a research methodology that can be "used to understand how people create and experience their worlds through processes such as place making, inhabiting social spaces, forging local and transnational networks, and representing and decolonizing spatial imaginaries" (Watson and Till 2009). I wanted to understand how it was that, amidst the rollout of plans to materially and discursively-symbolically transform an 800-square mile watershed, residents and representatives of Los

[17] Nonacademic accounts of the Los Angeles River should not be discounted as well. Several provide insightful, historically-based, and well-researched discussions of how the river came to be what it is today, in what ways people interact with the river, and how/why it is undergoing massive revitalization. See Elrick (2007) and Linton (2010) as examples of solid, nonacademic accounts and analyses of the L.A. River.

Angeles experienced the spaces of this watershed. Lastly, I approached my fieldwork research as conducting specifically a *critical* ethnography, one that aims at "generat[ing] the knowledge needed to foster a democratic society and a critical citizenry", which aligns with the objectives of conducting environmental justice research (Foley 2010, 473). Therefore, adopting a critical ethnographic approach meant that I engaged in fieldwork with a reflexivity that informed my role as a researcher who carried the larger goal of having my research *work towards* more just urban spatialities for the communities I interacted with. Many of the individuals I spoke with throughout the course of my ethnographic fieldwork recognized, sometimes indirectly, that there were few outlets for them to express their thoughts on the changes they saw unfolding in their spaces of everyday life; my research could be one of those rare vehicles by which their voices—and localized knowledges—could be translated eventually into material or policy change.

In addition, the epistemological approach of my critical urban ethnography was rooted in feminist standpoint theory, as I place particular emphasis upon perspectives of so-called marginalized groups. In doing so, I subscribe to the arguments of standpoint theorists that understanding and privileging the viewpoints of those who are traditionally excluded from decision-making spaces can better inform an analysis of the larger structure of relations within social systems (Haraway 1997; Harding 1995; Hartstock 1983; Wylie 2003). In the case of my dissertation research project, I adopted this particular epistemological position by deciding to focus upon several low-income, predominantly Latino neighborhoods within Northeast Los Angeles (Cypress Park, Elysian Valley) and North San Fernando Valley (Pacoima) as my key case studies. While my analysis does not focus solely on the experiences of residents from these neighborhoods (and how they are affected by changes in river/watershed management practices), it does situate them as epistemologically privileged informants without reducing their identities to essentialized social categories (Wylie 2003). In privileging these perspectives, I hope that the knowledge produced through my research will be one based on an explicit political positioning that recognizes and handles the lived experiences of these community members as legitimate forms of knowledge of environmental change in the city.

The two years I lived in Los Angeles were occupied by ethnographic fieldwork that led to eventful moments (such as overturning in a kayak) as well as the more mundane tasks of sitting in meetings and perusing technical reports. I spent over twenty-two months (from October 2011 to August 2013) carrying out ethnographic methods coupled with extensive archival research. In addition, preliminary fieldwork was conducted in Los Angeles during June 2009 and July 2010, which helped prepare me for my longer period of place-immersed research. My main methods for data collection were semi-structured interviews with key informants, participant-observation in meetings and public events, and informal conversations and interactions with informants. While much of my data collection was conducted at the local level (city and county agency meetings, locally-based gatherings and forums), I also focused on activities occurring mostly at the scale of the neighborhood. In addition, I performed archival research through textual and content analysis of policy documents, planning reports, media coverage, popular writing outlets (such as blogs); and repeated, extensive photographic documentation of relevant sites. In total, my fieldwork involved participant observation at over 250 relevant events/meetings, semi-structured interviews with seventy-one individuals (in addition to informal and unrecorded conversations with approximately thirty other key individuals), and review of dozens of river-related reports and media articles. I also volunteered regularly for several organizations, including Friends of the Los Angeles River and the Village Gardeners, a river beautification organization based in San Fernando Valley, where I was able to interact with members of the

public as a river advocate. All of this fieldwork was carried out in order to document how communities experienced, on a quotidian and everyday level, the ongoing transformation of the fifty-one miles of L.A.'s most notorious waterway.

MAIN ARGUMENTS AND OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

Thus far, I have discussed how my dissertation is interested in examining the claims embedded within a specific discourse of urban sustainability, one that promises a balanced triad of ecological, economic, and social benefits. My analysis draws from environmental justice (EJ) and urban political ecology (UPE) literatures, which provide a critical framework from which to assess the extent to which environmental justice is achieved or advanced through the implementation of urban sustainability measures. Moreover, from my critical ethnographic methodology, one grounded in the privileging of everyday politics of urban environmental change, policymaking, and discursive negotiating, I explore how urban sustainability, in the form of restoring the L.A. River watershed, intersect with the goals, ideas, and efforts of EJ. Based on these elements of inquiry, the central argument I present throughout this dissertation is that, *the activist movement around the L.A. River served to disrupt select dominant aspects of urban development and environmental policymaking, which then allowed for certain environmental and social justice issues to be addressed. However, the limited conceptualization of environmental justice and how it is framed within discussions around watershed management/river restoration constrain a more substantive and radical engagement between the urban sustainability agenda of river restoration and environmental justice activism in Los Angeles.* Each of the chapters explores a specific line of inquiry that supports and expounds upon this argument through the provision of context, place history, and case study examples.

Chapters Two and Three serve to contextualize my central argument by providing historical backgrounds on both the Los Angeles River watershed, the regional flood control system superimposed upon that watershed, and the environmental movement that formed to challenge such a system. In **Chapter Two**, I discuss how and why the Los Angeles River was transformed from a free flowing river that once served as the sole source of water, to a flood control infrastructure system. Rather than the inevitable outcome of the conflict between L.A.'s 'site and situation' or the unavoidable adoption of particular technological solutions, the Los Angeles River watershed underwent a material-ideological transformation due to the convergence of specific political, economic, and scientific agendas upon a specific ecosystem.[18] Local state officials and powerful businesses preferred a flood management method that would not interfere with urban development of valuable land; meanwhile, the agency ultimately given jurisdiction over the watershed, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, operated from the dominant scientific paradigm of controlling floods through the structural modification of rivers. Therefore, the history of the L.A. River watershed, and its transformation during the first half of the 20th century, reveals how the riparian geography of urbanized Los Angeles was produced through the workings of powerful forces that sought to re-configure natural systems for the sake of upholding dominant interests and ideologies.

How these interests and ideologies become challenged, resisted, and disrupted is the topic of **Chapter Three**. From the mid-1980s onward, grassroots activism emerged around the Los

[18] I borrow these ideas from Kelman (2003), who, though not the creator of the terms "site vs. situation", discusses them within the specific context of floods, rivers, and urbanization.

Angeles River, and eventually grew into a local environmental movement. Over the course of thirty years, due to changing political, economic, cultural, and biophysical conditions, both in and beyond Los Angeles, this local movement positioned the river at the center of multiple sustainability policies and attempted to re-conceive it as a symbol of a greener, cleaner L.A. In presenting how river-based activism grew into a politically influential coalition, this chapter makes the case for how the L.A. River watershed became the site upon which an urban sustainability agenda coalesced. Because the channelized river and structurally modified watershed represented many of the region's most unsustainable practices—overreliance on imported water (and its high energy cost), degradation of water quality and riparian ecosystems, rampant urbanization of the floodplain, poor transit alternatives, lack of parks and public space, minimal opportunities for participation in environmental decision-making—the movement challenged existing and dominant forms of urban planning and resource management. In doing so, the L.A. River movement disrupted status quo urban environmental policy and narratives, and opened up political spaces for certain environmental justice concerns to be incorporated and facilitated.

Challenging the dominant practices of urban watershed management did support and advance select environmental justice issues in Los Angeles. **Chapter Four** delves into how the river movement intersected with and incorporated environmental justice actors and concerns, particularly within riverside communities. Issues such as the unequal distribution of parks and open space among less affluent neighborhoods, or the limited opportunities for "disadvantaged" communities to participate in environmental planning were identified as viable points of articulation and discursively folded into advocacy for sustainable watershed management practices. The dovetailing of environmental/conservation and environmental justice interests, particularly over the issue of disproportionate access to urban greenspace, represents a major achievement of the river movement. However, while the incorporation of environmental justice issues, discourses, and actors signify the progressive evolution of the river movement, there is danger to promoting urban greening without fully addressing the underlying urban processes that lead to environmental injustices in the first place. Though environmental improvements to underserved neighborhoods achieve distributional justice by combating the inequitable access and provision of these beneficial urban resources, they can also create the paradoxical outcome of *reinforcing* injustices through the creation of environmental gentrification. As neighborhoods become healthier and more livable through environmentally beneficial projects such as constructing parks, wetlands, and bikeways, these improvements could lead to neighborhoods becoming both economically and culturally desirable. And without protection against real estate markets and neoliberal policies, these gentrifying neighborhoods can become vulnerable to the displacement of its lower-income, poor, even homeless residents.

As many state and NGO actors operate predominantly under a liberal and distributive model of justice, their efforts and measures may only partially address the manifestations and legacies of environmental racism and injustice that shape spatial production in Los Angeles. An overemphasis on distribution of sites/facilities leads to "political responses to environmental equity problems" that "focus too much on outcomes and not enough on the processes that produce those outcomes" (Foster 1993, 748). Focusing solely on distributive outcomes leads to conceiving of environmental justice as a *state* rather than a *process*; this "focus on the present or a single slice in time ignores the processes which created such inequities" (Boone 2008, 150). Building parks or installing green infrastructure in underserved neighborhoods along the Los Angeles River may socially and environmentally benefit these residents. However, plans that

focus *only* on building parks or retrofitting infrastructure without addressing the larger structural forces that produced the unequal conditions of these neighborhoods in the first place fail to fully advance an environmental justice agenda.[19] These plans must be developed and implemented among others, which acknowledge that housing patterns, racialized divisions of labor, disparities in wealth accumulation, zoning practices, uneven enforcement of regulations, and unequal access to information/scientific knowledge may all contribute to the landscape of inequitable distributions. Taking these multiple factors and forces into account provides for a more nuanced and comprehensive conceptualization of environmental justice.

Failure to acknowledge and address the multiple dimensions upon which injustices are produced/perpetuated can constrain or even counteract efforts to advance EJ goals. These outcomes are discussed at length in Chapters Five and Six, which present case studies that support the argument that a distribution-oriented conceptualization of EJ prevents substantive advancement of environmental justice objectives among communities. Specifically, as I discuss in **Chapter Five**, lack of acknowledgement of the racial politics embedded in formations of place, landscape, and cultural identity can stymie efforts among restoration advocates to leverage the river towards environmental justice goals. As the urban landscape of Los Angeles is overtly racialized, with environmentally unjust distributions directly the outcomes of the spatialization of racial difference and Othering, a politics of justice must grapple with this legacy of racialized space. Within the deeply racialized landscape of the Los Angeles River itself, several community organizations and/or neighborhood groups are attempting to achieve some measure of environmental justice, whether it is the construction of parks/open space or the reduction of pollution. While these groups achieved several environmental justice victories in their neighborhoods, the inability of several state and NGO actors to recognize and address the racial histories of these places ultimately led to the exclusion of these groups from decision-making processes that shape areas of the watershed they live, work, and play in. Moreover, as I argue in **Chapter Six**, neighborhood improvement and environmental justice involve complex entanglements of racial histories, place identity, and socio-spatial legacies that evade straightforward diagnoses of inequitable distribution of environmental benefits and harms. The case study of Elysian Valley, a small riverside neighborhood in Northeast Los Angeles demonstrates how the politics of place and identity are integral to the politics of environmental justice, and how distributional approaches of justice are inadequate to address this complicated terrain of environmental justice. As river-related initiatives and projects are contributing to the gentrification already underway in Elysian Valley, the creation of parks and urban amenities becomes a threat—rather than just a benefit—to vulnerable residents; in this case, a distributional conceptualization of justice fails to produce policy interventions or proactive development programs that can combat gentrifying forces within the neighborhood. These case studies demonstrate that rather than act as an add-on or a secondary component to equitable distributions of environmental conditions/land uses, issues of race, identity, and place history are integral to the recognition and participation that justice requires. **Chapter Seven** briefly asks—and imagines—what a fuller understanding of justice would look like for the wider watershed.

[19] Environmentally beneficial measures, such as installing green infrastructure and promoting smart growth, may not also be socially beneficial, as "integrating green infrastructure into planning policy may be seen to offer the prospect of addressing numerous green space issues without challenging the orientation of a planning system focused on development facilitation" (Lennon 2015, 269).

If the aftermath of the Army Corps of Engineers' bulldozing of the Sepulveda Basin illustrated anything, it is that Los Angeles is attempting to redefine its relationship to its environment. In a departure from its past, the voices of activists demanding that regional flood control does not come at the cost of ecological health and public access to open space signal what kind of new relationship could be forged for the city's future. While this is an encouraging indicator of the L.A. that could be, it is imperative to question how just and equitable a more sustainable city will be. Are there voices protecting vulnerable riverside communities—such as the homeless that were purportedly chased out of the Sepulveda Basin—alongside those protecting endangered songbird species? How is the nexus of urban sustainability and environmental justice being realized through environmental programs, if such a nexus exists? How is the L.A. River being restored to reclaim a more sustainable city? And will *everyone* get to enjoy the cleaner, greener L.A.?

CHAPTER TWO
A CITY AND ITS RIVER: A HISTORY OF THE LOS ANGELES RIVER'S TRANSFORMATION (1880S-1940S)

INTRODUCTION

Within a time span of a little more than 80 years, the Los Angeles River went from being described as a "beautiful, limpid little stream with willows in its banks" that was the city's "greatest attraction", to a "desolate vista, a wasteland [with] just a threadbare coat of unspeakable slime" (Gumprecht 1999, 95; Gottlieb 2007, 136).[20] Once a highly-valued source of water, first for Native Americans and then for European settlers, the L.A. River made possible the growth and development of the region by irrigating agricultural fields and providing water to a rapidly growing population. Yet how is it that by the 1980s, that same river was condemned as an urban wasteland, described with such disdain and derided as having no value? What were the events and processes by which a celebrated stretch of waterway came to be regarded as a repugnant blight upon the metropolitan landscape? What changes within the politics of water and land led to the river's alteration from natural resource to manmade monstrosity? And how did shifting ideas around nature, state authority, natural disaster, and scientific knowledge shape not only the changes to the river's banks and channels, but also to the policies and practices managing them? In short, to borrow from historian Blake Gumprecht: "who killed the Los Angeles River?" (Gumprecht 2005). And, of course, "*how* and *why*?"

This chapter addresses these questions by following the changes of the Los Angeles River watershed, from the latter half of the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, to examine the politics of a limpid stream's transformation into a desolated wasteland. I utilize a political ecology framework in presenting the urban environmental history of the L.A. River's transformation during this sixty-year period. In doing so, I handle the Los Angeles River watershed as a socio-nature produced and re-produced by metabolic processes that occur within historically- and geographically-specific networks of social relations (Gandy 2002; Heynen et. al. 2006b; Keil 2003). I also subscribe to Gandy's assertion that "the production of nature is a microcosm of wider tensions in urban society" and approach the metabolism of urban water in Los Angeles not as an isolated socio-ecological process, but as a reflection of the wider political, economic, and cultural forces at work in the production of urban space in L.A. (Gandy 2002, 2). In other words, the channelization of the river's flows, the re-defining of its central function, and the diminishment of its significance to the county's residents resulted from broader socio-ecological changes unfolding in Los Angeles during this period. Moreover, I recognize the power relations embedded within these socio-ecological relations and processes. In doing so, this chapter pays attention to the ways in which power played out in the transformation of local rivers. Human-nature interactions are not apolitical, nor are they politically neutral, and so I argue that the material-discursive transformation of the L.A. River was deeply driven by powerful political, economic, and scientific agendas (Ekers et. al. 2009). Therefore its technological and infrastructural modifications were neither inevitable nor the natural outcomes of a city's adaptations to particular geographic conditions, but rather resulted from political decisions.

Bearing these ideas in mind, the central argument of this chapter is that the channelization of the Los Angeles River came from a conjunctural moment in which political,

[20] Quote by William Mulholland in 1878. Quote by Dick Roraback in 1985., a journalist for the *Los Angeles Times*.

economic, cultural, and scientific forces intersected to advance the widespread urban development of the Los Angeles floodplain over other modes of land-water management. During this particular conjunctural moment—from the turn of the 20th century, and culminating in the 1930s-40s—the forces which represented the "wider tensions in urban society" in Los Angeles facilitated particular patterns of urbanization, reinforced particular discourses of nature, and privileged particular forms of scientific knowledges that together positioned the wholesale channelization of the L.A. River as the necessary course of action. Rather than the natural or inevitable outcome of urbanization, the concretized re-configuration of the L.A. River watershed occurred within the historically- and geographically-specific moment whereupon the political-economic agenda of regional urban growth coincided with the techno-scientific interests of agencies privileging structural modes of water management.

By the late nineteenth century, the powerful capitalist and corporate class, represented by railroad companies, real estate syndicates, boosters, and other business elites that carried a financial interest in L.A.'s growth, pushed for the economic development of the region; their interests were largely assisted by an entrepreneurial local state. This imperative for economic growth and capital accumulation through urban development was in part assisted by a political-scientific apparatus, particularly from the turn of the twentieth century onward, which privileged the centralization of resource management and managerial authority of techno-scientific 'experts'. This political-scientific apparatus, embodied in the policies and institutional practices of water agencies, favored structural and engineered modifications to river systems as solutions to the problem of floods. Together, these political, economic, and scientific forces allowed for the realization of a hegemonic agenda of capitalist urbanization in Los Angeles, as it: prioritized rampant land development throughout the flood-prone L.A. region, promoted urban growth through the extraction of water from nonlocal sources, and consolidated the political and scientific authority of technocratic agencies which promoted engineered solutions to environmental problems. Operating upon the physical landscapes of the watershed, these social interests also drew from and reinforced powerful ideologies concerning nature. These ideologies worked through narratives and discursive formations that positioned 'chaotic' nature and 'orderly' cities as diametrically opposed to one another. They persuasively argued that since natural processes, if left to their own devices, produced disasters that disrupted the growth of the modern city, these disruptive forces could—and should—be tamed by scientific and technological mastery.

In presenting a political ecology informed history of the Los Angeles River, this chapter follows the changes in discursive representations of the river—in addition to the physical modifications—during this sixty-year period. Textual descriptions and other representational devices of Southern California's rivers reflected and reinforced the broader cultural-ideological ideas held with regards to water, urban space, and natural disasters. Representations of floods, especially after the acquisition of water from the Owens River and during the first decades of the twentieth century, fed into the hegemonic discourses of urban water which, again, facilitated the conditions which made possible the realization of unencumbered urban development. According to Stuart Hall (2006), discourse:

> is a way of talking about or representing something. It produces knowledge that shapes perceptions and practice. It is part of the way in which power operates. Therefore, it has consequences for those who employ it and those who are 'subjected' to it (173).

Hall makes it clear that discourses do not simply operate on the realm of the symbolic/semiotic, but exerts influence upon material outcomes. Therefore, it is important to examine the terrain of

the ideological in order to understand how the ordering of ideas, meanings, and discourses become translated into practices and materialized in specific forms and consequences.

Throughout the chapter, I present how the textual depictions, representations, and portrayals of the L.A. River (and its flooding) shift over time and under different sets of social and ecological-environmental conditions, to reveal the specific role that the discursive played in the material transformation of the watershed. Although by no means a comprehensive discourse analysis of L.A.'s environmental history, I present select textual material that captures the dominant cultural perceptions and attitudes around nature, urban space, and technological control which serve as "the mental frameworks" and "systems of representation" present during this historical period (Hall 1983, 64). Much of the material I draw from comes from news publications, such as the *Los Angeles Times*, as well an assortment of engineering reports and planning documents.[21] Aside from these primary documents, the remainder of this chapter is drawn from secondary historical accounts of Los Angeles, its water infrastructures/systems, and its environmental transformations. Because there already are so many environmental and urban historical accounts of Los Angeles, I rely upon their much more thorough and extensive analyses in constructing my arguments for this chapter. Providing this history reveals *how* L.A.'s watersheds underwent dramatic transformations, and unravels *why* powerful groups saw fit to "kill" a river for the growth of a city.

THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE LOS ANGELES RIVER (LATE 18TH CENTURY TO EARLY 1900S)

"Nuestra Señora de los Angeles de la Porciuncula": Pre-European Uses of the River

The history of Los Angeles cannot be told without a history of the Los Angeles River; one could argue that the history of the river *is* the history of L.A. (Price 2006, 2008). It was only through the presence of the L.A. River that the area known as Los Angeles came to exist. And as the region and its residents changed, so too did the ideas and ways of interacting with its waterways. Before European settlement of Southern California, the indigenous inhabitants of the region, the Tongva people (also known as the Gabrielinos), depended upon the resources of seasonal streams as they practiced a hunting and gathering mode of production (Gumprecht 1999). The Tongva shifted settlements seasonally, following the sources of available food throughout the year, with the seasonal flow and movement of local rivers as one of the most crucial factors of their movements. During the dry summer months, the water in the rivers would barely make up a trickle of flow, and oftentimes the riverbed remained dry. With the rainy period in the winter months, however, the rivers and streams could swell into powerful flows that meandered across lands and fed into existing wetlands (known as *cienagas*) and pools. As their

[21]The newspaper's relationship to the story of the L.A. River is interesting. Set up in 1881, the *Times* came to be during an especially wet decade, marked with heavy rainfall and several floods; this chronological overlap appears to have been written about in the early years of the publication. Second, the publication and its owner, General Otis, enjoyed incredible amounts of influence among the business elite being established in L.A. during the turn of the century (Gottlieb and Wolt 1977). As a member of the LA Chamber of Commerce, the Merchants and Manufacturers Association, and a significant landholder in a powerful real estate syndicate, Otis and his newspaper signified the business interests of Los Angeles, one that not only pushed for the construction of the LA Aqueduct but also for the development of lands in the region, especially the outlying valleys adjacent to the downtown core. Otis' successor at the *Times*, Harry Chandler, furthermore, was notorious for using the newspaper to advance his pro-business agenda, including real estate speculation and development. Thus, the history and workings of the *Los Angeles Times* and the growth machine behind the expansion of the Los Angeles region are bound up with one another. Examining the representations of nature, the river, and the city through the discursive material published through the *Times* joins together L.A.'s elite actors the role of the local newspaper in shaping the semiotic and symbolic meaning behind the L.A. River.

subsistence depended in part on the resources of the environment, these indigenous groups structured their social practices and arrangements around changing geographic conditions, which included the periodic inundations of the regional rivers.

With the introduction of European settlers in the Southern California region, the dominant and popular narrative begins in 1781. It was during this year that the Spanish settled the *Pueblo*, a quiet outpost of the Spanish empire that was to later grow into the municipality of Los Angeles. Notably, the pueblo was located at the confluence of the Los Angeles River and a tributary later named the Arroyo Seco. In an expedition begun in 1769 by Spanish explorers surveying the Southern California environment for possible settlement locations, Father Juan Crespi, a priest and member of the expedition, wrote the earliest accounts of the Los Angeles River. In his meticulous journal entries he describes the picturesque riparian landscapes that the weary expedition must have encountered in their travels:

> On going about three hours we came to the watering place the Captain and his soldiers found yesterday, another good-sized, full-flowing river with very good water, pure and fresh, flowing through another very pleasant green valley […] This river flows on down nearly at ground level through a very green, lush, wide-reaching valley of level soil...a very lush, pleasing spot, in every respect […] Good, better than good, and grand though the previous places have been, to my mind this spot can be given the preference in everything, in soil, water, and trees, for the purpose of becoming in time a very large plenteous mission of Our Lady of the Angels of La Porciuncula (*Nuestra Señora de los Angeles de la Porciuncula*) (Crespi 2001, 337).

In later entries, Father Crespi again extols the fertile valleys and the clear waters of this river basin, declaring the *Nuestra Señora de los Angeles de la Porciuncula*—or, *Rio Porciuncula* for short—to be superior to the other two excellent rivers in the region[22], and an ideal location for the settlement of a Spanish mission. On his return trip from exploring the coastal areas of Northern California, Crespi encounters the river once more:

> We crossed a large flow of water, but it was not the entire river; instead, from what we saw and crossed—we crossed three flows lying apart from each other—the river here is split into three branches flowing over a large plain through which it runs, so green and lush it seems as though it has all been planted. …Having crossed this river three times, I find it is the one that has best pleased me out of the three of them, and what with the three branches I saw this time, it would not be necessary to spend a great deal of toil in order to irrigate a great amount here upon its large plain, which may be four of five leagues in size (689).

It is clear from these entries that water was essential to those looking to establish one of the earliest Spanish pueblos in the territory of California. As Crespi's writings show, the *Porciuncula* was favorable for its flow capacity, which would allow irrigation of vast tracts of land without the expenditure of excessive manual labor; the river, in other words, was predominantly regarded for its utility value in facilitating human settlement. The early settlers, or *los pobladores*, agreed with Father Crespi, that the banks of this quiet stream, with its picturesque groves of cottonwoods and willows, appeared to be an optimal place to lay down the town. *El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles*, as the settlement was first called, took down roots near the flowing *Rio Porciuncula* and its smaller tributary.

Now established, the pueblo needed to grow. Historian Torres-Rouff writes that "few necessities occupied the minds of Los Angeles residents more than water", and as the pueblo grew into a thriving Spanish town, an irrigation system known as the *zanja* was constructed (2006, 122). The system expanded outward from the confluence of the L.A. River and Arroyo

[22] These are now known as the San Gabriel River and the Santa Ana River.

Seco, first to the urban settlements and then farther out to the agricultural fields that made up early Los Angeles (Ostrom 1953). Composed of open-faced ditches that piped river water from the central aqueduct, known as the *Zanja Madre*, the *zanja* network distributed the waters from the L.A. River to the surrounding lands of the Spanish town. Who owned the water, who had access to use it, and who maintained the *zanja* system reflected the sociopolitical institutions and cultural worldviews of these residents. In accordance with Spanish communal law, the rights over water resources were to be held in common by the *pobladores* and their descendants. This accepted arrangement of property rights and relations provided the legal framework for how societal organization was to be set up around a particular system of water allocation, distribution, and utilization. Water rights, known as *pueblo* rights, established communal rights (and equal access) to the water of the *Porciuncula* as well as required all members of the community to maintain the necessary improvements to the *zanja* system (Ostrom 1953). Town leaders could only make dramatic changes to the *zanjas* with consultation and approval by the community, who were ultimately the collective holders of the property rights to the waters. In 1854, the city of Los Angeles created the esteemed position of the *zanjero*, a watermaster, that oversaw the administering of water, maintenance of ditches, and adherence of specific water rights. In the earlier days of the city, agriculture and livestock management were the main purposes of water usage, and "throughout the Spanish-Mexican period the *zanjas* continued to be the principal source of supply for domestic purposes" (Ostrom 1953, 30).

Pipes, Property Rights, and People: Anglo-American Transformations of Urban Nature

If the Los Angeles River was a valuable natural resource to the citizens of Spanish-, and later Mexican-controlled Los Angeles, then it became the critical component for the continued development of the region under United States sovereignty. The year 1848 saw the annexation of half of Mexico's territory into the hands of the United States government through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and shortly after, the formation of the State of California through constitutional charter. Although mining, ranching, and agriculture had attracted Anglo-American/European settlers into the western coast of the continent several years prior to 1848, the formal process of U.S. territorialization over Los Angeles (and all of the other annexed territories) triggered ever-larger waves of Anglo- and European-American migration. Venturing into lands still dominated by Mexicans and native *Californios*, these white settlers saw a promised land that signaled the inevitable fulfillment of their Manifest Destiny (Fogelson 1967).[23] However, that destiny could only be made possible by the presence of—and ultimate control over—a ready water supply.

The first two decades after U.S. annexation served as a transitional period in the establishment of Anglo-American rule over the western territories, with Los Angeles experiencing gradual rather than punctuated demographic and economic change. Land ownership and property rights over resources, however, began to undergo a process of translation from a Spanish-Mexican legal framework to that of an Anglo-American one. This latter framework, rooted in exclusionary and individual-based rights over land and natural resources, stemmed from and promoted a capitalist mode of production and an ideology of commodified nature (Cronon 1983; Worster 1985). Beginning with the Land Act of 1851, which required all (former) Mexican landowners to prove their ownership titles (whether through land grants or purchases)

[23] Though white Americans settled into Los Angeles by the 1850s, it was not until the 1870s, especially during the 1880-1890s, that their population increased dramatically. McWilliams notes that: "Since 1870, the population of Southern California has increased at a phenomenal rate" (1942, 113).

to the U.S. government (and to pay subsequent property taxes and legal fees for those lands), the institutionalization of bounding/mapping land, establishing private property rights, and applying a monetized taxation system impacted Mexican Californians (McWilliams 1942). Moreover, for those *rancheros* who entered into the cattle market, spurred by the influx of gold rush miners, competition from other producers and the need to borrow capital resulted in worsened economic situations.[24] As a result of these multiple factors, landowning families lost their wealth and were forced to sell the vast tracts of land that made up their ranchos, often to unscrupulous land speculators at astoundingly low prices. Under the new U.S. regime, ranchos were broken apart into subdivisions and town tracts, while the communal ownership of the pueblo's common lands were terminated under a land tenure system dictated by individual, private property rights (Torres-Rouff 2013).

Water, likewise, underwent a process of legal, institutional, and physical reconfiguration. As Los Angeles transitioned from a Mexican town to an American municipality in the 1850s, the question of ownership of the city's main water source—the Los Angeles River—sprang up repeatedly and contentiously. In response to the constant squabbles over the river's flows, the California legislature and state courts in the second half of the nineteenth century formed, passed, and interpreted a series of laws in order to adjudicate the contested claims over this limited supply of water (Kahrl 1983; Ostrom 1953). In 1881, the California Supreme Court laid the legal foundation for Los Angeles' ultimate claim over the Los Angeles River; in a court decision, it granted the city rights to all waters (both surface and subterranean) of the river and its tributaries that lay within the city boundaries.[25] Arguing that pueblo rights to water claimed by the founding *El Pueblo* had been carried over under U.S. annexation, the Supreme Court granted the city of Los Angeles the continued pueblo rights over waters of the Los Angeles River—rights which are legally superior to that of riparian rights and the doctrine of prior appropriation (Hutchins 1959; Miller 1973). Regarding the precedent of Spanish-Mexican water law determining Los Angeles' continued rights to water access, McWilliams declares "never did an American city owe more to the fortuitous circumstance of Spanish settlement" (McWilliams 1942, 186). However much this American city owed Spanish water law, historians such as Ostrom argue that in adjudicating pueblo rights under a distinctly Anglo-American system of resource laws and institutions, the former took on an interpretation that had not existed under Spanish and Mexican law (Ostrom 1953).[26] Though the title and category of pueblo rights over water remained intact during the transition to Anglo-ruled California, the meaning behind these rights—water as communally-held property—were dismantled under U.S. law.

The significance of the 1881 Supreme Court decision is better understood within the context of the rapid change Los Angeles was undergoing by the beginning of the decade. Historians of Los Angeles mark the late-1870s and 1880s as a turning-point in the development and modernization of Los Angeles from a somewhat isolated agricultural town to a self-propagated urban boom (Davis 1990; Fogelson 1967; Fulton 2001). The 1870s saw the completion of railroad lines that swept into San Francisco and—eventually—Los Angeles, bringing along with them the masses of tourists, entrepreneurs, and immigrants from the East and

[24] Fogelson explains that "few Californians survived this crisis with their ranchos intact. Trained as soldiers and dedicated to the ideal of the Spanish grandee, they did not understand the complexities of the market economy" (1967, 16).

[25] Though the court placed this restriction on the city's rights, legal scholars who have studied pueblo rights in the US West point out that these rights are elastic, meaning that the amount of water that can be claimed by a city can grow along with the population size and territorial boundaries of that city. This elasticity lends to the legal strength of pueblo right claims.

[26] Torres-Rouff (2006) also argues that the Supreme Court's interpretation of Los Angeles' pueblo rights are more akin to protection of water diversions under the Doctrine of Prior Appropriation, a wholly-American set of water right claims.

Midwest, all in search of the sunny paradise Southern California had been advertised as. Boosters, backed by both the railroad companies and the local businesses, fueled these migrations with printed materials and whirligig tours that painted the region south of the Tehachapis as the real-life manifestation of a mythic Eden. Ranchos, now in the hands of land speculators and real estate developers, were subdivided, platted into tree-lined towns, and sold to newcomers eager for their share of the sun-kissed American Dream (McWilliams 1942). Real estate values and speculation reached feverish levels of activity, driven by the increasingly-efficient machine of railroad companies, boosters, developers, and tourists, who together symbiotically generated and perfected the commodification of land. In response to the boom (and subsequent bust) of this decade, the late 1880s also marked the formation of the powerful Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and the dramatic resurgence of the *Los Angeles Times* (Gottlieb and Wolt 1977). Always in competition with San Francisco and San Diego to become the largest California city, Los Angeles now appeared poised to realize that dream and outgrow its rivals to the north and south.

It is during this period of astounding growth and even more frantic self-promotion that the city of Los Angeles secured full rights and control over a steady water supply. Though private water companies and delivery systems formed as early as the 1850s, much of the water that supported the region continued to come from the Los Angeles River, and through continued reliance of the *zanja* system. Thus, it was crucial for the city of Los Angeles (and then, for a short period, the privately-contracted Los Angeles City Water Company) to retain as much control over the river's waters as possible, for growth, claimed boosters and civic leaders alike, necessitated water (Ostrom 1953). And it was not only the legal frameworks under which water was defined and distributed that changed after U.S. annexation, but also the infrastructural system which carried out that distribution. Torres-Rouff presents a historical analysis of how, beginning in the 1870s, the open canals of the *zanjas* began to be replaced with closed pipes that oftentimes ran underground (2006). Justifying this infrastructural transformation were discourses of public health, the need for technological modernization, and racial/ethnic superiority, even as the full-scale use of pipes cut off the public's access to water and produced inequitable distribution of water delivery and sanitation services. Moreover, this physical transition of infrastructure, from wooden ditches to metal pipes, signified a system of water supply that was more efficient in reducing waste and more effective in preventing contamination.[27] Rather than just a physical change of the conduit system, "the transition from *zanjas* to pipes signaled more than a change in Angelenos' relationship with their environment. It also altered their relationships with the city government and with each other" (Torres-Rouff 2006, 120). The material-ideological transformation of urban water, beginning in the 1850s and accelerating after the 1880s, occurred during a period of racial/ethnic turmoil and economic development, impacting the relationship between the city and its local rivers.

CHANGING IDEOLOGIES OF WATER AND THE DISCONNECTION OF FLOWS

The brief history of Los Angeles in the latter half of 19th century illustrates how the burgeoning growth of an American city unfolded on a political-cultural arena as well as a

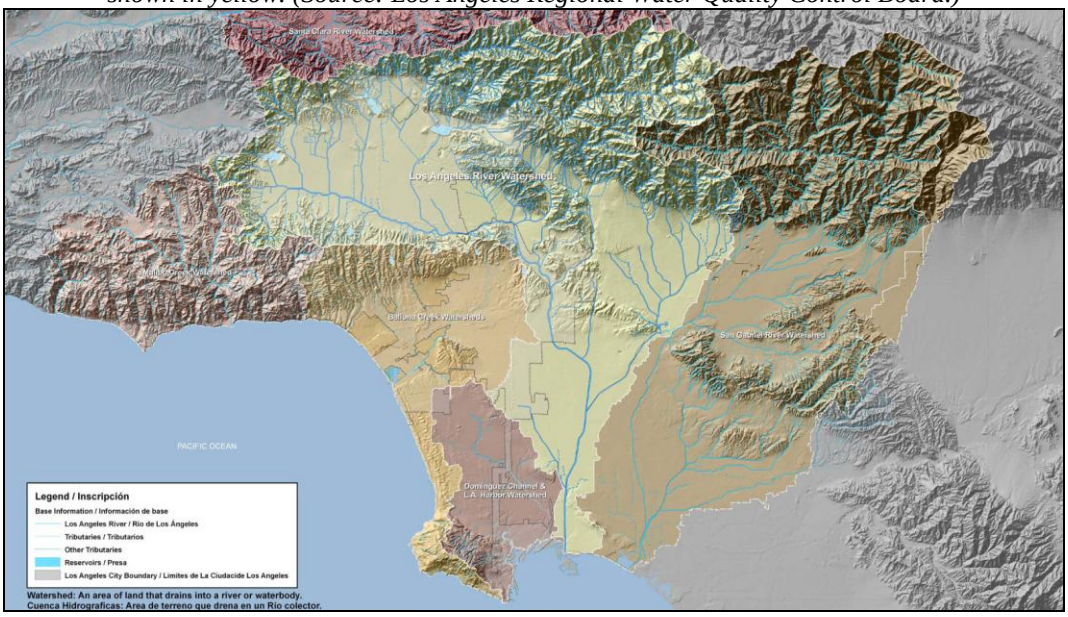
[27] According to Fogelson: "For the Mexicans, who cultivated small farms and accepted indiscriminate use of water, the system was satisfactory. But for the Americans, who consumed much more water in intensive agriculture and urban enterprise and expected a separate domestic water supply, the waste and pollution of Los Angeles' most precious resource was incomprehensible and intolerable" (1967, 24-25).

material-spatial one. As legal frameworks and cultural worldviews regarding the use and management of nature shifted, so too did the spatial organization of the landscape and the resources contained within. From the 1880s onward, then, it is crucial to understand the shifting role of the L.A. River's waters within the rapidly changing terrain of water politics and ideas of nature that accompanied the urbanization of the region (Gumprecht 1999; Orsi 2004). In the later decades of the nineteenth century, to the minds of those who hoped to develop Los Angeles from a quiet rancho town to a bustling metropolitan empire, the Los Angeles River represented the tension between necessary natural resources and a bothersome, oftentimes destructive nature that impeded progress via its floods just as much as it facilitated progress through its water supply. The opening of the Los Angeles Aqueduct in 1913 triggered a partial resolution to that tension. However, no simple series of causes and outcomes exist—the river did not simply transform from resource to nuisance to hazard, just as the city did not simply open an aqueduct because it needed more water. Rather, the acquisition of imported water supplies, the social construction of the river as a site of natural disaster, and the continued (and carefully planned) explosion of urban growth are entangled processes that depended upon new ideologies/attitudes of water. During the next thirty years, Los Angeles would undergo shifting relationships to river waters, separating and categorizing certain flows as controlled versus uncontrollable, as valuable versus disposable.

"A Freakishly Paradoxical Environment": Geography of a Southern California Watershed

Any analysis of water's movement through Los Angeles must consider the geography of Southern California. However beneficial a resource it was considered to be by early residents, the river is also a physical thing shaped by the hydrologic and geologic processes constituting the catch basin. And the Los Angeles River catch basin, like many other Mediterranean-climate stream systems, is prone to floods. Arguably, the natural lay of the land combined with the region's climate produce a watershed perfectly set up for occasional floods of intense magnitude and sudden ferocity. Historians are quick to point out this flood-prone nature of the Los Angeles environment. Carey McWilliams, in his assessment of the geo-physical state of Southern California, concluded that it was "a freakishly paradoxical environment" (1942, 184). In a region where "the absence of local water resources is…its eternal problem", the paradox lies in the fact that it is also the "land of freak floods [where] it neither rains nor pours; the skies simply open up and dump oceans of water on the land" (McWilliams 1942, 183-184). Mike Davis, in his insightful quest to dissect the "ecology of fear" that shapes geographical imaginaries of Los Angeles, claims that here, "high-intensity, low-frequency events…are the ordinary agents of landscape and ecological change" (1998, 18). "The extreme events that shape the Southern California environment", he argues, are not "random disorder", but "a hugely complicated system of feedback loops that channels powerful pulses of climatic or tectonic energy…into environmental work" (19). Not only is the Los Angeles basin a place frequented by regular floods, argues Jared Orsi, but its landscape was in fact made desirable for settlement by those very floods. "The floods had made the land," he states, though "the soils that settlers in the late nineteenth century found so fertile were a product of the very climatic action they did not believe in—repeated deluges and constantly changing river channels" (2004, 30). William Fulton's assertion that "by all conventional notions, Los Angeles is a foolish location for a big city" succinctly summarizes these assessments of a freakish, paradoxical environment (2001, 6). So what about this geographical site renders it so perfect for floods?

Figure 2.1. Topographic map of Southern California's major watersheds. The Los Angeles River Watershed is shown in yellow. (Source: Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board.)



The Los Angeles River watershed is approximately 840 square miles in size. Beginning in the San Fernando Valley and ending at the Long Beach harbor, the mainstem river is just over fifty miles long, fed by underground reservoirs and five-six major tributaries (Bigger 1959; Orsi 2004). The upper portions of the watershed are bounded and shaped by three different mountain ranges: the Santa Susana Mountains in the northwest, the Santa Monica Mountains in the southwest, and the steep San Gabriel Mountains in the northeast (*Figure 2.1*). These mountain ranges, particularly the San Gabriel Mountains, are relatively young and thus characterized by geologic volatility and astounding rates of sediment erosion (McPhee 1989). In other words, the entire range sheds enormous amounts of eroded sediment every year, which is counteracted by the even more rapid uplifting occurring due to tectonic activity. Compounding this sedimentation is the ecology of the watershed's highly-flammable chaparral uplands, which are characterized by periodic fires that leave behind denuded hillsides laden with loosened sediment/soils made impermeable by substances released from plant litter (Troxell and Peterson 1937). Without the anchoring roots of vegetation and blanketed by wax-like soils, the post-fire foothills need only minimal rainfall to trigger an onslaught of debris flows. Moreover, from the mountain peaks to the flatlands of the floodplain, the change in land elevation throughout the watershed is dramatic. The mainstem Los Angeles River drops 795 feet during its relatively short course of fifty-one miles; the steep topography can be better grasped when compared to the Mississippi River's 605 feet drop over its 2,000 miles of flow (Gumprecht 1999).[28] According to McPhee, "the San Gabriels are nearly twice as high as Mt. Katahdin or Mt. Washington, and are much closer to the sea. From base platform to summit, the San Gabriels are three thousand feet higher than the Rockies. To be up in the San Gabriels is to be both above and beside urban Los Angeles" (1989, 205).

[28] The actual length of the river is somewhat contested, with some environmental organizations/activists arguing that it currently runs 52 miles as opposed to the 51-mile length reported by government agencies and scientific reports. For more discussion of this topic, see Linton 2008.

Because Southern California possesses a semi-arid climate, its rivers are marked by seasonal flow variation. Historically, due to intervals of dry, summer months punctuated by shorter, wetter winter seasons, the streams and rivers of Los Angeles flowed quickly during the latter and oftentimes went dry during the former (Gumprecht 1999). These highly varied seasonal flows did not allow for the creation of permanent, deep-flowing channels, but rather produced hydrologic flow regimes characterized by meandering routes, ephemeral riverbeds, and regularly inundated floodplains (Kondolf et. al. 2013).[29] Not only were Southern California rivers prone to meandering, but they even dramatically shifted its entire course after particularly heavy periods of storms.[30] Seasonal variation and channel capacity were (and continue to be) exacerbated by the unpredictability of rainfall in Southern California and the highly varied amounts of rain throughout the up- and lowlands. Rainfall records indicate a yearly "average" of fifteen inches for the Los Angeles basin; however, this average is "merely an abstraction", as "the actual norm turns out to be seven- to twelve-year swings between wet and dry spells" (Davis 1998, 16). During a single wet spell, the region can experience multiple hundred-year storms, only to face extreme drought in a following year, and "this meteorological volatility renders the concept of a normal season meaningless in southern California" (Orsi 2004, 3). In addition to temporal irregularity, wind patterns and topographic extremes produce spatial variation in rainfall across the region. The mountain ranges are especially prone to torrential rains, to the degree that the flow in the Los Angeles River "has been known to increase its flow three-thousand-fold in a single 24-hour period" (Davis 1998, 17). All of these topographic, hydrologic, and climatic traits—steep hillsides, sporadic deluges, violent flows of runoff, and semi-amorphous streambeds—work in tandem to produce a flood-prone geography. Evidence of these floods was even documented by Father Crespi in his journals, as when he encountered the Arroyo Seco, one of the river's main tributaries:

> [T]here is a large dry creek to the north-northeast, with a very large bed *showing plainly what big torrents it must carry*, with dead trees visible in its bed that it must carry down from the mountains, and in its bed large pine-nut cones have been found (2001, 337, emphasis added).

Crespi's descriptions of these riverbeds provide some of the earliest illustrations of the dynamic waterways of the region and their impact upon landscapes throughout the watershed.

"Aqueous Supply" and "Treacherous Stream": The Two Faces of the River

It is within this paradoxically water-scarce yet flood-prone geographic site that the rapid changes of population growth, urbanization, and industrial development of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century occurred. According to Gottlieb, the Los Angeles River "in fact, was both symbol and substance of Anglo Los Angeles' complex view of its surrounding environment" (2007, 139). This complexity stemmed from the simple fact that the rivers of the region—the Los Angeles, San Gabriel, and Santa Ana—remained critical to both the physical organization of urban space and the cultural-political arrangements of resource governance; their roles as the sole source of water could not be overlooked. Despite damaging floods that struck the region in the 1860s and 1880s, municipal and business leaders, boosters, and residents alike regarded their local streams as necessary features to an otherwise idyllic Southern Californian

[29] See Gumprecht, (1999) for maps that chart the historical movements of these meandering streams.

[30] The most dramatic demonstration of the river's tendency to meander occurred in the early 1800s. Due to heavy rainfall and stream flow, the river shifted its course from flowing south (to empty into the Long Beach harbor) to flowing west and emptying into the Santa Monica Bay. Several decades later, the river shifted course to once again flow south into Long Beach. Between 1815 and 1889, the river changed courses four times (Gumprecht 1999, 140).

environment. In the period of boosterism, when "a consortium of local businessmen and large railroad interests" fueled an imaginary of Los Angeles largely built on the healing properties of a naturalized environment and perfect climate, a bucolic representation of nature was used to sell real estate and promote tourism (Klein 1997, 27). Though featured as a central attraction of this idyllic environment, the L.A. River was in reality simultaneously a treasured, even fiercely-protected resource (as evidenced by the flurry of legal activity surrounding rights to its waters) and an occasional hazard to the fledgling city.

This conflicting and dual nature of the river is reflected in discursive representations of it in popular media and institutional opinion. In an editorial piece by the *Los Angeles Times* in February 1882, one writer muses on the unique characteristics of the L.A. River. Though its flows are small and its channels devoid of commercial vessels, it is nevertheless:

> the life of the emporium of Southern California, and we should do it a deserved homage, for should misfortune befall it to the extent of having its aqueous supply shut off for a year, we could bid farewell to this beauteous home of Angels, and fold our tents and follow the lead of the absquatulating Arab in his silent march away ("The Los Angeles River" 1882a).

Overly-dramatic writing aside, the article's author credits the river as the reason for continued civilization in a land as dry as those distant deserts occupied by "Arabs". Not only did the river allow for human occupation in L.A., but it also represented the enormous potential of the land, should the right infrastructures and property rights be assembled. "[W]hen intelligent capital shall sink wells of large capacity some eight or ten miles up the river, and pipe the water to us," the same writer envisions, "the volume thereof will be so much increased that the entire land between us and the sea may be irrigated all that is desired for the cultivation of vines, fruits, and corn" ("The Los Angeles River" 1882a). The rivers of Southern California, in irrigating fields, powering mills and street lights, and sustaining whole cities, were framed as nature's providential provisioning of water needed to meet considerable demands. Valued foremost for its industrial utility—this was not just water for the people, but water that powered the very engines of wealth production—the river waters became intertwined materially and symbolically with the imperative of capital growth. Man could overcome the physical limitations of semi- and arid lands through the industrious application of water technologies that converted these waste-lands into ones of productive use (both agriculturally and financially) and value-making.

Similarly, in another *Times* article from 1887, a local booster extols the natural virtues and advantages of the Southern California basin. Asserting that "the season of unchecked prosperity which the country enjoys is the legitimate outcome of natural conditions", the author describes the sunny climate, ample agricultural lands, and scenic coastlines. This litany of advantageous natural conditions includes the "three small rivers of great importance" in Los Angeles County, which are "comparably insignificant in volume" yet "are still the 'well-spring of life' for this country". Small and non-navigable these rivers may be, but:

> From them are taken the water supplies which transform the country from an almost barren waste into a garden. The water is mainly carried in ditches, flumes, and pipes, and thus distributed over the agricultural and horticultural lands. Thus are our small rivers rendered of more value to us than are the large rivers of many other lands to the sections through which they flow ("Sun-Land" 1887).

Here, as in the 1882 article, the centrality of the river's water in transforming an undesirable and intractable landscape—a barren wasteland—into a productive, fertile, and ultimately profitable one—a flourishing garden—is celebrated by the author. These assertions can be seen as more than the triumphant rhetoric of boosterism. Until the grand opening of the Los Angeles Aqueduct

more than twenty years later, and before Mulholland could exhort LA residents to "take" the canal waters, the small rivers of L.A. County served as the main water source for a growing city and its thirsty population (Ostrom 1953). It also bears reiterating that the value of the river's waters was derived from its utility in industrial and agricultural activities; the water's use value lay in its ability to generate exchange value—when applied wisely—from the land.

Not all accounts of the Los Angeles River during this time, however, are celebrations of an essential and valuable waterway. In contrast to the above quote, another *Times* article, published just a year before, describes a different river that behaves in a wholly different manner.[31] After floods in early-1886 led to the deaths of three Angelenos, the newspaper covered them with a dramatic headline declaring, "Los Angeles River on a Rampage; Tears Away Bridges and Inundates a Consideration Portion of the City!" In rousing narrative and vivid detail, the article describes how the river, "an angry torrent", "suddenly became an angry, turbid stream and went roaring down, bank full…." Further down the page, the author's opinion on the flood becomes clearer:

> The river, though a small stream ninety-nine hundredths of the time, is still capable of foaming freaks when maddened by the Storm-God's lashings. It is a treacherous stream and cannot be trusted to be on its good behavior year in and year out. It needs to be restrained within its banks. It pays no attention to the 'official' river-bed, but breaks out just where it pleases, each time doing damage… ("A Fierce Freshet" 1996).

As this quote demonstrates, the celebrations of the Los Angeles River's valued contributions to the area came alongside exclamations of concern at the same river's threat to the prosperous growth of the same area. A year later, after another period of heavy rainfall, the *Times* pondered about "the restless river", describing the "great damage to property and the loss of life resulting from its refusal to be restricted to its 'official bed' in time of heavy rains" ("The Restless River" 1887).

Depictions of the river as a living entity, at times wild, maddened, and uncontrolled continued after another series of floods in 1889. In a December publication of the *Times*, the author laments the lack of infrastructural foresight in preventing overflows, declaring that as a result of this neglect, "the Los Angeles River has been encouraged to get on the rampage, and go roaring and foaming on its mad way to the sea" ("On account of" 1889). In another brief article from 1889, a *Times* writer warns readers that though the river "for the greater part of the year…is hardly big enough after it leaves the city limits to be navigable for a good sized catfish", during the winter months becomes "enough of a 'natural water-course' to frequently cause considerable anxiety to those who live near its banks, wherever a levee has not been built" ("The Los Angeles River" 1889). For a region that depended upon a waterway for much of its prosperity, the tension between dependency of a resource and the dangers posed by that same (yet occasionally-uncontrollable) resource proved to be a constant source of concern. During a meeting of the Los Angeles Board of Trade in 1886, members argued back and forth on whether the river should be confined within straightened channels or riverfront properties should be removed in order to widen the riverbed. In reporting on the discussions at the meeting, the *Times* summed up the Board's conundrum with the appropriate title, "The River: What to Do With Our White Elephant" ("The River" 1886).

[31] During the second half of the 19th century, there had been recorded flood events in 1862, 1884, 1886, and 1889, though these occurred when the floodplains were still becoming urbanized (Gumprecht, 1999).

While these discussions of the flood-prone river depict an intractable and destructive nature, and call for measures to rein in its sudden outbursts, they nevertheless remain connected to and cognizant of larger historical patterns. As lamented as they are, these floods do not discursively become isolated events that lack historical precedent, but are rather described as environmental occurrences that follow previously-observed patterns of ebb and flow. In an 1882 article from the *Los Angeles Times*, the newspaper reflects upon residents' experiences of past flooding events, warning that "the experience of the past should be the warning of the future. Judging from the facts presented, the necessity for taking some effective measures to confine the river within certain limits, as far as practicable, is obvious" ("The Los Angeles River" 1882b). In an 1882 special series dedicated to the Los Angeles River published by the *Times*, J.J. Warner, an L.A. resident, contributed four essays that examined the problem and possible solution to the city's uncontrollable river. In the first essay, published on November 14, Warner warns of the changing course of the river, claiming that:

> [Those] who have witnessed the velocity of [the river's] current and its destructive power, both in carrying away fields and covering them with sand, can imagine what would be its destructive effects if it should be turned to this other line… [W]hichever one it took the value of property carried away or covered with sand would be a great and irreparable loss to the city (Warner 1882).

However dire Warner's predictions may be, they were tempered by a narrative reliance on the history and geographic realities of the region. Earlier in the essay, he surmises that the natural processes of sediment transport and hydrologic flow of the river provided an explanation for the recurrent channel overflows observed within the city center.[32] But rather than represent these floods as strictly nature's impingement upon human settlements, Warner is careful to ascribe responsibility to the human actors as well:

> The founders of Los Angeles, and their descendants for half a century, were, from observation and experience, so well aware of the rambling of the river, that for more than fifty years after the settlement and organization of the town government not a dwelling-house was erected on any of the land included within the [flood]lines hereinbefore described. […] I believe it is a fact, although I will not assert it positively, that the first permanent dwellings erected upon any part of the described land were built by foreigners who had been residents of the town but a short time, and who had not, like the original founders and their children, been witness of the migratory nature of the Los Angeles river (Warner 1882).

The current pattern of urban settlement, according to the author, grew from an ignorance of the history and geography of the Los Angeles basin, and therefore exacerbates the social impacts of natural inundations. These floods cannot be regarded as wholly natural disasters, as the impacts felt by the population are largely a result of human activity.

Not only do these discussions of the river contextualize flooding within historical timelines and in relation to human responsibility, they also establish the connection between periodic inundations with the presence of fertile valley landscapes and crucial water supply. According to an article published by the Historical Society of Southern California in 1890, the interwoven forces of climate, hydrology, and topography, and their effects upon the region, are emphasized. The author of the article carefully presents the history of flooding in Southern

[32] Here, Warner writes: "A land which is built up by deposits of overflowing waters cannot be raised as high as the surface of the water, it follows that all such land is liable to be subsequently overflowed, and is in most cases in danger of being carried away to a lower level of the same river which built it up." He then continues on to say that "it will be seen by this process, in which the river is constantly, year after year, building up to its bed and diminishing the velocity of its current, forces it to leave the place where it has run for any considerable number of years, even without any greater flood than comes from our common winter rains."

California since the earliest records of rainfall in 1811, making the case that patterns of alternating dry and wet periods have long impacted the region and shaped not only valley lands but human industry (such as cattle ranching) as well. This pattern of shifting climate produces a record of floods that "appears rather formidable and might even be considered damaging to the good name of our State." However, he concludes that:

> Our floods, like everything else in our State, can not be measured by the standard of other countries. We are exceptional even in the matter of floods. While floods in other lands are wholly evil in their effects, ours, altogether causing temporary damage, are greatly beneficial to the country. They fill up the springs and mountain lakes and reservoirs that feed our creeks and rivers, and supply water for irrigation during the long dry season. A flood year is always followed by a fruitful year (Guinn 1890, 39).

Unlike floods in other regions of the world which are characterized as "evil", the flooding streams in Southern California bring the benefits of supplying the state with much needed water. Climatic and hydrologic processes are conceived as interrelated forces, and thus floods are portrayed as historically normal and regionally necessary.

The ambivalent representations of the L.A. River take on greater significance when considering them in the context of the myth making of Southern California's environment. As a place that was "imagined long before it was built", Los Angeles was sold as a desirable location in order to attract industry, a labor force, and an Anglo American populace that would buy up the plentiful real estate (Klein 1997, 27). Boosters, backed by business elites, produced pamphlets, travel books, and other promotional materials that extolled the healthful natural environment of Los Angeles, seen in bucolic landscapes and the restorative climate. The portrayal of the local rivers as scenic, life-sustaining streams served to fortify this geographic imaginary of a city blessed with both beautiful environments and bountiful natural resources. These representations of L.A.'s natural advantages were, of course, "half fact, half cloaking device, a collective imaginary shared by those who ran policy" (Klein 1997, 29). Nevertheless, the presence of frequent floods from these same rivers could not be completely ignored, and, despite the efforts of the myth-making booster machine, "certain problems with climate were…in fact, well-known to many travelers" and "appeared in popular descriptions of place" (Klein 1997, 33).

"A River for a City!": The Los Angeles Aqueduct and the Changing Role of Local Water

It is important to recognize the varied and complex cultural attitudes held with regard to the L.A. River during the later decades of the nineteenth century in order to better understand how those very attitudes began to change in the early-twentieth. During the 1880s and 1890s, a rapidly urbanizing semi-arid region understood its small, moody river as, by turns, an environmental benefit and burden. By the time of the disastrous 1914 floods, however, the Southern California region had become so urbanized, so permanently and densely settled among the floodplains of the watershed, and so reliant upon another river (flowing more than 200 miles away), that the Los Angeles River was regarded as mostly burden with little benefit. At the turn of the century, amidst the waves of newcomers moving into the Southland's sunny climes and the real estate booms, the historical awareness of a naturally inundating river gradually eroded from local consciousness (Gottlieb 2007). Moreover, as a seemingly-endless and hard-won supply of water came flowing down from the Owens Valley, the small stream that was the L.A. River, once the city's lifeline, now appeared useless at best and perilous at worst.

The story of the Los Angeles Aqueduct and its pivotal role in the history of the city of Los Angeles has been told many times, by many authors, and with various conclusions.[33] The purpose of retelling that narrative here is not to append to this excellent historiography, but to examine the interrelated workings of urban water, politics, and ideology during the 1900s and 1910s, that affected the perception, representation, and subsequent valuation of the Los Angeles River. The hegemonic logic of capitalist urbanization, which proliferated in the Los Angeles region during the turn of the century, demanded that technological solutions be applied to overcome nature's constraints and allow unencumbered economic growth. And a major constraint of the semi-arid Southern California climate was the persistent shortage of water. Efforts to overcome those shortages—both real and constructed—thus brought about changes to the relationship between nature and the city, and the material-symbolic transformation of the river at this time unfolded within broader changes of water's uses and meanings.

The end of the 1800s witnessed an imbroglio of activities dealing with who possessed ownership, control, and governing authority over the waters of the region's rivers, all of which left no doubt as to the centrality of the L.A. River to the city's survival. In 1898, after several years of haggled negotiations and political maneuverings, the Los Angeles City finally reclaimed municipal ownership of the water supply system, having purchased all infrastructural components from the previous supplier, the private Los Angeles City Water Company (Kahrl 1983). Water provision had not been publicly-owned and operated since 1868, and thirty years of poor service and high prices had convinced government leaders and select members of the business community alike that privatization of domestic water supply was a major setback.[34] With its pueblo rights, infiltration facilities, reservoirs, and distribution pipes all now firmly back in the powerful grasp of the newly-appointed Board of Water Commissioners, the city put the reservoirs of the watershed to use. Under the leadership of the board's chief engineer, William Mulholland, the municipal water service system was able to reduce rates, physically expand the distribution network, and promote water conservation among consumers.[35] Yet even while water suppliers drilled wells into the watershed's reservoirs and diverted flows through an endless maze of subterranean pipes, the trajectory of growth set upon the city dictated an expanded water supply reliant on the acquisition of new sources. Specifically, the city could justify the procurement of nonlocal water supplies only if the current local supply was perceived as heading toward inevitable scarcity. The limited local supply, embodied in the L.A. River, was no longer a natural advantage but a limiting factor to Los Angeles' potentially explosive growth.

By 1904, Los Angeles was undergoing another round of intense growth all the while emerging from a period of less-than-average rainfall.[36] The combined impact of a booming population and diminishment of available water resources convinced Mulholland and his close associates Fred Eaton (a former mayor of Los Angeles) and Joseph Lippincott (a Bureau of Reclamation official) to search for alternative and, eventually, nonlocal sources of water. Though water from the Los Angeles River was estimated to be able to sustain a population size of

[33] Some of these well-known histories are: Davis 1993; Erie 1992; Fogelson 1967; Kahrl 1983; Nadeau 1950; Ostrom 1953; Reisner 1986; Worster 1985; LADWP 1966.

[34] Privatization of the water supply was so unpopular that the city charter was amended in 1903 to prohibit any sale or lease of water outside of the city unless ratified by a two-thirds vote from L.A.'s residents.

[35] Interestingly, Mulholland is described by Kahrl as an avid admirer and studier of the Los Angeles River. The author states that "probably no man has known the Los Angeles River as well as Mulholland, and the lessons it taught him became the keystone of all his later works" (Kahrl 1983, 20).

[36] According to Ostrom, "During the eleven-year period from 1893 to 1904, annual precipitation varied from a maximum of 19.32 inches to a low of 5.59 inches. Five years within that period had an annual precipitation of less than nine inches, with three consecutive years from 1897 to 1900 receiving only 7.06, 5.59, and 7.91 inches, respectively" (1953, 8).

300,000, and though the population of Los Angeles stood at 206,000 in 1904, it was concluded that the river could not possibly provide for the future needs of a much larger future population (Fogelson 1967; Kahrl 1983). For Mulholland and others like him, the choice between curtailing growth or increasing supply needed to be made. "No adequate water supply to meet future requirements of substantial urban and agricultural growth could be found on the watersheds of the coastal plains of Southern California," concludes Ostrom. "The only alternatives were to restrict growth within the limits of a carefully conserved local supply or to secure a new source of supply beyond the mountains" (Ostrom 1953, 10). Of course, in a city conjured by dreams of grandeur and built up by sheer willpower alone, restriction of growth was the unthinkable alternative; a new source must be secured.

And so the chain of events that would eventually culminate in the Los Angeles Aqueduct began in earnest in 1904. Despite the interest the Bureau of Reclamation expressed for an irrigation project in the promising Owens Valley, Eaton, equipped with encouragement from Mulholland and the necessary paperwork from Lippincott (the chief of the southwest office for the Bureau of Reclamation and an L.A. resident), traveled to the sleepy Sierra town. There, he created extensive maps and surveys, and began purchasing land and water rights from the local farmers—who believed it was to the federal agency that they were selling these rights (Kahrl 1983). After months of silence from the City of Los Angeles regarding its intent to acquire the Owens River, surreptitious purchasing of rights by Eaton, and political negotiations between Mulholland and the Bureau of Reclamation, the plan to build an aqueduct from the valley to Los Angeles solidified in summer of 1905. The federal agency gave up its interest in the irrigation project, the farmers of the Owens Valley realized (too late) who they had actually sold their land and water rights to, and the news of the city's agenda became public through a breakthrough announcement in the *Los Angeles Times*. "Titanic Project to Give City a River" trumpeted the front page headline of the *Times* in July 1905, declaring the Owens Valley project and the city's bond approval a success in bringing "thirty thousand inches of water" to L.A. ("Titanic project to give" 1905). Overlooking or ignoring the fact that the city already *had* a river that supplied it with water, the *LA Times* headline presented the aqueduct project as the means through which Los Angeles would *receive* a precious, faraway river. There was only one river that mattered and it was not the one that ran through the heart of the city.

It is uncontested that the amount of water carried by the L.A. River in the early 1900s could not serve a much larger population; the watershed contained only a finite amount of acre feet at a given time while the population of the city was experiencing growth at geometric rates. However, historians argue that the *perception* of scarcity—not just the actual shortage based on projections—proved just as influential in the decision to seek nonlocal sources of water. According to McWilliams (1942):

> Even with its watershed right firmly established, Los Angeles began to fear a *future* water famine. Although the city had enough water in 1900 for a population of 102,249, it began to be disturbed by the discrepancy between the available supply and the rate of population increase. In large part, however, this fear was artificially stimulated by a group of powerful 'empire builders' of the period (187).

Divergent accounts exist to the degree of fear mongering generated by Mulholland, real estate syndicates, and local politicians; some longstanding stories even accuse aqueduct supporters of

intentionally dumping local water reserves as part of the campaign to artificially create fears of a 'water famine'.[37]

Regardless of how much collusion and conspiracy existed behind the political machinations and public discussions of the aqueduct, the flames of concern for an inevitable water famine were indeed stoked by powerful local actors, chief among them Mulholland. In order to convince the voters of Los Angeles to approve of a series of bonds that would finalize the property rights to the Owens and then pay for the $24.5M project, the chief engineer repeatedly insisted that the flow of the Los Angeles River was dwindling, that its supply could not support more than the existing population, and that "at the rate the community was consuming its water supplies, Los Angeles could run dry in only a few weeks" (Kahrl 1983, 85). Following Mulholland's lead, the *Los Angeles Times* (as well as other news publications) printed "almost daily predictions of the dire consequences" of failing to secure water from the Owens. Los Angeles City's water commissioners echoed these panicked calls for action, while a United States Geological Survey report from 1904 concluded that "the policy of the City in going to a distant source for its water supply is not merely wise, but is absolutely necessary" (quoted in Kahrl 1983, 89). Perhaps the most damning evidence against this campaign of artificially generated scarcity is the fact that from 1905 to the completion of the aqueduct in 1913, Los Angeles' population grew from 206,000 to over 500,000, and all the while it was sustained by waters drawn solely from the Los Angeles River (Kahrl 1983). Despite its somewhat fabricated origins, the diminishment of the L.A. River flows for the sake of acquiring that of the Owens River took on a truth in the minds of the city's voting public. Bolstered by the discursive strategies of experts and legitimized by widely disseminated representational devices, the shortage of local supply became a conceived—if not actual—reality.

That reality spurred overwhelming support for the Los Angeles Aqueduct from the public, who voted in 1905 and 1907 to pass the bonds needed to pay for the project. Amid ongoing federal investigations into the ethics of agency officials, legal wrangling as to the city's domestic versus agricultural uses of the water, and fiery battles between municipal and private utility interests, the 223 miles of gravity-powered canals were constructed in five years (LADWP 2017). When, in November 1913, the first flows of the Owens River rushed into the San Fernando Valley, the belief in technological might to overcome nature's obstacles stood unwavering. Water for the city had been secured; unhindered growth would prevail. "The city had to have the aqueduct," Kahrl concludes, "not to meet any actual demand and immediate needs, but to serve the *prospective* demands of a greatly increased future population" (1983, 89-90, emphasis added).

A future population—and its prospective demands—also meant prospective urban development and, through it, the tantalizing promise of easy profit. This is exactly what McWilliams meant when he described the fear of water scarcity as created by "empire builders", and further reveals the entanglement of land, water, and capital in the burgeoning city. Even before construction of the aqueduct was underway, the concern over who would exactly benefit from the additional water supply raised its head. Alarming discoveries led to heated allegations of a powerful real estate syndicate that—upon learning, in 1904, of the city's interest in diverting water from the Owens Valley—began to purchase arid, useless lands in the San Fernando Valley. This land speculation was, of course, now made less risky with the securing of future irrigation supply. Composed of the wealthiest and most influential business leaders in Los Angeles—rail

[37] Perhaps the popularity of the 1974 Hollywood film *Chinatown*, in which this very act is revealed to have transpired, has lent longevity, if not credence, to these stories.

infrastructure, newspaper, finance, and electric power company owners—this syndicate, known as the San Fernando Mission Land Company—by summer of 1905 controlled sixteen thousand acres of land in the San Fernando Valley (Kahrl 1983). Although individual members of the syndicate abhorred and competed with one another, "the general growth and economic development of Los Angeles and the South Coast provided such a unifying issue" that they lent the support needed by Mulholland, the city council, and the water commission to clinch the aqueduct project (Kahrl 1983, 99). Thus, water in L.A. once again became inextricably tied with issues of land management and capitalist endeavors, for as water continued to fuel the urbanization of the region and the development of land, these interlocked elements laid the groundwork for new meanings to the L.A. River.

The history of the L.A. Aqueduct demonstrates that the material-ideological transformation of the waters of the Los Angeles River occurred in conjunction with the transformation of imported drinking water. Flows of water—first from the Owens River, and then from Mono Lake, the Colorado River, and the Bay-Delta—became commodified goods that were imported into the region from increasingly far-off geographies (Gottlieb and Fitzsimmons 1994). These waters were treated and transformed into "clean", potable materializations, while it was ideologically transformed into a commodity that was divorced not only from the particular biophysical and ecological processes of its sources but also from the political struggles involved in its acquisition. Concurrently, the flows of the Los Angeles River underwent an ideological transformation that rendered it as unwanted, dangerous urban runoff, portending a radical material transformation of concrete channels and contaminated stormwater. Through this complex dual process of material-ideological transformations of imported, clean, consumed water on the one hand and expelled, polluted, and 'hazardous' water on the other, the dominant economic interests of unimpeded urbanization and industrial growth were served. This process is summed up by Gottlieb, who states that "with the L.A. River no longer central to the planning regarding L.A.'s growth—as water *for* the city and its soon to be annexed territory—the River increasingly came to be seen as a hazard rather than a supply source when water flowed *into* the city during major storms" (2007, 140).

The construction of the L.A. Aqueduct also exemplifies the role of the local state in facilitating the hegemonic agenda urban economic growth. The beginning of the 1900s saw the formation of a local state apparatus that undertook a series of bond-reliant public infrastructure projects, carried out to encourage economic and territorial growth of the region. Gramscian analyses recognize that hegemonic capitalist dominance gains its position not only through private actors, but also through the facilitative role of the state. In Los Angeles, during the turn of the century, the state-led and funded construction of large-scale infrastructure projects illustrates the active involvement of the local state apparatus in the promotion of the region's economic expansion (Erie 1992). In particular, the state's role in the construction of the L.A. Aqueduct and the San Pedro Harbor reflect a broader shift in local governance during the first three decades of the twentieth century; during this period, Western cities transitioned from purely entrepreneurial to state-led development regimes through implementation of public works infrastructure projects. The scale and significance of these projects demonstrate that "by the Progressive Era…the local state had become a key instrument of western economic development and interurban competition" (Erie 1992, 549). The crucial role that the local state plays in the operating of the urban growth machine—enacting policies and undertaking projects that facilitate industrial growth and the accumulation of wealth via real estate—remained in accordance with interests long held and carried out by business and industry elites (such as the railroad companies, the

Merchants and Manufacturers Association, real estate developers) (Molotch 1979). For the growing city of Los Angeles during this period, the key state projects centered on transformation of the land-water nexus, whether it was through the laying down of hundreds of miles of irrigation pipelines or the dredging of swampland to create a world-class port—or, as seen intensifying in the next decade, the construction of flood control structures.

ACTS OF GODS AND ACTS OF MAN: FLOODING AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF DISASTER

The city and its hinterlands underwent explosive growth in the first decade of the 1900s, so that by 1914, the landscape of the L.A. basin boasted streets, railroads, and miles of new commercial and residential development. Intensified urbanization produced settlement that encroached further and further up the foothills of mountains and within the sandy, low-lying floodplains. Along with geographical expansion, the local state consolidated its political strength while industry, in the form of agriculture, real estate, manufacturing, and rail and shipping trade, grew under the improved infrastructural systems in place. The early years of the twentieth century also brought about a series of drier winters, which, combined with the assurance of a newly secured water supply, fueled the region's collective amnesia with regards to periodic flooding and the fluvial vicissitudes of the Los Angeles River. Therefore, the material transformation of the landscape via rampant urbanization, the shifting attitudes toward water, and the continued realization of an economic imperative for growth ushered in the specific socio-ecological conditions upon which flood events of the early twentieth century played out.

In addition, broader political-cultural changes were underway, in Los Angeles and beyond. The turn of the century ushered in the Progressive Era and the implementation of programs that powerfully shaped ideas/practices around city planning and water resources management alike. With its emphasis on rational planning, efficiency, and rule by scientific expertise, the modes and mechanisms of governance during the Progressive Era contributed significantly to material-ideological transformations of urban space and water. Across the United States, city planning became a highly technical science and profession, one that operated under the ideals of social control, comprehensive planning, and rational distribution of land use (Peterson 2003). Subscribing to the political era's belief that problems were best solved through technical expertise, planners and Progressive reformists implemented programs for public health, zoning, housing, transportation, and resource circulation that would "engineer" the city into efficient and orderly spaces (Schultz and McShane 1978). Therefore, during this period of urban history, "reform-minded professionals adapted the principles of scientific management to the creation of an urban environment" that was not only tightly controlled and highly functional, but also "conducive to the accumulation of capital" (Fairfield 1994, 179-180).

Moreover, the ideals of rational planning, scientific expertise, and the engineering of solutions also governed the ways in which natural resources were conceived and managed. In particular, the management of water resources in the western United States was deeply rooted in notions of efficiency, conservation, and the heightened role of the state. The rise of hydraulic societies in the water-scarce yet territorially expanding U.S. West during the early twentieth century relied upon the commodification of water and the formation of technocratic regimes (Hays 1999; Worster 1985). These societies transformed material flows of water in numerous watersheds, from the construction of dams to the creation of reclamation districts to the redistribution of water for urban and agricultural uses. When examining these hydrologic and hydraulic transformations, Worster stresses the importance of recognizing that "the realm of

ideas, ideologies, and philosophies" are "decisive historical forces in their own right", and that careful attention must be paid "to the ideological matrix that has surrounded [modes of water governance], especially to those ideas that concern nature" (1985, 54). The ideological matrix operating around water resource management during the Progressive Era was, according to Samuel Hays, the "gospel of efficiency", which "promoted the 'rational' use of resources, with a focus on efficiency, planning for future use, and the application of expertise to broad national problems" (1999, vii). This Progressive Era gospel of efficiency, whether it was applied to the planning of urban space or the management of water resources, reveals the ideological framework—the ideas and philosophies concerning urban nature—operating in Los Angeles during this historical period. That these ideological underpinnings aligned with the economic imperative of promoting growth through appropriating water and urbanization of land, exemplifies the consolidation of power in Los Angeles.

"A New Ecosystem": Urbanization, the 1914 Flood, and County Response

In the early months of 1914, a major storm hit the city. Following a month of higher-than-average rainfall in January, the second week of February sent four straight days (from the 18th to the 22nd) of continuous rain upon the San Gabriel Mountains and the city below. The ensuing effects were disastrous. Fed by the nineteen inches of rain cascading down from the mountains as well as the three inches along the coast, the Los Angeles River near downtown was carrying over 31,000 second feet of water, or, "about the normal flow of the mighty Colorado River" (Bigger 1958, 1). As the rivers swelled and overtopped their embankments, they wreaked havoc upon the surrounding built environment, inundating roads, washing away bridges and buildings, uprooting agricultural fields, and dumping over three million cubic yards of silt into the recently completed—and very expensive—L.A. harbor (Orsi 2004).[38] Although the region had experienced much more intense storms (only nineteen inches of rain had fallen in 1914 versus the record *sixty-one inches* that had caused the flood of 1889), and although no human casualties were reported, the flood nevertheless left $10 million worth of damage in its wake (Carpenter 1914; LACFCD 2012).[39] Jared Orsi, in his excellent environmental history of the flood ecology of Southern California, argues that the floods of the 1860s and 1880s were of much greater magnitude than that of 1914; what had changed was not the type or intensity of floods that hit the region but rather the landscape upon which these periodic events unfolded. He states that "Los Angeles, the infant metropolis, had never experienced anything like the deluge of 1914" because while "in the 1880s, southern Californians did not yet depend on the absence of floods, nor had they altered their environment in ways that made it more flood prone," by 1914 "in contrast, a city had emerged on the plain, and with it a new ecosystem" (2004, 34-35).

This new ecosystem was a uniquely urban and industrial one that placed a fledgling metropolis at odds with the environmental realities of its geographic situation. The newly-constructed San Pedro harbor—heralded as "the greatest single asset" of Los Angeles County—depended in part upon minimal water and sediment flow from the rivers, which ended their journey precisely at the Long Beach port (Orsi 2004, 25). Commercial agriculture, particularly the booming citrus industry, flourished in the fertile soils of south L.A. County and San Gabriel Valley; these vast agricultural fields now lay exposed to the very floods that had laid down the

[38] Orsi (2004) reports that the Los Angeles harbor cost over $11 million, roughly half of which was paid for by the city, and the other half by the federal government. Also, according to Bigger (1959), after the flood of 1914, dredging of the harbor would cost an additional $400,000.

[39] According to the City of Los Angeles' Los Angeles River website, this translates to around $165 million in today's currency.

rich deposits of alluvial sediments that allowed crops to thrive. Meanwhile, that initial engine of expansion in Southern California—the railroads—had spent decades laying down tracks along the expanse of sandy, flat land that in actuality were the banks of local rivers and even the (temporarily) dry channel beds (Fogelson 1967). Granted what was essentially free land for rail construction to facilitate goods and people movement, the railroad companies—beginning with the giant Southern Pacific in the late 1800s and then later including the electric car railways of Huntington's empire—laid down tracks within the dry floodplain and built countless trestle bridges across the river (Gumprecht 1999; Orsi 2004).[40] Perhaps the biggest change to the land came in the form of paved surfaces, from building plots in subdivisions to expanding networks of roads. Though seemingly innocuous in its ecological impact, the scale of the spread of pavement reached unprecedented rates: "between 1904 and 1914, the city of Los Angeles alone gained nearly five hundred miles of improved roads" so that "by 1915, the city of Los Angeles had paved nearly all its streets" (Orsi 2004, 32).[41] The transformation of land under the urbanization and industrialization of Los Angeles—the creation of this new, urban ecosystem—occurred under the collective amnesia (or ignorance) of past floods, further fed the imperative of regional economic growth. It also, of course, exacerbated the potential for calamitous environmental events. The urban ecosystem provided the conditions for eliciting a response from its residents that significantly differed from their 19th century counterparts, and laid the groundwork for altered ways of perceiving and interacting with nature.

Taking stock of the devastation left behind by the February floods, the county Board of Supervisors created a five-member body of engineers in the spring 1914. This board of engineers was tasked to study the region's hydrologic and geologic conditions, and provide solutions to the county's flood problem. For a year, the engineers laboriously collected enormous amounts of data, surveyed every stretch of the watershed, and even amassed hundreds of interviews of elderly residents' recollections of past floods. The product of their endeavors was delivered to the county Board in 1915 in the form of reports that called for a series of engineering interventions upon the watershed, from mountains to the streams to the harbor (Orsi 2004). Though the political process of finalizing a plan, appointing a director, deciding upon a financing mechanism, and garnering enough State-led support was fraught with conflict and delay, by June 1915 the state of California passed legislation that created a regional flood control authority, the Los Angeles County Flood Control District (LACFCD) (Orsi 2004).[42] In a political climate of localism and fragmented governance, and during an era in which the federal government only intervened in navigation—not flood control—projects, the formation of this agency and the passing of a bond in 1917 to pay for its activities, nevertheless indicated an institutionalization and centralization of authority that dealt specifically with the matter of controlling floods (Bigger 1959).

Despite the political controversies that continued to plague the new agency, the Flood Control District wasted no time in flexing its institutional authority and applying its might upon a

[40] These tracks diminished the overflow capacity of the loosely-defined river channel while the base of the trestle bridges acted perfectly as debris traps that clogged streamflow and sent water rushing in unpredictable new routes.

[41] Carpenter (1914) reports that all of the construction had a secondary impact on the flood-prone nature of the newly urbanized region. The dredging of sand from the Los Angeles River led to the deepening of the channel, which served to increase the likelihood of its flooding during a storm event.

[42] The issue of which engineer's report would be signed into law, the district-wide bonding versus special assessment financing as mechanism for taxation, and the appointment of J.W. Reagan as the chief engineer of the Flood Control District involved contested politics, outcry, and lobbying by various local entities. These political controversies are well documented in both Bigger (1959) and Orsi (2004).

volatile watershed. Although the 1915 report by the Board of Engineers had been divided between recommendations that concentrated efforts on the upper versus lower portions of the watershed, a work plan that melded approaches of both up- and downstream modifications was agreed upon.[43] Armed with institutional autonomy, the clout of eminent domain, the ability to raise public funds through bonds, and the broad approval from the local business community, the LACFCD undertook engineering projects that would slow mountainside waters, collect debris, funnel out sediment, and provide a predictable—and permanent—path for streams to flow. That they did not have the necessary hydrologic or geologic data to formulate a widespread blueprint for a comprehensive flood-control system (and would not until 1931) did not deter the regional agency from acting within the Progressive Era's faith in technical skill, rational planning, and scientific efficiency (Orsi 2004). According to Bigger, the formation of the agency and provisioning of bond money set off a flurry of construction activities: "By 1931, the District had built twelve dams in the mountain canyons. […] Additional protective measures, including debris basins, small mountain check dams, spreading grounds, and channel-improvement works, had also been installed on main rivers and tributaries" (Bigger 1959, 15). Meanwhile, by 1924, measures to protect the harbor from excessive buildup of silt were near completion.[44]

The 1920s ushered in another round of population growth, economic expansion, and land development, especially as the city of Los Angeles annexed rural territories throughout the county as well as the San Fernando Valley. This growth renewed concerns about flood control and water supply, yet this time the Flood Control District stood poised to address both. According to the California Flood Control Act of 1915, the agency is tasked with both flood control management and water conservation in the region; the latter mission originated from residents' concerns that the local water supply—in the form of runoff—was being wasted with every major rain event. This approach to urban water management, like that of the aqueducts, reflected the early twentieth century's paradigm of rational planning and efficient management of resources by experts. The importance of conservation—of ensuring that resources did not go to waste—was a scientific and moral imperative of Progressive Era policymaking.[45] In Los Angeles, these ideological and scientific handlings of natural resources manifested in the water conservation measures of the county flood control agency. A water conservation bond approved in 1924 provided funding for a massive dam in the San Gabriel Mountains that would simultaneously impound floodwaters to prevent downstream inundation and create a reservoir that would increase the indigenous surface water supply (Orsi 2004). Ultimately, the San Gabriel Dam, as it was titled, was not completed due to the tectonic instability and constantly eroding hillsides of the San Gabriel Mountains. Despite its failure, however, the vision of the project represents the scientific approaches and cultural attitudes concerning water policy during this period, as engineered structures became the embodiment of multi-use resource planning. The attempts at water conservation in Los Angeles during the 1920s, though unfulfilled, indicate the workings of deeper ideologies regarding nature and political power. As Hays (1999) concludes:

[43] According to Bigger: "Downstream works would more visibly protect those persons through whose property streams flowed. The issue was also connected to the financial problem, as the downstream works would not only be expensive but also would not be mainly located in places where large numbers of the taxpayers lived" (1959, 116).

[44] Again, Bigger states: "On only one thing was there general agreement—that state and federal aid for the harbor work was most desirable. The task of obtaining funds from these levels of government went smoothly" (1959, 116).

[45] Similar ideas of waste/nature played out in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries, as centralized state authorities sought to modernize and civilize their territories (as well as consolidate state power) through improvement projects that captured previously "wasted" nature. Under colonialism, land determined as underdeveloped or even outside the legal strictures of private property was often labeled as "waste" or "wastelands", while the local populations were deemed as unable to capture and harness "nature's waste" and thus unfit for managing their own lands and livelihoods (Blackbourn 2006; Gilmartin 2003).

> The broader significance of the conservation movement stemmed from the role it played in the transformation of a decentralized, nontechnical, loosely organized society, where waste and inefficiency ran rampant into a highly organized, technical, and centrally planned and directed social organization which could meet a complex world with efficiency and purpose. …This was the gospel of efficiency—*efficiency which could be realized only through planning, foresight, and conscious purpose* (266-67, emphasis added).

However appealing the ideal of efficiency was, political turmoil impeded the efforts to execute flood control and water conservation in a comprehensive and organized manner. The late 1920s brought about new leadership in the LACFCD and a more methodical approach to a comprehensive flood control system. Forgoing the piecemeal and somewhat arbitrary process of project construction, the flood control agency sought to produce a region-wide plan that captured the interconnected dynamics of water, land, and climate.[46] From these efforts came the 1931 comprehensive plan, an empirically-informed report that categorized the various flood-control needs of mountains, foothills, and floodplain, and in response set forward a host of structures and modifications to address those floods (Orsi 2004). Yet political squabbling and deteriorating public support riddled the arena of flood governance in the 1920s, as bond after bond was rejected by disillusioned voters who instead sought federal assistance and water supplies from the distant Colorado River (Gumprecht 1999). Meanwhile, though local leaders had petitioned for decades for federal intervention to their flood problem, it was not until the mid-1930s that they received a positive response. Though the Army Corps of Engineers had begun working on harbor improvement as early as 1914, it was the only project undertaken by the federal government, much to the displeasure of L.A.'s officials. Creating and maintaining ports at San Pedro was regarded as vital to trade-by-sea and economic activity; the Army Corps were justified in port projects due to the significance of those projects to national and local commerce (one of the justifications for the agency intervention) (Bigger 1959).[47] Aside from redirecting the terminal flow of the L.A. River by relocating the mouth away from the harbor, the Corps saw no need for navigability improvement and did not touch the river. The flooding river and the nuisance it created, while seen as a serious problem, did not fall under the standard of improving interstate commerce/trade, nor did it contribute towards overall "national economic development"; it therefore remained unaddressed by the federal engineering agency (USACE 1998). Local officials and business leaders argued repeatedly that the damages caused by the floods did indeed impact commercial activities, but they were asking an agency to step beyond their jurisdictional boundaries and principle roles as facilitators of waterborne commercial activity (Orsi 2004).

"The Greatest Catastrophe in Los Angeles' History": 1930s Floods and Federal Involvement

By 1934, however, it seemed that Los Angeles' prayers would be answered, albeit through tragedy. That year saw a series of calamitous floods hit the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, wiping out homes, destroying roads, and leading to dozens of deaths. At the same time, the federal government initiated a tentative proposal to develop a national flood control

[46] Bigger argues that: "Before the development of the comprehensive plan, the selection of localities for projects and the type of works to be built were in great measure influenced by community demands. The bond issues placed on the ballot in 1914, in 1924, and in 1926 scattered projects to be built widely throughout the District. … A *sine qua non* of flood control planning was the distribution of projects throughout the area, so that everyone would have something for which to vote" (1959, 123).
[47] According to Bigger, the "protection of the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach was perhaps the principal raison d'etre of flood control" (1959, 134).

program that would provide exactly the type of engineering intervention the elite of L.A. had been so patiently asking for. On January 1, 1934, pounding rains—up to eighteen inches in certain areas!—unexpectedly hit the metropolitan region. While downtown Los Angeles waded through overflowed streets, it was in the foothill communities that disaster struck most severely. The previous year had been marked by hot winds and fires in the mountains, and the denuded hillsides of the San Gabriel Mountains proved unable to retain and infiltrate the deluge. Exposed waxy soils and loosened rocks mixed in with the torrential flow of water coming down the steep hillsides, creating waves of cement-like mud that gathered in volume and momentum (McPhee 1989).[48] Categorized by geologists somewhat clinically as "debris flows", these mud-like flows of water and sediment crashed into the sleepy neighborhoods of La Crescenta and Montrose, nestled in the La Cañada Valley at the Sierra Nevada foothills, along the Verdugo Wash tributary. In mere seconds, homes were completely buried, roads clogged with sludge-like mud, cars picked up, and buildings shattered to pieces under the force of the mud. By January 4, the *Los Angeles Times* announced to still reeling Angelenos that forty-two were dead and property damages had been wracked up to $5M ("Co-ordination of flood relief" 1934).

Calls for relief in the form of flood control projects swiftly sprung up from the disastrous New Years events; these were later hastened by another flood that hit in October 17, 1934, leaving six dead and more damages to property. The failure to pass yet again another local bond measure for flood control works in November 1934, combined with the severity of the January floods, drove local leaders to desperately continue their campaign for federal assistance and intervention (Orsi 2004). For both of these flood events, the language and representation of local rivers echoed that of the 1914 calamities, with these seasonal streams cast as unpredictable and dangerous impediments to urban growth.

By January 3, the *Times* reported that both city and county officials had requested $1.5M for repairs and reconstruction of the impacted area. "Los Angeles sends urgent plea to Washington for relief of flood-stricken area", fretted the *Times*, pointing to the "loss of life and damage to property cited" by local leaders in their appeal for federal aid ("Los Angeles sends urgent" 1934). Capitalizing on the nation's attention in the aftermath of the flood, the Los Angeles County Flood Control District in 1935 revised and submitted a new comprehensive flood control program to the National Rivers and Harbors Congress, and continued lobbying for federal assistance. By September 1935, local papers announced to concerned citizens that the Army Corps would be providing funding, manpower, and technological assistance for fourteen flood improvement projects, predominantly in the tributaries located in the upper watershed. At a total estimated cost of $20M, the county was equipped with the engineering expertise and federal support to protect their residents; officials were beseeching Congress for $30M's worth of additional projects. "Great new, far-reaching flood-control defense will tame vagrant waters tumbling down mountain slopes," trumpeted the *Times*, promising that the public works projects "will do more than safeguard property by controlling the runoff" by re-diverting river waters into underground basins ("County's huge new flood" 1935).

Aside from the direct relief funds, Los Angeles' persistence in lobbying could not have come at a more fortuitous moment. Up until the early 1930s, there did not exist a national flood

[48] McPhee provides a description that does justice to the scope and scale of these geologic features. He writes that "debris flows amass in stream valleys and more or less resemble fresh concrete. They consist of water mixed with a good deal of solid material, most of which is above sand size. Some of it is Chevrolet size. Boulders bigger than cars ride long distances in debris flows. Boulders grouped like fish eggs pour downhill in debris flows. The dark material coming toward the Genofiles was not only full of boulders; it was so full of automobiles it was like bread dough mixed with raisins" (1989, 185).

control program in the United States. Even though federal agencies such as the Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation had been formed (and as early as 1802 for the former) and tasked with large-scale water engineering projects, they operated in particular regions and/or dealt with specific water improvement works (O'Neill 2007; Shallat 1994).[49] Problems related to flooding were considered the concerns of local and state governments, who often were not equipped with the technical knowledge, funds, or jurisdictional reach to address floods at the scale of entire river basins. Outside of the Mississippi River basin and the Tennessee River Valley, the scope of flood control works remained minimal and decentralized (Barry 1997).[50] Even in Washington, politicians and lobbyists disagreed on the type of river basin management needed, with some advocating for single-purpose flood control measures while others pushed for comprehensive watershed planning that addressed problems of soil erosion, deforestation, and water conservation (O'Neill 2007).

However, in the era of the New Deal, the unprecedentedly expanded role of the federal government—intended to tackle unemployment and resource conservation—ensured the eventual establishing of a national program for river management. Under New Deal programs, such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Public Works Administration (PWA), work crews were assembled and assigned to work on flood control projects around the country, including Los Angeles (Gumprecht 1999). Meanwhile, single-purpose flood control advocates in Washington were able to push through the first Flood Control Act in June 1936, which reflected a victory for those who preferred legislation enacting engineered solutions over comprehensive watershed planning. The bill "established the federal government's responsibility for flood control on all navigable streams" and initially set aside $310M for the first round of projects (O'Neill 2007, 165). It authorized the Army Corps of Engineers as the principle agency with jurisdiction over modifications to downstream portions of navigable streams for the sake of preventing floods, while the Soil Conservation Service and the US Forest Service were left with erosion prevention schemes in upstream areas. In subsequent Flood Control Acts (1938, 1941, 1944) of the New Deal era, the powerful role of the Corps was consolidated, the amount of federal funding to river management increased significantly, and engineered structures "opened the way for much more intensive manipulation of rivers" (O'Neill 2007, 177).

To many in Los Angeles, the 1936 Flood Control Act appeared a windfall, an answer to their prayers. The active participation of city and county officials, particularly the presence of Flood Control District engineers, ensured L.A.'s piece of the New Deal pie. As soon as the discussion around a national flood control program reached the ears of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in 1934, they and the LACFCD submitted plans, sought relief assistance, and encouraged the Corp to study the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers (Orsi 2004). Even after the 1936 Act allotted $70M to Los Angeles, officials and district engineers continued to revise their comprehensive flood program and lobby for an extension of federal public works into new watersheds (Orsi 2004).[51] Later Flood Control Acts continued to earmark millions of dollars for projects along the Los Angeles River, a small and seasonal stream that could barely

[49] O'Neill states that: "Most advocates of inland navigation improvement and most army engineers had resisted having the Corps undertake flood control until 1917, let alone multipurpose river development. The Corps had incorporated new activities into its work over time, but usually only after Congress pushed, and only in its own due time" (2007, 157).

[50] The Mississippi River flood of 1927, one of the most significant floods in U.S. history, demanded an extensive flood control program from the federal agency due to the river basin's critical role in trade. The events of the 1927 flood and its environmental significance are recounted excellently in Barry 1997.

[51] In 1937, Ballona Creek was included the federal work plan for Los Angeles flood control. Two years later, the district asked for an additional $240M for more projects along the L.A. basin.

be categorized as "navigable" and had previously been ignored for its uselessness in relation to trade and commercial activities. It was through the federal government's major involvement in flood management that this once-useless river began to merit any attention. That attention now came in the form of increased manpower and federal money. According to Orsi (2004):

> …the [Army Corp's Los Angeles District] staff swelled from fifteen in August 1935 to more than sixteen thousand a year later. The army's involvement rejuvenated the flood-control efforts in Los Angeles, as the workers, 95 percent of whom came from relief rolls, spent a feverish year reinforcing channels, building dams, and digging debris basins above the La Canada Valley (107).

With such expanded numbers, the Army Corps as well as the WPA and PWA moved in to begin work on the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers in 1936.

Then, two years later, the storm event that many consider to be the greatest—or at least, most devastating—in Los Angeles history tore through the Southern California region. Following higher-than-average rainfall during the month of February, a collision of moisture-laden wind and cold currents of air over Southern California's mountain ranges triggered a five-day storm (Troxell 1942). Beginning on February 27 and continuing until March 4, 1938, record-shattering rainfall hammered down on the already drenched Southland, with the heaviest falls occurring throughout the day on March 2. During this storm period, the average rainfall reached 22.5 inches, while the hardest-hit areas, concentrated mainly in the San Gabriel and San Bernadino Mountains, experienced more than thirty inches of rain (the highest recorded reaching 32.20 inches). Peak discharge of runoff in the larger streams (such as the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers and their tributaries) reached record highs, exacerbated by earlier precipitation events that left behind saturated soils unable to absorb much more; not since the massive flood of 1861 had such high discharge rates been observed (Troxell 1942, 7). In the Los Angeles River, the recorded discharge rate reached up to 67,000 cubic feet per second, more than double that of the rates recorded during the 1914 flood. Major dams along the tributaries of Pacoima Wash, Tujunga Wash, and Arroyo Seco filled to capacity with runoff as well as eroded sediment and transported debris.[52]

The 1938 storm appeared the very manifestation of an environmental catastrophe. A USGS report found that while "the rates of rainfall during the storm period of March 1938 were not particularly high as compared with the rates in other storm periods in the same region," nevertheless "at stations in the headwater areas of many streams [including the Los Angeles River]…the maximum 24-hour rainfall was the greatest on record" (Troxell 1942, 1, 58). Regardless of how much total volume of precipitation fell in the 1938 flood versus previous ones in Southern California, the overall damage left in the wake of this latest flood marked it as the "greatest" in Los Angeles' history. In a December 1938 meeting of hydrologists of the American Geophysical Union, a hydraulic engineer of the LACFCD "described the March storm as at least equaling the greatest in Southern California records", with runoff rates reaching "at least three times as much as from any previous flood" ("Flood storm cause traced" 1938). According to the calculations of the Army Corps of Engineers, the five-day storm event and resulting flood took eighty-seven lives and racked up property damages exceeding $78.6M (Troxell 1942, 14). Other accounts estimated the death toll at over 140 ("Los Angeles is isolated" 1938).

Spanning over 290,000 acres and stretched out across five counties and numerous sub-watersheds, the reaches of the flood could be mapped out in destroyed orchards and agricultural fields, in decimated bridges, inundated roads and homes, as well as the thousands of displaced

[52] According to Troxell (1942), the discharge from the mountains reached up to 1,000 second-feet per square mile.

residents seeking aid (Orsi 2004; Troxell 1942). Closed freeways and railroads, broken telegraph lines and damaged telephone services, and halted air transport during the immediate aftermath essentially left the metropolis isolated and stranded ("Los Angeles isolated by air" 1938). Moreover, a third of all flood control projects built by the county since 1915 had been washed away or buried in debris, unable to withstand the violent flows of the very rivers they had been designed to control (Orsi 2004). Surveying the wreckage two days later, the city attorney announced that the flood was "the greatest catastrophe in Los Angeles' history" ("Indomitable Los Angeles" 1938).

Though the March 1938 flood inflicted costly damages and tragic deaths, its magnitude spurred yet again another round of federal assistance and support. County officials and Southern California Congressmen assembled a flurry of petitions to the federal government, their arguments centered on the unquestioned position that "enactment of flood control legislation…is imperative to the safety of the Los Angeles metropolitan area" (Francis 1940). Immediately after the devastating events of the flood, the County Board of Supervisors and Flood Control District requested federal funds up to $40M for repairs to the cities as well as continued flood control projects. In early March the WPA recruited 4,000 workers to begin emergency relief efforts in the impacted areas; again in July the District applied for almost $19M to the PWA in order to direct the labor of relief workers towards the construction of flood containment works ("W.P.A. assign 4000" 1938; "Fund of $18,834,000" 1938). The Army Corps, in cooperation with the Flood Control District, revised the comprehensive flood control plan for the Los Angeles and San Gabriel River watersheds, and submitted it to the War Department for appropriation of funds in spring of 1939. This latest plan, which included fifty-four major construction projects built over a thirty-year period, would cost the federal government a total of $237M ("Vast county flood" 1939). A year later, in response to another funding plea by the Flood Control District to the House Flood Control Committee, the Army Corps began conducting another study of watershed characteristics, while also hosting a series of public forums on local input to flood solutions (Francis 1940). From these activities came the added appropriation of $186M in the 1941 Flood Control Act for improvement projects in the Los Angeles region. Despite the staggering price tag to the implementation of this comprehensive plan, the era of post-Depression, New Deal spending meant that the federal government's role in local land-use governance had developed into a political norm, as the construction of large-scale public works projects, unemployment relief, and resource conservation were underway all over the country (Smith 2006).

From Floods to Disasters: Representations of Nature's "Menace"

As the floods of 1914, 1934, and 1938 demonstrate, expanded floodplain settlement in Los Angeles had exacerbated the effects of flood events upon humans. While the city had experienced storm events and inundations of greater magnitude in previous decades, the urban ecosystem upon which local rivers acted produced catastrophically different results, perfectly exemplifying Gilbert White's adage that "floods are 'acts of God,' but flood losses are largely acts of man" (1945, 2). And despite the myriad acts of men that had resulted in the massive damage of the 1914 flood, shifting attitudes regarding local rivers and urban water altered the way these "acts of God" were perceived. Already, the acquisition of an imported water supply combined with the short-term memory of L.A. residents with regards to their flood-prone environment had begun to alter perceptions about the Los Angeles River's value. The narrative of the river was no longer that of the water source that made possible human settlement, but

instead framed urban rivers as powerful disruptions to the process of city building. In other words, as rampant urbanization and floodplain settlement ensured that flood damages would continue to be "acts of man", the floods themselves increasingly became discursively constructed as "acts of God".

Each successive flood generated images and reinforced narratives of a city under attack. After 1914's catastrophic event, newspapers, planning documents, engineering reports, and public statements from politicians discursively handled the L.A. River as a liability, a safety hazard, and a force of incredible destruction. At times, the language used to describe the river likened it to a wild animal or rampaging beast. Referencing the damage to the city caused by the 1914 flood, the mayor of Los Angeles condemned the river flows as "savage waters" that turned cities into "their prey" (Orsi 2004). Local newspapers declared the river as a "menace", while the 1915 Board of Engineers report repeatedly described flood-prone neighborhoods as "menaced areas" (LACFCD 1915). Through these various representational devices, regularly-occurring flood *events* were re-constructed as flood *disasters*.

The floods of the 1930s continued the discursive re-scripting of regional rivers as untamed natures, portraying the region's historically and regularly occurring floods as aberrant disasters while oftentimes minimizing the human contribution to flood damage. For instance, reports of the 1934 New Years Flood framed the incident as a human tragedy produced by nature's fury. One article in the *New York Times* reported on the "crushing walls of water" that "devastated" hillside communities and left behind "flood-ravaged areas" ("38 die in floods" 1934). This "disaster" was attributed to heavy winter rains and recently denuded foothills; though the article noted that the late December storm was the "heaviest on record", it did not attribute the severity of damage to the presence of so many homes built on the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains.[53] The "heaviest" rains were presented as the sole culprit. Similarly, a story from the *Chicago Daily Tribune* described the New Years Flood as a force of nature "fed by torrential rains of unprecedented violence" that "carried death and destruction in its path" and "caused suffering" for foothill residents ("37 die in Los Angeles" 1934). In contrast to these violent torrents, the *Tribune*'s article notes on several different occasions the supposed 'normal' state of the L.A. River; at one point, it observes that "the river is usually only a dry riverbed", and later assigns the heavy rainfall (a "disastrous storm") as responsible for turning the "Los Angeles River, practically a dry gulch 364 days out of the year" into a "raging stream".

Not only does this language reinforce the discursive construction of the river as a force of malice and destruction, but (erroneously) presents the flood as an anomalous natural event that is uncharacteristic of the river's usual dry state. After the flood in October 1934, another *Tribune* article catalogued the havoc wreaked by "a freakish play of weather"; again, the interplay of rainfall, fires, and river flows are presented as aberrant and uncontrollable ("500 flee homes" 1934). These "freakish" forces of nature are even personified as enemies of progress and order. One 1935 *Los Angeles Times* article headline warned, "Fires and floods allied as foes of Los Angeles", and depicted the interlinked processes of hillside fires and flash floods as the "city's double danger" that "will sweep through unprotected communities, leaving death and destruction in their wake" (Hall 1935). A special front page *Los Angeles Times* article, after exhaustively

[53] There were, however, some articles that discussed the problem of foothill development as a contributing factor to the devastation of the 1934 flood. A January 5 article from the *Chicago Daily Tribune* baldly states that: "The tragic loss of life in the Los Angeles flood is another warning that river beds should not be used as building sites. That is a lesson which repeated disasters in many sections of the country have failed to teach." The article then continues on to recommend that future development in Los Angeles should be curtailed: "Permits to build houses in areas subject to flood should be denied in settled districts like Los Angeles" ("The lesson of" 1934).

cataloging the climatic instabilities recorded in the "freak weather year" of 1934, concluded that "the hand of nature falls heavily" through "out-of-the-ordinary climatic disclosures" ("Hand of nature falls" 1934). Collectively, these discursive depictions construct a cohesive narrative of natural disaster, where freakish forces of nature beget human tragedy.

Four years later, the accounts of the 1938 flood also painted the event as an unprecedentedly destructive event, a disastrous brush with an angry Mother Nature. Flying over Los Angeles after the March storm, a *Washington Post* reporter noted the "raging rivers, hardly the size of Rock Creek on [sic] previous visits, making shimmering islands of housetops and swirling around piles of iron and stone once part of bridges." He observes that: "Los Angeles itself presented a picture of desolation. Streets were piled high with twisted wreckage. Bridges were destroyed, homes ruined. The beauty of Pasadena was despoiled…all were flood-scarred and desolate" (Haight 1930). Another *Chicago Tribune* article declared unpredictable Mother Nature as the culprit of devastation, pointing out that "the rain that spread death and destruction through Southern California" catalyzed storm conditions in which "bridges were torn away, homes were demolished, automobiles were swept in raging torrents, railway lines were paralyzed, airports flooded, and thousands of homes inundated" ("26 die in Los Angeles" 1938).

As Los Angeles was recovering from the storms, news articles from around the country breathlessly reported the ruins left in their wake. They detailed how steel railroad bridges had been "ripped apart as if it were constructed of flimsy kindling sticks" by the "raging waters" of the river, and supplied grisly speculations of the "mud, silt, and debris, piled six to eight feet deep in some parts" that "may cover bodies that will never be found" ("Los Angeles isolated by air" 1938; Raymond 1938). Video footage televised over national media outlets documented grim tableaus of submerged automobiles, crumbling bridges, and shattered buildings; the *Pathè Gazette* paired these images with blaring trumpets and a narrator who declared "disaster, destruction, and death descend on five Southern California counties!" (*Pathè Gazette* 1938). Broad declarations were made, as when Henry W. O'Melveny, a self-proclaimed "student of weather conditions on Southern California for more than sixty years", analyzed the history of flood events in Los Angeles and concluded that:

> there have been heavy rainfalls in Los Angeles County…of greater magnitude than that of this season of 1937-1938, but that the 1938 flood produced a greater loss of life and greater destruction of property than any of the previous floods (Melveny 1938).

Meanwhile, Los Angeles County Supervisor Herbert C. Legg announced on March 3 that "Los Angeles County today is being faced with one of the most serious flood conditions since 1884" (quoted in "Flood perils Los Angeles" 1938). Story after story covering the floods characterized the local rivers as "rampaging", "treacherous", "unpredictable", and a "menace", though records of previous inundations existed and were even mentioned in these same accounts. This discursive construction of flood disaster, of course, obscured those very acts of man that had placed man directly in the treacherous pathway of these acts of God.

As the history of the Los Angeles River thus far demonstrates, the transformation of the river occurred as much on the terrain of the discursive-symbolic as it did on the material. The imperative for capitalist urbanization of the flood-prone Los Angeles basin worked through and relied upon the changing cultural meaning of urban water and urban nature. The uncoupling of the *river* with water *supply* increasingly led to both the abstraction of water and the fetishization of its infrastructure, while simultaneously assisting in the discursive construction of the river as

the site for natural disaster.[54, 55] The disruptive and disorderly inundations of the river represented the incompatibility of nature with the modern city; furthermore, it was solely the workings of the former—not the latter—that generated urban environmental disaster. Mike Davis examines these transformed ideologies of nature, arguing that "the social construction of 'natural' disaster is largely hidden from view by a way of thinking that simultaneously imposes false expectations on the environment and then explains the inevitable disappointments as proof of a malign and hostile nature" (1998, 9). Southern California's rivers, in particular the Los Angeles River, became discursively and symbolically constructed as a malign and hostile nature. This served to stir up a "paranoia about nature" that "distract[ed] attention from the obvious fact that Los Angeles has deliberately put itself in harm's way" and that "[f]or generations, market-driven urbanization has transgressed environmental common sense" (Davis 1998, 9). Thus, the history of L.A.'s rivers epitomizes, to borrow from Ted Steinberg, the "unnatural history of natural disaster in America", whereby the "the tendency to see nature as the real culprit" behind urban natural disaster:

> developed when those in power in disaster-stricken cities sought to normalize calamity in their quest to restore order, that is, to restore property values and the economy to their upward trajectory (Steinberg 2000, xix-xx).

The normalization of calamity, as I discuss in the next sections, relied not only upon discursive representations of flood-prone rivers, but also upon processes of scientific knowledge production that was anything but politically neutral.

THE POLITICS OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND THE ENGINEERING OF FLOOD CONTROL

By the close of the 1930s, the fate of the Los Angeles River was, quite literally, set in stone. The allocation of massive funds through federal flood control legislation and the mobilization of labor through New Deal public works programs set the course of urban watershed management in L.A. County for the next fifty years. While the involvement of federal agencies and funds signaled a victory for local political and business elites, who had long campaigned for federal intervention against the continuous L.A. floods, it also solidified and legitimized the engineered approach of flood management. Both the mandate carried by the Army Corps of Engineers and the allocation of funds through the Flood Control Acts attest to the victory of the single-purpose watershed management regime in L.A. Therefore, the decision to channelize the river came about through the political maneuverings and clashes occurring upon multiple fronts, including the one upon which the politics of science and knowledge played out. Rather than a comprehensive system based on universally applicable principles of hydrology, geology, and fluvial mechanics, and conceived of by expert engineers equipped with the soundest calculations of flow magnitude, velocity, and peak discharge, the process of establishing a scientific solution to the Los Angeles River problem involved localized, iterative, even unplanned efforts. The messiness of this iterative knowledge production process reveals

[54] This continued abstraction of water supply came in the 1950s-1960s when Los Angeles extended its water acquisition further into the Sierras by tapping into Mono Lake, and then with the construction of the State Water Project that imported water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta, as well as from the Colorado River (through the Colorado River Compact).

[55] Regarding the reification and fetishization of urban infrastructural networks as products of modernity, Graham writes that the "desocialized" commodification of these networks "worked to help sever the urban infrastructures from their roles in the perpetual transformation of nature into city and their crucial mediation of social power" (2000, 117-118). I argue that this process of hiding the transformation of nature occurred simultaneously at the Owens and Los Angeles Rivers.

how the very specific set of structural modifications to the Los Angeles River watershed were as much a political outcome as it was a technical-scientific one. Furthermore, the messy politics involved in the production and application of flood control knowledge show how river channelization was not a technological inevitability based on the region's flood-prone geography, but rather was one particular outcome of a highly politicized social process.

During the creation of the 1914 comprehensive plan, engineers of the nascent County Board of Engineers needed to chart the history of the region's flood events in order to determine the magnitude and frequency of various-sized storm events. No detailed historical record of floods that had occurred prior to the 1870s existed, and the engineers thus possessed no empirical data to determine how big previous storm events had been. In order to understand the flooding capacity of the watershed, engineers, under the instruction of chief engineer James Reagan, conducted dozens of interviews with old Angelenos, including elderly Mexican residents, in order to gain this historical perspective. Rather than relying on quantifiable data sets or hydraulic equations, the engineers' scientific method consisted of aggregating the individual localized knowledges of elderly Mexicans and residents in order to inform their hydraulic theories. These interviews revealed critical facts about the Los Angeles River, including its ability to completely alter its flow channel, as it had done in the 1820s and 1860s. Once aggregated and incorporated with hydrological and geological principles, these oral histories became translated into calculations of the possible 50- or 100-year flood, and subsequently presented as evidence supporting the science of structural modification. In his insightful analysis of the 1914 interviews, historian William Deverell (2004) argues that the localized memories and embodied histories of these elderly residents, many of whom were Mexican, were utilized simply as utilitarian instruments, as the knowledge of floods embedded within everyday lived experiences were extracted and subsumed within a larger technocratic framework.[56] This racialized chapter of L.A.'s flood history reveals the power relations embedded within knowledge production processes, as an individual's memory was considered knowledge only after it was collected, codified, and quantified by those engineers and professionals deemed experts.

Not only did the production of flood control knowledge depend heavily upon the local, nonexpert knowledge of elderly residents in L.A. County, but it was also riddled with uncertainty and insufficiency of empirical information. The creation of the Los Angeles County Flood Control District in 1915, for instance, signaled the assembling of expert engineering minds that would scientifically assess the flood problem of the region and provide technical solutions. However, as the early report of the Board of Engineers indicates (at multiple times, no less), the problem was so complex that a single, agreed-upon plan of action was not readily available (LACFCD 1915). There was insufficient data, a lack of adequate comparative cases in the United States, and disagreement over which control measures should be adopted, and where. So little was known that the Board of Engineers' concluded in the report:

> "We earnestly recommend the continuance of scientific observations and studies of questions of rainfall, stream flow, rate of absorption by gravels, retarding effect on mountain floods by small restraining dams and aforestation and the cooperation in this work with the interested scientific departments of the Federal Government" (1915, 15).

[56] Deverell concludes that: "What is so striking about the flood control interviews of 1914 is the mere presence of Mexican voices and Mexican people, brought back and made real by the infrastructural demands of 'the better city' of the future. […] In the…case of the young hydrologists talking to octogenarians, the personal histories were but means to an engineered end" (2004, 121).

Not only does this recommendation reveal the absence of scientifically sound principles being applied universally to an environmental problem, but it also reveals the need for involvement and assistance of federal agencies.

Hence, while the formation of engineering teams, the conducting of empirical studies, and the investment of public funds politically—and publicly—signaled techno-scientific expertise at work, the reality of producing and applying knowledge to address the flooding L.A. River was disjointed, incomplete. Indeed, according to Bigger:

> The period between 1917 and 1930 was one largely of experimentation. Programs were primarily a series of individual projects without necessary interrelationship… Data on the rainfall, soil, and geology of the area were still lacking. Development of the Los Angeles metropolitan region was proceeding rapidly; localities in which flood control seemed unnecessary one day became places in which it was vital on the next. […] Not until the end of the 1920's were the engineering requirements for flood protection in Los Angeles sufficiently clear to enable the District to prepare with confidence a blueprint for the future (1959, p.58).

With insufficient data, poor understanding of the changing land use conditions of the L.A. basin, and a lack of a coherent, comprehensive plan, the county engineers' efforts strayed far from the exalted scientific ideal.

Not only was scientific knowledge production often burdened with uncertainty, but it was further shaped through the messy and iterative interactions between the experts and the watershed itself. Even with the completion of a comprehensive flood control blueprint, the technical expertise of flood engineers was assisted by the physical processes of the Los Angeles River basin. One of the most interesting outcomes of the March 1938 disaster was the fact that the magnitude of the flood provided additional hydrological and geological information to engineers in their flow calculations. H.E. Hedger, the chief engineer of the Flood Control District, concluded in a report that:

> Since the United States Engineering Department has entered this field it has determined upon and used larger estimates of discharge, additional methods of flood regulation and higher standards of construction. The advisability of these changes has been borne out by experience *gained in the flood of March 2, 1938,* which produced the largest run off of record in Los Angeles County and caused damage estimated at approximately $45,000,000 in the county (quoted in "Vast county flood" 1939, emphasis added).

Orsi (2004) argues that the 1938 flood was crucial in that it "provided engineers with vital hydraulic data" since, according to one USACE engineer, "it was possible to observe the action of various flood control structures under the extreme condition of a major flood" (118). With "730 precipitation stations and hundreds of stream gauges" in place—and collecting previous data—during the March deluge, the new information gained by hydrologists allowed them to "reestimat[e] the severity of the hypothetical fifty-year storm and toughe[n] their design criteria accordingly" in the 1941 comprehensive plan (Orsi 2004, 118).

The relationship between the (often frustrated) human engineers and the increasingly urbanizing watershed manifested through a series of interactions in which one side exerted its activity upon the other (Mitchell 2005). The disruptive tendencies of the rivers themselves shaped the engineering knowledge being formulated at the time, and it was this knowledge that gave rise to the physical structures built to tame those very disruptions. Whether it was check dams in the mountains or earthen levees along the mainstem channel, each successive round of structural modification was tested—and reevaluated, then rebuilt—by the behaviors of the flooding rivers. The flood control works were not a perfect, uncontested techno-scientific

management strategy, but rather an ad hoc set of actions and reactions dictated not only by hydraulic knowledge (the formal "sciences" of hydrology, geomorphology, ecology, and mechanical engineering), but also through the reactions of the river system itself—the overflowing banks, channel migrations, erosion and transport of sediment, and its cascading, interrelatedness with land use patterns of the basin (Mitchell 2005).

The politics of knowledge production are also revealed through the institutional workings of the agency involved—the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The scientific paradigm and approach of the Corps has long favored large-scale, structural projects rather than more comprehensive, ecosystem-based plans or multiple purpose basin programs (Samet 2007). As Bigger notes, "flood control and water conservation by replenishment of the underground water tables are the only major elements of multiple-purpose drainage-basin development in Los Angeles" (1959, 77). This privileging of structural and single-purpose interventions to river basin management goes back to the early twentieth century, when inter-agency conflicts arose as to whether water conservation or flood control was the correct approach to river basin management:

> Officially and privately, members of the Corps argued that forest cover did not affect stream flow, *that reservoirs could not control floods, and that a strong levee system provided the only practical solution to the flood problem*. […] The conflict over water policy, therefore, became, in part, a controversy over hydrological theories…. The Corps of Engineers eagerly entered this public debate to protect its strategic position in the field of federal water policy (1959, 203-4, emphasis added).

Therefore, the Army Corps' reliance on structural modifications—encapsulated in a particular technocratic ethos and solidified through institutional positioning—was a manifestation of its efforts to consolidate and exert political power within the realm of federal water policy. This institutional and political exercise, of exerting technical authority, combined with the pattern of grand public works projects carried out under the New Deal, precluded any alternative flood control regime consisting of "softer" management designs. Rather than a single management decision or policy, the Army Corps' rejection of nonstructural or watershed-based management approaches demonstrates "the agency's overriding institutional bias for recommending large and environmentally damaging structural projects" which has become "the most intractable problem with the Army Corp's planning process" (Samet 2007, 147).

As the examples of local knowledge reliance, planning under uncertainty, and iterative interactions with river processes illustrate, Los Angeles' flood control science emerged through the formation of a heterogeneous assemblage of practices, technologies, and skills. Gaps in data were filled in by local residents' oral histories and personal memories, though their contributions to the knowledge production process were eventually rendered invisible. The region's rivers themselves acted as new sites upon which engineers could undergo a process of 'experimentation', of performing trials and learning through errors. Conflicts over resource management strategies and institutional paradigms resulted in the privileging of certain forms of watershed management over others. As a result, knowledges produced through these processes, and the practices, skills, and technologies stemming from them, were far from the scientific ideal propagated by the bearers of authority (Mitchell 2005).

Engineering the Modern City: Narratives of Unruly Natures and Technologies of Control

Despite the messy politics of flood control science in Los Angeles, the preference for structural modification of watersheds reflected and reinforced powerful ideologies of Modernity and Progress via technology. During the first half of the twentieth century, the discourse of

Modernity promulgated the idealized image of expert engineers, equipped with a predesigned plan based on universal theories of hydrology and mechanical forces, successfully carrying out their plan by imposing their knowledge and will upon the river. This discourse of the omniscient engineer, his infallible techno-science, and his unquestionable role as resource management authority was promoted during the sociopolitical climate of the several decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century. The political privileging of technical-scientific expertise and the professionalization of engineering before and during the Progressive Era aligned with narratives of progress through comprehensive and rational management. In the urban context, specifically, the discourse of the Modern City drew from and further fed into the scientization of urban planning, the professional development of engineers, and the implementation of urban order through water management technologies and other infrastructures (Kaika and Swyngedouw 2000; Neuman and Smith 2010; Schultz and McShane 1978). In Los Angeles, this new political-cultural climate, combined with the re-scripting of floods as *natural disasters*—compounded by the ongoing urbanization of the region—led to the development of governing bodies, scientific skills, and management practices that shifted from studying floods to specifically studying *how to control* floods. The formation of a techno-political paradigm, which partly relied upon the re-scripting of floods as natural disasters, generated management strategies that attempted to control rivers' natural flow regimes through structural modifications. This paradigm also further reinforced the discourse of Man's control of Nature through technological might.

Indeed, as WPA-driven work on the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers gained full speed in the early 1940s, what emerged alongside the dams and concrete channels was the narrative of an unruly nature being tamed by man's genius. While the local rivers had long been described as flood-prone and even dangerous, the high death toll and property damage from the 1930s floods triggered renewed vilification of the rivers.[57] Coverage of the 1934 and 1938 floods highlighted the sheer power of naturally occurring riverine systems. Now what was needed was an equally mighty force capable of taming and controlling those natural systems. That force could be found in the ingenuity and technical skill of scientists and engineers. So, as engineers built and tested hydraulic models, as work camps raced to erect enormous dams in the foothills, and as hydrologists calculated peak discharge flows and channel depth-width ratios, the veneer of safety came to be constructed as well. Stories of engineering ability coupled with images of the vast, concrete structures it actualized drew from and reinforced the powerful narrative of progress through technological might in an era of Modernity. The emerging network of flood control structures, like other great works of urban infrastructure:

> celebrated the mythic images of…modernity, encapsulating and literally carrying the idea of progress into the urban domain. Their material existence provided the confirmation and lived experience that the road to a better society was under construction (Kaika and Swyngedouw 2000, 129).

To a flood-weary Los Angeles, this better society meant a *safe* and orderly environment.

The narrative of man's ability to tame nature, buoyed by discourses of the Modern City, continued to prevail during the two decades of flood control construction. At the onset of federal intervention, local newspapers promised the residents of Los Angeles that the Flood Control District had begun "a great, new, far-reaching flood control defense" that would "tame vagrant

[57] Following the 1934 flood that killed over 40 people and cost millions in damages, the *Los Angeles Times* ran photo after photo of the destruction left behind in the wake of the floods. A USGS report in 1937 warned that the afflicted valley "exhibits to an unusual degree the effects of violent flood action", concluding that the site is "particularly vulnerable to the ravages of flashy floods" (Troxell and Peterson 1937, 69).

waters tumbling down mountain slopes" (Moon 1935). In January 1936, the *Los Angeles Times* provided a front-page spread of photographs depicting massive channel modifications underway, along with an official looking diagram of the expanded riverbed and banks. Beneath the photographs and diagrams, the author cheerily announced that:

> Men and machinery directed by United Sates Army engineers are changing that vitally important length of the river from *an irresponsible water course* into a far larger, thoroughly conditioned channel that will be a vitally important flood protection while at the time *conforming to the well-ordered*, picturesque region through which it passes. […] The transformation of the nine miles of river is being carried on with the typical, clearly defined *exactness and certainty* with which Uncle Sam's army engineers prepare defenses against any enemy—only this time their defense preparation is against an element that…let run hog wild is a fearful danger—flood water (Cohan 1936, emphasis added).[58]

The message is clear: technical capability coupled with mechanic might can transform an irresponsible water course into a well-ordered stream. Here, the Los Angeles River is portrayed as an *actual enemy* against which military engineers struggle, even battle.[59] Another *Times* article from 1940 describes the scale model built by Army Corps' hydraulic engineers for the sake of testing channel configurations under various flow magnitudes. Declaring that "unruly Los Angeles River has been strapped on a laboratory table", the article presents the river as an object of experimentation, a subjugated lab specimen put under scientific trial and error that "resulted in findings making it possible for the engineers to handle [flood] problems in the most efficient manner ("Engineers put river" 1940). Whether it was an enemy or a scientific test subject, the imperative remained taming the river, which was successfully fulfilled by the work of tireless, cunning engineers. "Engineers build trap for next flood's fury," crowed one 1938 headline of the *Times*, which went jubilantly on to announce that the "next time Old Man River comes rampaging down on Los Angeles he will be slapped into a steel, concrete and stone straitjacket" ("Engineers build trap" 1938).

Dams, in particular, appeared to symbolize the narrative of Modernity's techno-triumph, no doubt a local manifestation of the nationwide admiration for the giant impoundment structures so firmly accepted by the 1940s (Worster 1985). Admiring the fourteen dams already constructed within Los Angeles County alone, a *Washington Post* article in 1938 commended these structures for regulating flow, which now no longer rushed "impulsively" down canyons but "behave[d] in an orderly manner"; without them the "damage by the recent flood would have been infinitely greater" (Peterson 1938). Less than two weeks after the March 1938 floods, a *Los Angeles Times* article thanked the "foresight of engineers" that constructed the 132 dams throughout Southern California that were capable of capturing 1.5M acre feet of water, and thus averting the region from "the ravages of one of the worst floods in its history" (Gordon 1938). In January 1942, the *Los Angeles Times* printed another full page spread of photographs capturing the full glory of four of the county's dams, captioned with the simple yet assured headline: "Harnessing the Weather—Dams and Channels Protect Los Angeles" ("Harnessing the weather" 1942).

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[58] The author then continues on to state: "The straggling, and in many places unkempt, river course as is, fades from your mental view to be replaced by the visualization of a great, broad, entirely cleared waterway that immediately discloses its ability to receive and tame a huge drainage of water, sudden or otherwise."

[59] Images were especially effective in portraying the magnitude and scope of the river modification projects being constructed. Another pictorial of river construction works was published in October 1937, this time paired with the promising headline: "Lifting the flood risk from Los Angeles" and an assurance that "flood-control engineers don't say…a flood won't occur again, but they believe it won't because of the flood-control work now under way" (Lifting the flood risk 1937).

At the completion of one of those dams—Hansen Dam along the Tujunga Wash—in 1940, the *Times* correspondent concluded that "man…strapped another harness on Mother Nature" and attributed the "modern methods of construction" to "turning an otherwise rampaging river into a docile, mild-mannered stream" ("Hansen Dam completed" 1940). Undoubtedly, these monumental symbols of progress were credited to the ingenuity of engineers. At the opening ceremony of Hansen Dam, County Supervisor Jessup praised its designers:

> This great dam is just one more addition to a long list of engineering miracles. In size and durability it may well be compared to the great Pyramids of Egypt. It was made possible only through the work of the Army Engineers in co-operation with our own Flood Control District ("Hansen Dam dedicated" 194).

One *Times* article, enamored by the "glint of sun on bronzed arms and backs of men" and the "steel pinnacles of towering cranes moving rhythmically" to construct a dam in Van Nuys, praised "the precision planning of technical experts, the work of skilled engineers" ("Beauty seen in" 1940). A decade and a half later, with most of the flood control system firmly (and literally) cemented into place, the *Los Angeles Times* declared "county wins fight to end flood peril," heralding a definitive end to the watery plagues of the past, as "dams tame once great menace" to secure human triumph over nature's rashness, at last (Berry 1956).[60]

Through countless newspaper articles, public announcements, and photographic representations, these discursive renderings framed urban rivers as sites of natural disaster, a disorderly foe ultimately conquered by the genius of engineering expertise and the toil of human determination. Though accounts and analyses from these experts revealed that the scientific process of flood control engineering was reliant on localized knowledge, often riddled with uncertainty, and far from the ideal practice of applying universal principles, the narrative of modern science's triumph against intractable nature reflected and was reinforced by the channelization of the L.A. River. This narrative, in turn, bolstered the image of Los Angeles as a symbol of Modernity, one which, now freed from the ravages of a capricious river, could fulfill its destiny as the greatest city in the U.S. West.

THE IMPERATIVE OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT: COMMODIFICATION OF LAND THROUGH THE CONTROL OF WATER

Tracing the history of the Los Angeles River reveals how scientific, political, and popular portrayals of the waterway both reflected and reinforced powerful discourses of disorderly nature needing to be controlled by man's ingenuity in order to establish the orderly Modern city. These ideas, for the most part, aligned with the political and economic agenda of elites: the urban growth and economic development of Los Angeles. As previously discussed, the land management regime that emerged from the 1880s to 1930s was one which promoted the commodification of land for the accumulation of wealth; this was carried out through intense real estate speculation, subdivision and development, industrialization, and other economic activities (Davis 1990; Fogelson 1967). The real estate boom, first triggered in the 1880s, "had given substance to an ideology which would endure for the next century. The city's business leaders…had committed themselves to the vision of permanent expansion" (Gottlieb and Wolt 1977, 16). With the acquisition of nonlocal water sources to provide for future growth, as well as

[60] In an earlier, perhaps more poignantly simplistic announcement, a *Times* article showcases a photograph of work progressing in the L.A. River captioned by the simple declaration of: "No more floods." (Army oversees river 1941).

the establishment of a federally-sponsored, technocratic watershed management regime that all but ensured the elimination of disruptive floods, the vision of unencumbered expansion came closer to full realization. And whether the specific objective was controlling waters or freeing up land, the transformation of Los Angeles' streams and rivers came about through the exercising and consolidating of power, by a collection of government, business, and scientific actors, in their pursuits of various agendas.

The expansion of Los Angeles required the control of water for the commodification of land. This was the consensus of the political and economic elites (such as business leaders, land developers, and elected officials), and it was this agenda would dictate the re-configuration of urban environments. Two specific historical moments, where alternative approaches to managing the urban land-water interface were considered and rejected, illustrate the dominance of this economic agenda. During the climatically tumultuous 1930s, the County of Los Angeles and their flood control agency requested federal assistance for the flooding problem; this request enrolled the technical expertise of the Army Corps of Engineers who institutionally privileged single-purpose, structural approaches to river management. However, prior to the enactment of the 1936 Flood Control Act, there were two instances where alternative solutions to L.A.'s flood problem had been proposed. In both cases, a small minority of dissenters—mostly planners, politicians, and conservationists—believed in and proposed flood management alternatives which required less drastic modifications to the river ecosystem. Instead of armoring the entire river with impoundment structures and ecologically destructive concrete channel walls/beds, these alternative plans claimed that the flood problem could be resolved with careful management of another abundant resource—land. And in both cases, land proved to be too valuable a resource to keep undeveloped, and therefore un-commodified. The imperative to convert land into profitable real estate, to circulate it into rounds of accumulation, to open it up for urban development, overrode the region's need to be kept safe from floods.

In the first case, the esteemed landscape architecture firm, comprised of the Olmsted Brothers and Harland Bartholomew & Associates, in 1930 created a report titled *Parks, Playgrounds, and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region*. Originally commissioned by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce to develop a comprehensive park design for the county, the report recommended that a greenbelt be created along the Los Angeles River and its tributaries. The purpose of such a county-wide network of greenspace was to provide both overflow buffering basins during storm seasons and extensive recreational open space for residents during the dry months (Hise and Deverell 2000). Aside from the park design, the report also called for the creation of "a new governmental authority that would have sweeping powers to raise money and purchase and develop property for parks, roads, flood control, and other infrastructure" (Orsi 2004, 105). This new body would be appointed by the governor and allowed to work independently of the Board of Supervisors, city councils, and the Chamber of Commerce. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the report sparked concern among members of the Chamber, who balked at the independent political power bestowed to the park authority and grew nervous at the prospect of so much land being publicly-owned, undeveloped, and therefore un-commodifiable (Davis 1998; Gottlieb 2007). As a result, the Chamber of Commerce quietly shelved the Olmsted-Bartholomew report and, as some have argued, quashed the region's first, best, and only opportunity to plan for a comprehensive park design (Davis 1998).

In the second case of a proposed alternative to river channelization, a small group of local officials and planners in the mid-1930s championed for systematic, county-wide hazard zoning. Countywide hazard zoning would prohibit flood-prone lands along river channels from being

developed, following the straightforward reasoning that keeping people away from the floods would lead to a potential reduction in property damage and threats to human life. This systematic enforcement of zoning operated upon the premise of flood *prevention*, whereas the dominant paradigm of the Army Corps was one of flood *control*. The former approach to reducing flood damage was to re-order city space to keep people away from the rivers, whereas the latter paradigm reasoned that rivers needed to be engineered in order to keep floods away from the people.

Despite the implementation of hazard zoning at smaller scales and in scattered areas along the watershed, the idea of a formalized, systematic, and region-wide hazard zoning plan (and set of enforced ordinances) was resisted by both the Army Corps of Engineers and developers. The Corps regarded flood control approaches such as zoning or planning to be outside the purview of their responsibilities. Zoning was something that planners and architects were concerned with, not hydraulic engineers. Moreover, companies and business elites also preferred the construction of large-scale structures in lieu of zoning laws that would curtail urban development. Land developers, private investors, and railroad companies protested against hazard zoning plans since land within the zoned areas—regarded as prime real estate—could not be developed (Orsi 2004). The railroad companies, in particular, decried the impact of floods to regional productivity and demanded structural—not zoning—measures for protection; in a 1914 meeting of the LA Chamber of Commerce, one member criticized local agencies for failing to guarantee these protections: "This thing of allowing rivers to wander unrestrained across fertile acres and silt-up the inner harbor is a proof that we haven't yet grasped the essentials of government" (quoted in "Flood waters real menace" 1914). Like the 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew report, the proposal for hazard zoning was not seriously considered by local government officials, developers, and federal engineers alike (Orsi 2004). Carey McWilliams stresses the problem of valuing property over precaution, pointing out that:

> Flood control, has, in fact, become a major political setup in Los Angeles, the basis of which is to build more cement causeways so that surface waters may be carried to the ocean as swiftly as possible and with the minimum damage to extensive property holdings which *have been built in areas that should have been zoned against occupancy* (1942, 195, emphasis added).

Had hazard zoning been seriously considered by political and scientific leaders, whole swathes of the floodplain and hillsides may have not been occupied.

The rejection of both alternatives exposes how much of flood control policy in Los Angeles was about the region's particular relationship to land. Beginning with the intensifying urbanization in the late-1800s and increasingly throughout the next several decades, floods came to be understood through the financial metrics of land values and costs in property damage. Each successive flood event portrayed local rivers as destructive natural forces, and accompanying the harrowing descriptions of nature's fury and the tragic accounts of lives lost were exhaustively catalogued reports of property damage, expressed in monetary values. Floods were not only dangerous but were *expensive* as well.

Accounts of the costs incurred by floods considered both the actual loss in property damages and the *potential* loss of property and/or costs to mitigate for flood damage. For example, in a February 1914 meeting of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, assistant general manager of the Santa Fe Rail Company complained that "since 1887…the Santa Fe has spent at a rough estimate, between $750,000 and $800,000 in safeguarding its yards from the encroachments of the Los Angeles River" and that "unless something is done soon", the companies "see large expenditures for precautionary measures in the near future" (quoted in

"Flood waters real menace" 1914). In the 1915 Board of Engineers report to the L.A. County Supervisors, chief of engineers James Reagan calculated the cost of the 1914 flood, taking care to identify and distinguish the different ways that flooding led to financial loss. When considering the assessment of the total cost, he urges that:

> It should be borne in mind that this amount is only for property or physical losses, and in only a few instances are the losses incurred by way of depreciation in value of property included in the estimate; *this loss arising from the depreciation in values along with another class of losses which occurred through the loss of business* are extremely difficult to reckon or estimate when it is considered that almost every business and industry in Los Angeles and the entire county was affected from two to four weeks… (LACFCD 1915, 334, emphasis added).

Likewise, after several incidents of fires in the Angeles National Forest in the early 1920s, the US Forest Service commissioned a board who conducted a study which placed a $40,000 per square mile price tag on forested watershed land, emphasizing the financial loss that another forest fire would incur (Hall 1935). In a commentary in the *Los Angeles Times* after the 1934 floods, the author stresses the need for fire protection measures in the San Gabriel foothills, arguing that:

> it is this combination of ocean, climate, and hills which is responsible for the thousands of beautiful homes and estates which adorn the slopes… The preservation of these picturesque homes and estates *and the future development of this mountain area for homes* will depend upon the protection and preservation from fire of the trees, shrubs, and other verdure (Hall 1935, emphasis added).

Arguments presenting the need to protect future properties from future floods assume that urban development will continue in threatened areas, once again revealing the unquestioned and unchallenged logic of building in flood-prone areas. On a related note, some arguments for flood control were based on considerations of the reduction in land value of parcels threatened by future floods. Again, Reagan's 1915 report reasoned that protecting flood-menaced land would increase its value:

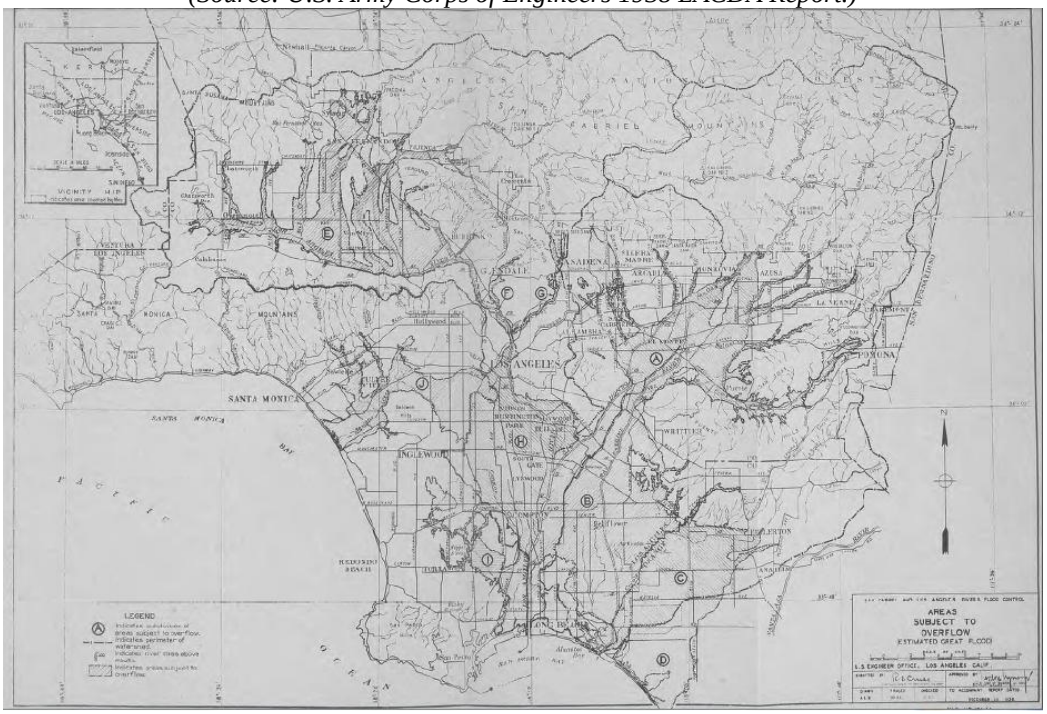
> It can, therefore, be readily seen that any plan which does not provide first for the proper protection for the Coastal Area would result in a distinct financial loss to the county... The investor, the property owner, is entitled to protection and whatever the cost to the county the money largely will be returned to *it in the taxes on the higher valuation that will obtain on lands that have been freed from the menace of destruction by floods* (LACFCD 1915, 332, emphasis added).

The logic in Reagan's argument clearly linked development, financial value, and protection from future floods, claiming that land freed from the "menace of destruction by floods" would enjoy higher valuation, through more productive uses or through rising real estate prices.

In rejecting the alternative planning visions of a regional park system and systematic hazard zoning, the political, economic, and scientific actors that favored watershed-wide channelization and structural modification exercised their power towards the spatial organization of L.A.'s urban environment. By prioritizing the exchange value of urban land, by privileging single-purpose technologies of watershed management, and by discursively constructing the Los Angeles River as a destructive agent of Nature, the technocratic engineers, capitalist elites, and local elected officials solidified their case that channelization was the only solution to ensure a safe and prosperous Los Angeles. The dire geographic situation that metropolitan L.A. found itself mired in is perhaps expressed none more clearly than in the 1938 report of the Army Corps of Engineers' comprehensive flood control program (*Figure 2.2*). In the opening pages of the

report, the federal agency gravely proclaimed that "the populous city of Los Angeles and it suburbs are situated on a fertile plain which is under a more dangerous flood menace than any similar region in the United States" (USACE 1938, 1, 34). It continued on to assert that "until such time as additional major improvements are made, vast areas are still subject to flood hazards". The remainder of the report makes clear that the "additional major improvements" needed are, according to the Army Corps' expert assessment, engineered structures—not parks or hazard zoning.[61] The natural conditions of the Los Angeles basin itself necessitate the proposed damns, concrete riverbeds, and channel walls.

Figure 2.2. Map of the areas in L.A. County subject to overflow in a 100-year flood. (Source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1938 LACDA Report.)



However, particular technological solutions are not inevitable outcomes of adapting to a region's environmental conditions. Urban historian Martin Melosi argues that "the implementation of new urban technologies were not automatic, coincidental, or inadvertent, but were *intentional efforts* by decision-makers to confront existing problems faced by cities as they grew upward and outward in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (2000, 8, emphasis added). Melosi's argument that urban techno-infrastructural apparatuses emerge from a series of political decisions and negotiations—not accidents or coincidences—applies to the story of the Los Angeles River. Neither the straightening and concrete paving of "47.9 miles of the river and 53.2 miles of its tributary streams", nor the construction of multiple dams, debris basins, and stormdrains throughout the 830 square mile watershed came about automatically or inadvertently

[61] In another clear example of the mentality that structural flood control was the only viable option for the metropolitan region, Southern California representatives of the U.S. House provided arguments at the House Flood Control Committee on April 1940 that only federal intervention could save the economically valuable lands and industries of the Los Angeles region. In one *Times* article, Representative Voorhis of San Dimas is reported to have said that "protection is possible only through aggressive prosecution of a comprehensive program" (quoted in Francis 1940).

(Gumprecht 1999, 227).[62] These new urban infrastructural technologies emerged as select political and economic interests strove to uphold the imperative of urban growth in a flood-prone site through the material-discursive manipulation and modification of urban socio-natures.

Therefore, the transformation of the Los Angeles River and its broader watershed reveal the wider tensions in urban society, a play of forces which played out upon multiple arenas, involved multiple actors, and unfolded at multiple moments. For powerful corporations and business elites invested in the economic growth of Los Angeles, the extraction of Owens Valley water provided a surplus water supply as well as the lucrative acquisition of San Fernando Valley real estate. The economic interests of this powerful capitalist class, represented by actors such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Merchants and Manufacturers Association, the *Los Angeles Times* syndicate, and the powerful railroad companies, meanwhile, were facilitated by the local state. Shifting from a pure entrepreneurial mode of urban governance to one of state-sponsored growth in the early twentieth century, the city and county governments proceeded to undertake "municipal projects" that "underwrote the city's population growth, industrialization, and territorial expansion" and acted as "an essential precondition to private development" (Erie 1992, 520-521). Water infrastructure projects, from the construction of aqueducts to the creation of a harbor to the channelization of local waterways embodied the local state's efforts to underwrite L.A.'s industrial and territorial expansion (Davis 1998; Gumprecht 1999). At the national level, the federal government's New Deal public works and work relief programs brought millions of dollars and the institutionalized expertise of the Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps' political positioning to be the authority on federal water policies, especially during the period of the conservation movement, combined with the Progressive Era programs oriented toward centralized management and technical planning resulted in preferences for single-purpose, engineered river basin management (Elkind 2011; Orsi 2004). The privileging of structural engineering over open space planning or land use zoning aligned with corporations' interests of leaving as much land available for its eventual commodification into urban real estate. Taken together, these multiple forces drew from powerful ideologies of nature and the city. Representations of floods show the active re-scripting of rivers as disorderly natures and the construction of narratives that emphasized the use of technological advancement to control nature and restore order upon the modern city.

Once strapped into the "concrete, stone, and steel straitjacket" designed by federal engineers, the Los Angeles River was no longer regarded as a river, but rather as a flood control channel, an artificial, manmade feature of the industrialized landscape. Likewise, once the river waters became a dangerous menace, it was something to be disposed of. This disposal of water occurred as part of a larger, more elaborate rift within the region's hydro-social cycle whereby different forms of water (supply, sewage, stormwater) were managed by different governing bodies and shunted through different infrastructural networks. In all cases, water became abstracted flows carried around through pipes and metabolized in particular ways by the urban population; through the metabolic processes of consumption, disposal, or control, these urban natures were no longer even considered as 'nature'. Any integrated approach to managing the flows of water circulating throughout the city, or planning efforts that took into consideration the complex dynamics between land and water, was subordinated by the dominant management approach. As a result, the urban landscape/hydro-scape of Los Angeles emerged alongside

[62] The entire Los Angeles County Drainage Area flood control system—or LACDA—by 1990 consisted of: 100 miles of mainstem channels, over 370 miles of tributary channels, 129 debris basins, 15 flood control and water conservation dams, 5 flood control dams, and over 2,000 miles of underground stormdrains (USACE 1991).

discourses of natural disasters that were informed by particular ideologies regarding the management of water and land. Meanwhile, narratives of rivers as agents of ecological chaos and socio-economic disturbance justified costly flood control measures. In short, answering the seemingly straightforward question of "who killed the Los Angeles River—and how and why?" uncovers a complex story of power, conflict, and socio-ecological change.

CONCLUSION: THE "DEATH" OF THE L.A. RIVER?

By the close of the 1960s, when construction of the regional flood control system was nearing completion, Mulholland's "limpid little stream" was nowhere to be found. In its place ran the network of concrete conduits that encompassed the Los Angeles County Drainage Area, a gargantuan, paved channel system stretched across the entire county and carrying only enough water to sustain the sheen of algal slime that Roraback so scornfully observed two decades later. During the one-hundred years of Los Angeles' transformation from a Spanish-settled rural pueblo to one of the largest, densest, and most economically powerful metropolitan regions in Anglo-dominated Western United States, the rivers of the region underwent parallel transformations. From seasonal, sandy creeks to an engineered flood control channel that runs "like a scar on the landscape", the transformation of the Los Angeles River symbolizes the broader environmental history of Los Angeles, a particularly egregious example of the disagreeable relationship between the city and its geography (Gumprecht 1999, 235).

Though Los Angeles is neither unique nor exceptional in this history of disagreeing with its environment, what it may nonetheless be is exemplary. The story of one small river illustrates the 'foolishness' of a metropolitan empire striving to grow where no natural advantage existed. The region's explosive population and territorial growth, its frantic pace of land development, and the dynamic topographic/hydrologic realities all combine to act as an exaggerated expression of the tension between rivers and cities, water and property, site and settlement. From the early struggles of boosters and a fledgling municipal government to the centralized, multi-scalar management regime consolidated by the mid-20th century, Los Angeles sought to reconcile these tensions through the control and manipulation of nature. Diverting an entire river hundreds of miles away to flow into the city, dredging a harbor where there was once only silty *cienagas*, trapping the onslaught of erosion sloughing off of mountains ringing the region, and immobilizing historically-meandering rivers into permanent channels required transforming nature both physically and ideologically. These transformations not only altered the relationships between humans and urban nature, but also unfolded in tandem with altered social relations under processes of industrialization and financial accumulation that manipulated urban space (Harvey 1989b). The "the death of the L.A. River" (as proclaimed by Gumprecht) by the 1980s meant the complete transmogrification of the entire watershed: a fully urbanized valley and the straitjacketing of its streams, as well as a region set on the infrastructural trajectory of continued structural flood control. Safety for Los Angeles residents and unhampered economic growth came at the cost of natural processes and healthy ecosystems. Each successive round of engineered modification further disturbed hydrologic flow regimes; disconnected fluvial dynamics throughout the floodplain; cut off indigenous fish, amphibian, and bird populations from the riparian habitat; and enclosed what was once public space from members of the public. Ecologically disrupted, spatially isolated, and culturally forgotten, the river, by the time Dick Roraback ventured down its concrete channels, appeared dead.

However, despite all the signs, the Los Angeles River by the 1980s was not dead. Though Gandy characterizes the current state of the river as "dominated by a landscape of concrete brutalism and public neglect", there are remnants of life that have clung to the successive layers of infrastructure laid down through the decades (Gandy 2006, 139). The banks of cottonwoods and quiet trickling of water that Father Crespi admired in his journal had long been transformed into a postmodern nightmare, yet the river still acted out in response to its transformed state. Flora and fauna—though not the indigenous species of the pueblo era—continued to live in the murky waters and interstices found among the cement. Angelenos hopped over or even cut holes in fences erected by the Flood Control District to boat, swim, and fish in the river waters. And the dynamic processes of erosion, sedimentation, and inundation continued to play out even after channelization, pushing back against the fortresses of LACDA to continue to shape the watershed. More importantly, perhaps, was that the river was not completely dead to some residents of the county. Though long perceived as a hazard, an impending site of disaster, and a now-sullied remnant of urbanized nature, the river remained a geographic feature of the land in the minds of some. Despite engineers' references to streams as "flood control channels", dissident groups of residents marveled at the potential of the river's spaces, and envisioned a rebirth of ecological, artistic, and socio-spatial significance. Dreamers, poets, and "creek freaks", these dissenters began to mobilize a counter-hegemonic demonstration that would strive to undo the past 100 years of technocratic management and symbolic destruction. The river, to them, was ready for resurrection.

CHAPTER THREE
FROM CONCRETE DITCH TO NAVIGABLE WATERWAY: THE HISTORY OF THE LOS ANGELES RIVER RESTORATION MOVEMENT (1985-2015)

INTRODUCTION

From October 1985 to January 1986, Dick Roraback, a *Los Angeles Times* reporter, published a series of articles titled "In Search of the L.A. River". Throughout the twenty part series, Roraback took on the voice of an imagined Explorer, an intrepid anthropologist-cum-ecologist who, armed with barbed wit and a disregard for safety rules, ventured into the hidden recesses of the Los Angeles River. At the onset of his quest, The Explorer realizes that "he had lived in the Southland for 10 years and he was ashamed that he knew not the channel that bisected his own city. He had heard of the Los Angeles River…but he did not remember laying eyes on it", a statement reflective of the waterway's status as largely forgotten by and invisible to the city's populace (Roraback 1985a). Mid-journey, as he surveys the landscape of discarded debris, asphalt, and polluted water that surrounds him, he reflects on the absolute scale of the river's transformation and laments its reduced state as concrete conduits: "The Los Angeles River is now a mammoth concrete drainage ditch, a matte monument to flood control. Taming a river is one thing… Emasculating it is another. The Great Los Angeles Eunuch" (Roraback 1985b). Though Roraback views the flood control measures and abstracted space of the river as contemptible and pathetic, he also painstakingly documents the remnants of vibrant nature, as well as the continued and creative human uses, found along the 51-miles of the river. Despite—or perhaps because of—these signs of remnant life, The Explorer concludes his series with a lamentation for the emasculated eunuch that is the L.A. River.

Thirty years later, on a spring day in 2014, the Mayor of Los Angeles, Eric Garcetti, stood at a lush park perched on the banks of the Los Angeles River, and announced the city's endorsement of an ambitious, billion-dollar restoration plan for the river headed up by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Standing in the shade of cottonwoods and willows, surrounded by members of the press as well as representatives of various city, county, state, and federal agencies, and watched by dozens of community stakeholders, the mayor lauded the Army Corps of Engineers for partnering with the city to complete the $10M, seven-year feasibility study for restoring eleven miles of the degraded L.A. River. Mayor Garcetti then proclaimed that the city had successfully lobbied Congress and the White House to select and fund the most extensive, expansive, and *expensive* restoration alternative laid out in the study. "I was tenacious about this," the mayor asserted from behind the podium, before continuing that the selection of Alternative 20, the restoration plan of choice, is "a big win for the city" (Sagahun 2014). A year later, the visibility around the Los Angeles River grew as "starchitect" Frank Gehry announced he too would be creating a restoration plan for the river. Although his designs are to be based off of the city's own 2007 Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan, the news that one of the most celebrated and influential American architects would also be a participant in designing the future L.A. River left elected officials, environmentalists, and Angelenos abuzz with excitement. Then, as the city's bid for the 2024 Olympics to take place in Los Angeles ramped up, grand proposals for riverside athletic and housing facilities were being circulated, swelling already high hopes for riverfront redevelopment (Barragan 2015b). Undoubtedly, the L.A. River is alive in the public's consciousness, no longer an "emasculated" waterway relegated to the unseen confines of the city's concrete underbelly.

What happened during the thirty years between Roraback's search of the hidden L.A. River and Mayor Garcetti's trumpeting announcement of a billion-dollar restoration plan for that same river? How did a ridiculed or forgotten geographic feature—regarded as little more than a concrete ditch—become the target of Frank Gehry's next big project? What kinds of political, economic, and cultural changes occurred in, and acted upon, Los Angeles for an "emasculated" river, nothing more than a giant stormdrain, to be endorsed by federal flood control engineers, world-renowned architects, and urban elites as a central component of L.A.'s greener, more livable future? These are the central questions I explore in this chapter, which presents the history of the Los Angeles River from the late-twentieth century to the present day. Through the use of historical, secondary, and ethnographic sources, I document the formation of the grassroots movement that advocated for the restoration of the L.A. River, and the material-discursive changes to the watershed that both shaped and were shaped by the movement's diverse efforts.

Chapter Two revealed that the "modern" city of Los Angeles emerged alongside the dramatic transformation of both the region's biophysical systems as well as its structure of social relations. New systems of property rights, racial hierarchies, regimes of resource governance, and ideologies of spatial planning were rolled out by powerful state and business elites, reshaping the way nature was perceived, represented, and produced. Freed from destructive floods, dependent upon faraway water supplies, densely developed, and socially (i.e. racially) stratified, the landscape of late-20th century Los Angeles reflects the intersecting political, economic, scientific, and cultural forces of the late-19th and early 20th centuries. Thus, the history of Los Angeles is inextricably intertwined with the transformation of the Los Angeles River. This transformation occurred at a conjunctural moment in Los Angeles' history, when the economic imperative of urban growth, the dominance of techno-scientific resource management, and the ideological separation of nature and urban society combined to push an agenda that channelized the river and transformed it into the socio-ecological configuration it is today. Because of this, the river is more than a physical infrastructural or modified ecological system. The river, its tributaries, and the surrounding watershed it drains also embody the hybrid social-environment forces and processes that work through and upon the material landscape of Los Angeles and dynamically change over time.

This chapter presents the environmental history of the Los Angeles River watershed from the 1980s to 2010s. Like the previous chapter, the historical account is informed by a political ecology framework, where the river is situated within a broader network of social relations that mediate the production of urban socio-natures. It argues that changing political, economic, cultural, and geographic conditions produced a different conjunctural moment in which new approaches to urban water and land governance could arise and take hold. Due to the different conditions in place in Los Angeles by the late-twentieth century, grassroots activism around the river took root and was able to grow into a local environmental movement. Throughout this discussion, I argue that certain counter-hegemonic aspects were central to the river movement, particularly in its earlier years. A core objective of grassroots mobilization around the river was challenging the dominant mode of urban water and watershed management that had been established through the construction of the region's flood control apparatus in the mid-1900s. In centering on the L.A. River, the coalition of artists, environmentalists, and activists participating in this movement targeted a techno-political artifact that effectively exemplified the host of social and environmental problems produced by the workings of unsustainable urban resource governance. Whether it was calling out the region's overreliance on imported water sources and

the continued urbanization of flood-prone areas, or resisting the continued privileging of engineering approaches, these activists worked to disrupt the "common sense" logic of urban land-water management operating in L.A. for decades. One of the most prominent aspects of the movement's counter-hegemonic resistance to watershed management was the struggle to discursively reinstate the river as a river once more and to undo the narratives of danger and disorder that had been used to justify the massive structural channelization of the river. Therefore, resurrecting the Los Angeles River meant a material-discursive-symbolic transformation of this notorious waterway.

RESURRECTING THE RIVER: A LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT THIRTY YEARS IN THE MAKING

By the 1960s, the techno-political apparatus charged with managing the various flows of Los Angeles' urban water was firmly established. This mode of urban water management, which began to emerge decades prior, became consolidated through the construction of physical infrastructure that carried flows of water to and from the city; urban development patterns that allowed settlement on floodplains and foothills; the conferring of jurisdictional authority onto engineering agencies; and the complex set of laws and policies which codified into place the management of this elaborate system. With every major storm event, a tightly regimented series of actions by agencies impounded waters and diverted major flows, which, coupled with the smoothly efficient miles of concrete walls prevented the disastrous floods seen in the first half of the 1900s. Los Angeles' flood control system, therefore, is one that works. A vast and tightly-regulated system, known as the Los Angeles County Drainage Area (LACDA), is spread out over three major river basins and spans almost 1,500 square miles, and is composed of twenty dams, twenty-six spreading grounds, 129 sediment-capturing debris basins, 240 miles of streams encased in concrete channels, and over 2,500 miles of underground stormdrains and 80,000 catch basins that feed into these streams (USACE 1992, 613). The Los Angeles River watershed, the largest in the county, encompasses 834 square miles of mountainous, forested, and urbanized land with fifty-one-miles of mainstem river running through forty-three cities and unincorporated communities of L.A. County (LACDPW 2012a). Overseeing the maintenance and management of this system are dozens of local, state, and federal agencies (see Bigger 1959). This flood control system at (and of) the Los Angeles River—and the management practices of agencies overseeing the system—carries out a single purpose: to dispose of water as rapidly as possible during storm events for the prevention of floods. It exists first and foremost to keep water *off* of land (*Figure 3.1*). As a result, water infrastructure in the Los Angeles County area is a socio-technical assemblage acting as both a physical manifestation of the urban land-water rift and the symbol of governance striving to maintain the land-water separation for the sake of safe, orderly urban spaces (Larkin 2013).

Despite the lack of devastating flood events since channelization was completed in the mid-1900s, the regimented control of regional watersheds come with a high environmental cost. Buried underneath metric tons of impermeable material, blocked off from public access, and fed with polluted urban runoff, the river virtually disappeared from the landscape, and consequently, from the minds of most Angelenos. Ecological habitat was destroyed along miles of the river, resulting in the loss of many wildlife species that had long made up the riparian ecosystem of Southern California waterways (FoLAR 2008, 2016). Hydrological and geo-morphological processes associated with free-running rivers were disrupted and modified by the presence of

concrete river channel beds, networks of stormdrains discharging into streams, and upstream dams that impounded water but also trapped naturally-flowing sediment (PWA 2000). Moreover, the construction of flood control infrastructure along Southern California waterways produced an overinflated sense of safety that then contributed to rampant urbanization of floodplains and foothills, which paradoxically increases the region's susceptibility to flooding (Hawley and Bledsoe 2011; Sheng and Wilson 2009). And, as illustrated in the previous chapter, the L.A. River—once the sole source of water for the city—underwent a discursive and symbolic transformation which reassigned this waterway from an integral geographical feature to an unruly nature that did not belong in the modern city (Orsi 2004). Maintenance and management practices that continued the ecological degradation and symbolic erasure of the river both reinforced and were tacitly endorsed by public attitudes concerning the need for flood control. As a result, it comes as no surprise that in 1995, American Rivers, a national environmental organization, named the Los Angeles River as the second most endangered river in the United States and the most threatened urban river (Gumprecht 1999). It was, as Roraback had described it, a mammoth concrete drainage ditch.

Figure 3.1. The flood control system on the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers.
(Source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Cover of the 1991 LACDA Review Interim Report.)

In response to these numerous environmental problems, grassroots activism around the Los Angeles River arose beginning in the 1980s. This early coalition of grassroots activists, made up of a small number of artists, environmentalists, and community advocates, grew concerned with and began to challenge the dominant forms of urban development and water resource management responsible for the current state of the river. Though this coalition championed around a seemingly straightforward environmental agenda—restoring the L.A. River—the actual river movement formed through the coalescing of multiple efforts carried out by diverse actors working on a range of social and environmental issues. Rather than consisting of a singular objective, the grassroots activism around the river emerged from resistance to

several different aspects of status quo land-water management, eventually forging a broader coalition of river advocates promoting a multi-issue agenda. As many of the problems intrinsic to L.A.'s urban water regime were predicated upon a forced and unsustainable separation of land and water, river advocates found themselves calling attention to the wide range of far-reaching social, political, and ecological consequences of that regime.

Seen in this way, early participants of river activism regarded their contestation of the management of the Los Angeles River as encompassing issues that went beyond one local river or watershed. For many of these activists, calling attention to the river meant contesting the mode of urban governance operating in Los Angeles that continued to inflict ecological damage to both local and faraway river basins, restrict access to and availability of much needed urban public space, encourage rampant urbanization without consideration of geographic conditions, and privilege technocratic agencies with little public oversight or inclusion. In short, the existing forms of watershed and water management in Los Angeles was unsustainable, unjust, or both, and challenging these management practices meant challenging the continuation of an unjust, unsustainable city. Therefore, to many environmentalists and activists active within the river movement, the L.A. River was and is central to, and also representative of, other environmental problems in L.A., produced through the dysfunctional and unsustainable workings of broader economic, political, and social processes. This conviction is summed up by one environmentalist and river activist:

> Paving the river had major consequences that are deeply implicated in most of the problems that Los Angeles is so notorious for. Even the severe air pollution, water pollution, the oceans and beaches, our unseemly thirst for everyone else's water throughout the west, and also with our really serious dysfunctions with greenspace, public space, and the inequities that come with that. […] *Revitalizing the river isn't about the river, primarily*. It's about addressing these problems we have in Los Angeles and it's about envisioning a different future for Los Angeles (Interview #33, 2012).

According to her statement, revitalizing the L.A. River was a means to envision and establish a different future for Los Angeles. This future L.A., as envisioned by river activists, included a number of changes to the way that nature was metabolized in the production of urban space. As the thirty year history of the river movement chronicles, the main changes included: comprehensive watershed planning and governance which eliminated the material-ideological separation of water and land (established by the previous flood control regime); re-inscribing local waterways as valuable natural resources and subsequently providing greater public access to those publicly-owned resources; and instituting more democratic and inclusive forms of management that moved beyond rule of (engineering) experts.

Perhaps most importantly, the grassroots activism around the Los Angeles River gained traction because it was carried out upon a changed sociopolitical landscape, one shaped by ecological, political, cultural, and economic conditions different from those that gave rise to the flood control system of the 1920s and 30s. In other words, redirected attention to the L.A. River emerged during a conjunctural moment favorable to the urban environmental agendas of those at the helm of the redirecting. The intersecting forces of this new conjunctural moment included: the rise of the environmental movement in the U.S. and its political and cultural influence; the restructuring of urban centers that gave rise to changing land use patterns; the growth of new scientific knowledges (and managerial schemes) around ecological restoration and water resource management; and the biophysical changes of the watershed itself, due to urbanization and shifts in climate patterns. From the late-1960s onward, the environmental movement

emerged as a powerful political and cultural force in the United States, generating a host of regulatory frameworks and federal legislation that sought to conserve natural resources, protect landscapes, and curb the harmful impacts of industrial pollution (Brulle 2000; Dunlap and Mertig 1991). Culturally, the rise of an environmental paradigm shaped the values, principles, and perceptions of nature held by American civil society, including ideas around conservation and urbanism (Hays 1982; Rome 2001).

Meanwhile, in cities throughout the U.S., deindustrialization of the urban core left postindustrial waterfronts increasingly open to transformation from spaces of production to consumption (Bunce and Desfor 2007; Kibel 2007). At the same time, new forms of scientific knowledge, centered on ecological restoration, river basin hydrodynamics, and riparian ecology gained scholarly legitimacy and increasingly began to be translated into new modes of water governance that emphasized integrated resource and adaptive management approaches (Leopold 1994; Molle 2009; Molle and Wester 2009; White 1945). These new forms of knowledge regarding land-water dynamics encouraged new management approaches that reframed issues such as flooding, water conservation, and watersheds. Moreover, the social landscape of large cities in the U.S., including Los Angeles, had been deeply altered by the civil unrest and civil rights movements of the 1960s, the related rise of the environmental justice movement in the 1970s-80s, and the racial-ethnic demographic shifts in urban areas with changing patterns of immigration (Morello-Frosch et. al. 2002; Pulido 1996a, 2006; Pulido et. al. 1996). Therefore, as environmentalists began to envision a different Los Angeles River flowing amidst a different Los Angeles, their push for new policies, institutions, and managerial practices enjoyed the shifting priorities and conditions of urban areas in a different conjunctural moment.

In presenting the recent history of the Los Angeles River I show how this infamous urban waterway came to be at the center of a local environmental movement pushing for its restoration—and through it, a more sustainable city. I begin with the 1980s and trace the major developments of the next thirty years, describing the conflicts and changes occurring around the river, as well as the major actors involved in instigating those conflicts and advocating for those changes. The thirty year history of the L.A. River is divided roughly into five-to-ten year periods, each of which is characterized by a somewhat distinct set of advocacy efforts and their related policy changes. Though I have organized the timeline of the Los Angeles River restoration movement in this way, there are, of course, themes and patterns that are not neatly delineated by what period they occurred in, as well as ongoing processes that span multiple years and/or decades. The chapter ends with a discussion on the changing representations of the L.A. River, and how these discursive-symbolic changes connect with activists' push for greater public access to it. On a final note, while I include as many of the river's developments as I can, there are still projects or plans related to the L.A. River watershed that are omitted from or glossed over in the discussion due to issues of relevancy and for the sake of a manageable chapter length. The sheer number of ongoing activities connected to the river is near overwhelming, and to fully document all of them is beyond the scope of this dissertation. They do, however, attest to the sheer enormity of this environmental undertaking, one that modestly began thirty years ago with several small-scale acts of artistic intervention.

THE 1980S AND EARLY-1990S: ART, "WEIRDO" ACTIVISM, AND CHANGING SOCIOPOLITICAL CONDITIONS

Most established accounts of L.A. River activism begin in the mid-1980s, with the overlapping of several key events that directly brought the river into greater public awareness.[63] One event was Dick Roraback's *Los Angeles Times* series, begun in 1985, in which he explored the L.A. River and catalogued its current physical conditions. Roraback's articles were significant in reinvigorating journalism's role in bringing the river back into public consciousness, as over five hundred letters were sent to the *Times* in response to The Explorer's river series (Hinton 2012) Many commenters found personal resonance with the fishermen, joggers, or wanderers described in the articles as occupying the river, and shared their own experiences of interacting the river, both before its channelization and after (LAT 1985).[64] The response to Roraback's *Times* series, while far from reinserting the river back into the public's consciousness, suggested that it remained in the memories of many Angelenos. Around the same time, Lewis McAdams, a recent immigrant to Los Angeles and a self-proclaimed poet, carried out a series of performative acts centered on reimagining the river. In 1985, accompanied by two of his friends, McAdams cut a hole in the chain link fence bordering the river with a pair of wire cutters, wandered into the channel bottom, and took it upon himself to "speak" for the river. He followed this incursion into the river with a theater performance invoking the spirit of riparian animals and William Mulholland; soon after in 1986, McAdams and his co-activists formed the Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR).[65] FoLAR, "whose goal is to bring the Los Angeles River, especially in the downtown area, back to life", at the time was the first organization to make the rehabilitation and revival of the L.A. River its central mission (McAdams 1985).

Though Roraback's and McAdams' journalistic and performative interventions are considered the key catalysts to turning attention to the river, artistic uses of the concrete waterway had begun more than a decade prior. In 1975, muralist Judith Baca was approached by the Los Angeles County Flood Control District to create a mural along a stretch of the Tujunga Wash, a major tributary of the L.A. River. Baca, working with over a hundred at-risk, local youth, painted a 1,360 feet long mural depicting the history of people of color in Los Angeles (Baca 1980). Now known as *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, the mural came about through the Flood Control District's "reevaluat[ing]…the aesthetics of hundreds of miles of concrete conduits" and Baca's familiarity of the site and "greater understanding of the racial and cultural isolation near the Tujunga Wash" (Baca 1980, vii, vi). Unlike The Great Wall, however, most of the artworks in the river were—like Roraback's and McAdam's forays—illegal. Muralists and taggers found the blank walls of the river's channels as enticing canvases, and stretches of the river became adorned with graffiti ranging from simple, scrawled tags to the elaborately stylized murals that especially began to crop up in the 1980s and 90s (Guanuna 2015). In addition, the iconic "storm drain cats" were first spotted in the early 1960s, and in 1969, Chicano artist Leo Limon started painting his own cat faces (fondly named the *gatitas*) over the river channels' aptly shaped stormdrain outlets (Carpenter 1999). The presence of these artworks are significant

[63] These include the fantastic accounts from Blake Gumprecht, Jared Orsi, Jennifer Price, Robert Gottlieb, and Roger Keil. Other sources, such as timelines of the river's history, also locate activism as a movement that began in the 1980s (FoLAR 2009).

[64] One commenter fondly noted that "I lived my Tom Sawyer youth on the L.A. River" before the "'big paving extravaganza'", where s/he "skinny-dipped in the pools, caught crawdads by the dozen, and boiled them in an old can filled with river water and a dash of vinegar."

[65] According to Coates (2013), the Arroyo Seco, a tributary of the L.A. River, also became an object of artistic activism in 1985, with a multi-media installation of the tributary exhibited at the California Institute of Technology's Baxter Art Gallery.

in the river's revitalization narrative, as they illustrate the creative ways diverse actors attempted to reclaim and render visible the inert, enclosed spaces of the river. It also marked the beginning of an ongoing relationship between art, activism, and restoration efforts (Arroyo 2010) (*Figure 3.2*).

Figure 3.2. A gatita *found along the L.A. River. (Source: Photo taken by author.)*

As artworks, theatrical performances, and newspaper articles began to reinsert (and reassert) the L.A. River into the city's awareness, the river itself exhibited changed conditions that further garnered political, environmental, and media attention. One major change was the amount of water in the riverbed. In 1984, the city opened the Donald C. Tillman Reclamation Plant in the San Fernando Valley, which released thirty-five million gallons of treated sewage water directly into the Los Angeles River. As a result, vegetation in the river, especially within the soft-bottom stretches of the Sepulveda Basin and the Glendale Narrows, grew noticeably and attracted more wildlife (Gottlieb 2007).[66] Noting the change, McAdams declared that "for probably the first time since the end of the last Ice Age, the Los Angeles became a year-round river (McAdams 1989). Because of the seasonal nature of Southern California's rivers and streams, as well as impacts of massive channelization, the flow regime of the L.A. River did not exhibit a sizeable year-round presence of water throughout its entire watershed until the Tillman Plant's discharges. Though the "naturalness" of the river could be questioned—both as its year-round flows were a departure from historical hydrologic regimes and that the flow itself was reclaimed sewage water—the increased presence of water, vegetation, and habitat visually supported FoLAR's claim that the river was indeed a river. One river advocate affirmed that that release of reclaimed water "coincided exactly with the efforts to revitalize the river," concluding that "it hasn't hurt that the river has looked more like a river while we've been trying to revitalize it" (Interview #33, 2012).

[66] Gottlieb (2007, 142) states that: "Even with the negative symbolism of treated sewage as a water source…this new river flow reinforced the appeal about a living river."

The river's more "natural" appearance perhaps came at a fortuitous moment. In 1989, California State Assembly Member—and then chairman of the Assembly's Transportation Committee—Richard Katz, proposed that the L.A. River be converted into a freeway during non-rainy seasons. Reasoning that the wide, concrete bed of the river—"wasted potential"—was perfectly suited for this conversion, Katz argued that his proposal was proactively tackling "the transportation crisis in Los Angeles" and deserving of further study (quoted in Taylor 1989).[67] Parrying concerns raised by both environmentalists and flood control engineers alike and making the economic argument that the river freeway would cost one tenth of the new Metro subway lines being constructed, Katz was able to convince the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission to authorize a $100,000 feasibility study for his proposal (Clifford 1989; Stumbo 1989).[68] The proposed "Katz Korridor", while publicly mocked, criticized by flood control agencies and the L.A. city mayor, and ultimately shelved, nevertheless had precedent. Similar proposals for converting the river into a freeway were made in the 1940s, 60s, and 70s by various governing officials, demonstrating the financial appeal of utilizing existing infrastructure for both regional transportation and stormwater disposal (Hobbs 2014).[69] However, the overwhelming opposition to Katz's proposal was generated partly by increased activism around the river (and aided by frequent news reporting) which had opened up dialogue on its value and potential (Gumprecht 1999).

In response to the growing visibility of the L.A. River, both through activism and increased media coverage, L.A. city's mayor, Tom Bradley, formed a Los Angeles River Task Force in 1989. The purpose of the group, composed of city, community, and NGO representatives, was "to develop and articulate a city vision of the Los Angeles River and begin the implementation of that vision through…Demonstration Projects." (City of LA River Task Force 1990). Mayor Bradley, who vocally opposed the Katz Korridor proposal, and whose administration supported environmental issues, through this act emerged as one of the first political endorsers of L.A. River improvement (Keil 1998). It is, however, important to emphasize that the city's interest in enhancing and improving the Los Angeles River was never a purely environmental one. In the Task Force's 1990 work plan, identified areas of interest for river improvement constituted a multifarious list, including:

> flood protection; natural resources and systems; water quality and management; aesthetics and visual quality; recreation use and facilities; transportation uses; commercial uses; adjacent land uses; education and public support; inter-agency cooperation and policy; planning, design and construction; acquisition; funding; maintenance; liability; and security (City of LA River Task Force 1991).

Bradley's endorsement of a future L.A. River hinged on the city's vision of the river not as a waterway restored into resembling some previous, undisturbed historical state, but as a multi-

[67] In the full quote, Katz declares: "This may not be the answer to the transportation crisis in Los Angeles...but we have to look at what resources we have, see how we can get ourselves out of trouble."

[68] In one *L.A. Times* article, Katz remarks on the plant and wildlife found in the riverbed: "There is nothing down here that wouldn't grow elsewhere" (Stumbo 1989). Then, while at a press conference for his proposal, he is reported as stating: "Flash-flooding has never been a problem in Los Angeles. We know enough about storms ahead of time to be able to avoid danger." This prompted Don Nichols, chief of water conservation division for the County Department of Public Works to respond, "There are dozens and dozens of storms drains all along the river, as well as major channels. All of them spit water into the river. I don't see how you could do it…without major modifications that would somehow take the flows and reroute them" (Clifford 1989).

[69] This argument appears in a 1946 Haynes Foundation Report titled *Waterlines*. In the report, the planning of "Streamline Freeways" is praised as logistically and financially pragmatic. "Freeways located along waterlines," the report states, "mean: hazards of floods have prevented valuable improvements—hence rights of way less costly" and "combined action on land acquisition for freeways and flood control can void public paying double damages" (Eliot 1946, 20-21).

benefit urban feature that could be incorporated into a number of non-environmental agendas such as commercial development and transportation infrastructure. Nevertheless, the creation of the task force represented the city's administrative backing of an issue thus far championed by a collection of artists and a fledgling environmental organization. Though the task force produced no immediate policy changes, placeholder signs were put up at key points along the river, one of the first formalized attempts to visibly mark the spatial presence of the river throughout the city.

The Political and Cultural Context for River Restoration Activism

It appears that a coincidental overlap of several significant events in the latter half of the 1980s catalyzed the political and environmental interest in the L.A. River. However, what should not be overlooked in analyzing the history of the river movement is the broader context in which these events unfolded. Ekers and Loftus argue for a historicized approach to the transformation of (urban) natures, which "involves detailing the specific forms of political, economic and cultural relations in place and time" (2012, 248). Thus, discussing the changing political, economic, and cultural conditions both within and beyond the Los Angeles region during the previous two decades sheds light on why it was that artistic, environmental—and the beginnings of political—support rallied behind a concrete river. I argue that by the late 20th century in Los Angeles, the cultural shift due to the success of the environmental movement, the political necessity of institutionalizing environmental protections, the restructuring of industrial and land use patterns, and the biophysical stresses manifested within existing socio-ecological systems coalesced into a conjunctural moment conducive to the material-symbolic excavation of an urban watershed.

Arguably the most significant change was the rise of environmentalism and the enacting of environmental regulations at the federal level in the decade prior. Through the influence of the U.S. environmental movement, federal agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) were formed, while a series of federal legislation designed to protect natural resources and regulate environmental impacts were enacted. The National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) (and its state-level version, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)) was passed in 1970, mandating environmental reviews of land use projects to assess harmful impacts. Specifically in relation to water resource protection, the Clean Water Act (CWA) was passed in 1972 while the Safe Drinking Water Act was passed in 1974. The latter established standards and mechanisms for the protection of public drinking water systems, while the former set up permitting systems regulating water pollution. In particular, the CWA provides an enforcement system through the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program that regulates the type and amount of pollutants dischargers can release into rivers, lakes, streams, and other bodies of water designated as "waters of the United States." The enactment these environmental laws provided the legal means by which the state is held accountable for protection of water, natural resources, and other environmental components. It also strengthened an environmental awareness among the public, both on a national scale and at the local scale of everyday life. The cultural shift in the U.S. toward accepting environmental narratives and supporting political agendas had fully occurred by the late-1960s and early 1970s—signaled by the celebration of the first Earth Day in 1970—which indicated that "society had accepted environmentalists' view of environmental quality as a social problem" (Dunlap and Mertig 1991, 211).

In Los Angeles, the growing urgency of water quality protections spurred the formation of the organization Heal the Bay in 1985. Led by Dorothy Green, a prominent environmental

figure, the organization initially pushed for sewage treatment facilities to comply with CWA regulations (Arrendell 1985).[70] Though Heal the Bay focused in its earlier years on coastal waters protection, it nevertheless symbolized the strengthening of local activism around issues of water pollution and contributed to the larger environmental awareness within the L.A. region. Though not explicitly connected to the Los Angeles River at the time, the passage of federal environmental regulation set up a favorable cultural context, according to one environmental advocate I spoke to:

> I think that looking at the origins of it all, of course, is that the real spurt of environmental consciousness that came around [the 1970s]. And the passage of the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act which were really the two key pieces of environmental legislation that affected rivers and streams and drinking water… There were these big episodes that woke people's consciousness up to the importance of cleaning up our rivers and streams all around the country (Interview #68, 2013).

A county engineer shared similar thoughts on the role of federal legislation, stating that, "at the same time that [flood management reassessment] is happening, the federal government's down here doing the Clean Water Act and the National Pollution Discharge Elimination Systems and TMDL issues, and FEMA's [Federal Emergency Management Agency] doing flood insurance.[71] So everybody's starting to plug into, 'hey, there's something going on here'" (Interview #10, 2013).

Environmental concerns at all political levels focused not only on water quality but water supply as well. As presented in the previous chapter, it has been over a hundred years since the Los Angeles River was the sole source of water for the city. By the 1980s, the city obtained most of its water from local sources (such as the L.A. River watershed) and the Los Angeles Aqueduct (sourced from the Owens River and Mono Lake in the Eastern Sierras), and purchased smaller quantities from the regional water wholesaler, the Metropolitan Water District (which draws from the State Water Project (Sacramento San Joaquin Bay Delta), and the Colorado River Aqueduct) (LADWP 2010, 27-35). The city's water utility, the Department of Water and Power (DWP) historically operated with little restriction in the Owens Valley until the 1970s and 80s, when residents living in the impacted watersheds of Inyo County brought a series of lawsuits demanding for reduced water exportation and remediation of air pollution created by desiccated lakes (Shaffer 2001). The first of these, *National Audubon Society v. Superior Court* in 1983, saw the California Supreme Court utilize an expanded coverage of the Public Trust Doctrine to rule against the city's unchecked extraction of Mono Lake waters, and required the DWP to release enough waters from upstream dams to support threatened fish populations (Conway 1984; Hanak et. al. 2011). Subsequent lawsuits led to mandates restricting the amount of water DWP could extract through the L.A. Aqueduct. Moreover, local activists around the same time began pushing for the city to decrease its overall reliance on imported water and invest in more effective recycling and conservation programs (Hughes et. al. 2013). The legal battles and

[70] Heal the Bay, one of L.A.'s most established and respected environmental organizations, has long been one of the major advocates for water quality improvements in the region. One of their earliest efforts involved successfully petitioning the EPA to mandate that the city of L.A. upgrade the infrastructure and practices of two sewage treatment facilities (Hyperion and Carson plants) to meet with the CWA's 1977 requirement that all sewage treatment plants conduct secondary treatment of its collected sewage.

[71] The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is the government body overseeing the National Flood Control Program, which mandates that all properties with federally-backed mortgages lying within specifically designated flood-prone areas (Special Flood Hazard Areas) must purchase flood insurance. Periodically, FEMA creates maps to determine which properties do or do not lie within these Special Flood Hazard Areas, which are typically those areas projected to be impacted by a 100-year flood event.

activist presence intensified political pressure for the city to present a more environmentally palatable water agency, resulting in Bradley's appointment of three environmentalists to the DWP Board of Commissioners, including Dorothy Green and Michael Gage, a FoLAR boardmember (Shaffer 2001).

Local activism was in part fed by water politics unfolding at the state level, where the debate around the Peripheral Canal proposal—construction of a tunnel that would more easily divert water from the Delta—came to a head as a ballot measure in 1982. While the proposal was defeated due to a mix of scientific, political, and environmental concerns (Norgaard et. al. 2009), it nonetheless indicated a cultural shift, as Californians rejected what appeared to be a continuation of hydraulic regimes centered on large-scale infrastructure projects as techno-fixes to the state's water issues (Gottlieb 1988). This trend toward rethinking water supply systems manifested in Southern Californians rejecting the Peripheral Canal project, though much of the discussion surrounding it involved the tunnel's expediting of increased water being sent to urban centers in the southern half of the state. For environmental activists in Los Angeles, the concern over the ecological damage created by expansion of systems such as the State Water Project was accompanied by a desire to push water agencies to invest in maximizing local water sources. According to one NGO representative, who has worked in both water supply and stream restoration campaigns, the environmental consciousness around the state's water crisis fostered growing concern for protecting local watersheds:

> Well, I would say that the peripheral canal campaign in fact was a really big turning point, in that before then the water agencies basically had the view that whatever problems we have with regards to water, we'll solve the problem by importing water from somewhere else. […] So looking at the origins of the new consciousness that came about, several things were going on. One was the realization of the environmental impact of all these systems that had been put into place—the flood control channels, the importation programs from the Owens Valley, from the Colorado River and the State Water Project—there were environmental impacts that were unanticipated from all of these programs. […] It made Southern California look at water resources and go, 'wait a minute, we need to be more careful, we can't assume that we can get water from anywhere regardless of environmental impacts. *We need to use local water better*' (Interview #68, 2013, emphasis added). [72]

As one of the main sources of L.A.'s local water, the Los Angeles River watershed appeared to be slowly, if indirectly, entering back into the growing political and popular dialogue around water supply. Though it had always remained within the DWP's water portfolio, its diminished role in the wake of L.A.'s water importation programs rendered it a somewhat overlooked source since 1913.

In addition, and related to the increased federal legislation around water quality and political attention around water supply, the 1970s and 80s saw a resurgence of scientific and policy attention turned towards rivers and streams. The federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, passed in 1968, established a national system of rivers deemed ecologically and/or recreationally valuable enough to be protected against construction of flood control, hydropower, or other

[72] This environmental NGO representative, having also served on Metropolitan Water District's board, shared with me the ways that agency responded to the growing statewide concern over water distribution systems by exploring conservation measures and other alternatives to reduce its footprint: "[MDW] started an integrated resources planning program in the early 90s, before a lot of this other stuff… I mean, integrated water management includes habitat, environment, water quality, open space, recreation, and those aren't part of Met's integrated resource program. So it's a more focused kind of approach. But it was definitely a big step forward in the early 90s when it was first established."

development structures (Tarlock and Tippy 1969).[73] As mentioned, the CWA in 1972 enacted water quality standards to rivers and streams. Beginning in the late-1970s, ecological restoration, both as an academic discipline drawing from ecological sciences and an environmental practice carried out by nonacademic professionals, gained traction across the U.S., leading to such milestones as the 1987 formation of the Society for Ecological Restoration (Gross 2002; Light and Higgs 1996).[74] Stream/river restoration, which emerged as a major scientific sub-branch within restoration ecology, sought to undo or at least mitigate the degradation of rivers by implementing projects designed to restore hydrologic function, enhance habitat, prevent channel erosion, improve water quality, and more (see Gore 1985 for a review). Especially since 1990, the science and practice of stream restoration has enjoyed immense growth, not only in terms of avenues/modes of knowledge production but also in the sheer number of implemented projects and amount of invested funds (Bernhardt et. al. 2005; Lave 2012).[75] Though stream restoration focused predominantly on nonurban waterways, scientific and political attention to river dynamics and stream ecology contributed to the study of the effects of urbanization, channelization, and potential rehabilitation on urban rivers that grew in later decades (Brooks 1998; Eden and Tunstall 2006; Paul and Meyer 2001; Tapsell 1995).

The expansion of river-based knowledge and concepts of restoration coincided with the changing role of many urban rivers, as economic restructuring begun in many North American cities during the 1980s saw the deindustrialization of riverfront/waterfront spaces. As these urban waterfronts no longer served their primary function of hosting shipping, manufacturing, warehousing activities, they became targeted by local governments as opportunity sites for urban redevelopment, renewal, and revitalization (Bunce and Desfor 2007; Cook and Ward 2013; Hagerman 2007; Vormann 2015). The postindustrial waterfront has effectively been re-branded and re-configured into commercial-residential spaces, made desirable—and profitable—by its proximity to 'nature' and central location. With the growing unpopularity of urban flood-control channelization projects implemented by the USACE, riverfronts such as the San Antonio, Chicago, and Hudson Rivers demonstrated the potential for these landscapes to regain their environmental, economic, and recreational value (Samet 2007; Stradling and Stradling 2008).[76]

Thus, the early activism and support for the Los Angeles River came about during a decade undergoing immense changes at national, state, and local scales, in regards to the social relations around water, rivers, and the (urban) environment. Decades of water governance regimes founded on massive water importation infrastructures, unregulated discharge of pollutants into waterways, and dogmatic techno-scientific approaches to resource management met with pushback from environmental movements seeking new socio-ecological systems. Federal and state legislation now ensured water quality protections, legal and political battles highlighted the fragility—and ecological devastation—of current water distribution systems, and heightened influence of restoration as scientific concept and environmental practice invigorated less disruptive river management alternatives. It is within this political-cultural climate that

[73] The authors claim that: "Although expansion of outdoor recreation opportunities was the initial goal of scenic river preservation, ecological considerations began to emerge during the 1960's" (1969, 710).

[74] Light and Higgs define ecological restoration as "a broad set of practices directed toward the amelioration of human impact on ecosystems" (1996, 227).

[75] Despite its rapid growth, the field of restoration ecology/stream restoration remains highly contested among scientists, policymakers, environmental ethicists, and activists. See Lave 2012 for a discussion of some of the issues.

[76] An excellent example of the environmental significance of a deindustrialized urban river is the Cuyahoga River, one of the most indelible symbols of the modern U.S. environmental movement (Stradling and Stradling 2008). Gottlieb (2007, 165-166) also discusses how urban river organizations like FoLAR, Friends of the Chicago River, and Friends of the White River came together to form the "Friends of Trashed Rivers", and convened a conference in 1993.

McAdams founded FoLAR, Roraback wrote his The Explorer series, and Assemblymember Katz proposed a riverbed freeway. One NGO representative summarized how the river movement found footing during the time Los Angeles underwent these changing conditions:

> Water has always been an issue…but that consciousness or that…urgency and need to address water, and in this case, river issues, has come to the forefront particularly in the last 20 [to] 40 years as our communities—not sometimes by choice but out of necessity—have started looking at air quality, water quality, drought, water shortages, pollutants… Those things have…been addressed out of need and necessity, and the river has been one of those (Interview #9, 2010).

River advocates drew upon and further mobilized the environmental politics emerging from newly reconfigured socio-ecological arrangements and attitudes. By the close of the 1980s, their push for a safer, more livable socio-ecological Los Angeles landscape remained an uphill climb.

CONFLICT IN THE 1990S: LACDA AND THE BEGINNINGS OF AGENCY RESTRUCTURING

While the first stirrings of environmental activism around the Los Angeles River began several years prior, one of the largest conflicts over watershed management played out in the early 1990s. This conflict, both representative of and further catalyzing ongoing tensions and negotiations between river activists and agencies, ushered in even greater attention to the state of the river and what was beginning to be a fledgling movement around it. Responding to river conflicts and growing political tensions, local state actors and entities began incorporating new measures into their management practices; in doing so, they assuaged activists by meeting some of their demands for water quality protections, enhancing local water supplies, exploring alternatives to single-purpose flood control, and degradation of river space. During this decade, also, the diverse environmental interests that had sprung up around the L.A. River since the late-1970s began to coalesce, forming a more solidified political platform that captured the various physical, institutional, and symbolic changes advocates demanded to see.

Arguably, one of the biggest battles over the Los Angeles River was the LACDA project. The LACDA project (which stands for the Los Angeles County Drainage Area), was the Army Corps of Engineers' proposed structural addition to the river's flood control system. Though the political and legal conflict over LACDA unfolded during the 90s, the conditions which necessitated its creation had been formed much earlier. Heavy storms in 1969 and 1980 resulted in recorded river flows barely contained by the flood control system. Particularly during the storm of 1980, engineers noted with alarm that water had overtopped the channel walls in certain stretches, leading to the realization that the capacity of the flood control system, referred to as the Los Angeles County Drainage Area, was inadequate for a radically changed L.A. basin (Orsi 2004). The Army Corps of Engineers and Los Angeles County Flood Control District (LACFCD) initiated studies to determine what measures would need to be taken in order to restore full flood capacity to the system they had built in prior decades. The system, they declared, demanded urgent rectification. In 1989 Edward O'Neill, the chief of program development at USACE's Southern Pacific Division warned that: "A levee failure during a major flood event could produce the same catastrophic results as a dam failure—a loss of life as well as significant property damage" (Stammer 1989). James L. Easton, chief deputy director of the county's Public Works Department (which houses the LACFCD) somewhat defensively noted that the system was not infallible, and occasional adjustments were needed:

> What we have designed and built here is not a system that will protect against any event that will ever occur in Los Angeles County. We will get events that will exceed the capacity of this system. Even if this system were exactly what the designers intended, we would get storms that would exceed its capacity, and I think that sometimes people forget that. They think that that's supposed to be there to protect me against everything. And it isn't (quoted in Stammer 1989).

The reason that Los Angeles now faced storms able to "exceed the capacity of this system" was due to the region's urbanization. As discussed in the previous chapter, the river was channelized due to the push from dominant interests to protect existing *and future* land development. The construction of the ACE's LACDA system fed into a sense of security from future floods and facilitated the rampant development of land throughout the entire watershed. A 1982 UCLA study found that between 1947 and 1979, "urbanization of the watersheds of the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers, including the mountainous portions, increased from 19.3 to 44.0 percent" (cited in Gumprecht 1999, 279). According to flood control engineers of the LACFCD, the flood control system was designed with the assumption that half of the San Fernando Valley would remain agricultural land.[77] Language in the Army Corps' environmental impact study reveals just how unforeseen the level of the basin's urbanization was to engineers:

> Increasing urban development has resulted in increased runoff because rapidly draining, impervious cover replaces runoff-retarding soils that support vegetation. The studies which led to the design of the LACDA system addressed future urban growth in the southern California area, *however, the designers were unable to predict the impact of urbanization and the effectiveness of the local storm drain system at carrying this increased runoff* into the main flood control channels (USACE 1991, 52, emphasis added).

Moreover, the degree of urbanization in the watershed was so severe as to constrain viable flood control options for the agency. The study concludes that measures to "integrate flow retarding facilities into the system", such as floodways and underground storage basins, were not feasible because "*there is simply no adequate undeveloped land…in the LACDA basin* appropriate for these alternatives" (1991, 82, emphasis added).[78] Urbanization was so extensive it essentially altered the way Los Angeles now experienced storm events. "If the same storm were to occur today that occurred in March 1938," announced Joseph Evelyn, chief of the USACE hydraulic section in 1989, "then we would experience a much larger flood event that might approach a 100-year flood event due to the urbanization that has occurred" (quoted in Stammer 1989).

In their 1991 Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed structural modifications to the LACDA infrastructure system, the Army Corps specified the deficiencies of the current flood control system. The agency found that only half of the L.A. River mainstem provided protection from the standard 100-year storm, while lower reaches of the mainstem and the Rio Hondo (a major tributary originating in the San Gabriel River watershed) did not even protect from the 50-year storm.[79] To address the problem, the Corps proposed a series of construction

[77] One agency engineer echoed those conclusions, telling me: "I guess we built the system in the early to mid 1900s and in doing so we made assumptions about how much area would get developed. …Well, it's developed way beyond what the assumptions were so now there's more water coming to the facilities than we'd anticipated" (Interview #66, 2010).

[78] The report continues on for eleven more pages to make similar conclusions for other flow retarding or storage measures, such as wetlands, detention basins, dams, and spreading grounds.

[79] The report states that: "Based on review of precipitation and runoff and on re-evaluation of system capacity, it was determined that the LACDA system does not adequately protect many areas; the potential for the system to fail is particularly serious in the lower river reaches. …The Los Angeles River lacks 100-year protection through about half of its length. In the most critical reaches, such as the leveed sections along the Rio Hondo and the lower end of the Los Angeles River, the level of protection is less than the 50-year level" (USACE 1991, 60).

projects that would increase capacity to cover the 100-year flood. These projects included building walls on top of levees along the lower twelve miles of the mainstem river, building walls along nine miles of the Compton Creek and Rio Hondo tributaries, reinforcing river levees with additional concrete, and raising several bridges. Failure to implement these protective measures, concluded the Corps, could lead to $2.3B in property damage and "catastrophic" loss of life. An additional financial reason to approve LACDA construction came with FEMA's revising of flood hazard maps in 1992. These new maps identified the neighborhoods falling under Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) designation, or, vulnerable to flooding from a 100-year storm due to inadequate protection. Now property owners in the newly delineated SFHA had to begin paying for flood insurance or saw an increase in their existing flood insurance payments; partly in response to impacted residents' outcry, the County Board of Supervisors approved the LACDA proposal in 1995 (Keil and Desfor 1996).

Environmental organizations' response was swift and furious. FoLAR, castigating the Army Corp's further fortification of the river, presented its own alternative to the LACDA proposal. Their plan included less engineered flood control methods, such as increasing capacity at Devil's Gate and Whittier Narrows dams, creating storage basins, widening sections of mainstem river and Compton Creek, and flows from Rio Hondo be diverted into San Gabriel River (Gumprecht 1999).[80] Shortly after the Board of Supervisor's adoption of the Corps' proposal, FoLAR along with Heal the Bay and Tree People, another influential environmental NGO, filed a lawsuit to prevent the project's construction; they were later joined by other high profile environmental NGOs. During the next two years, the County Board of Supervisors and the Los Angeles County Superior Court went back and forth on the lawsuit, while mediation among involved parties was carried out in an attempt to reach a consensus-based resolution to flood control projects (Deister 2000). Despite the organized opposition mounted by the coalition of environmental organizations, the pressure from downstream municipalities to reinstate flood control capacity to the LACDA system outweighed ecological concerns. Construction commenced in 1996 and final legal approval of the project was given in August 1997.

Nonprofit Organizations Rally around Watershed Protection

Though the construction of higher channel walls and parapets along the LACDA system represented a defeat for environmental/river organizations, it served to energize activist efforts of these groups. Partly due to the already growing momentum around improving the L.A. River and implementing better regional water/watershed management practices, and partly capitalizing on the publicity and sympathy garnered by the LACDA controversy, the pro-river camp intensified their activities. In the mid-90s, North East Trees (NET), an urban forestry nonprofit organization, began planting trees and creating micro-greenspaces along select stretches of the L.A. River. At the same time, NET, FoLAR, and other environmental organizations continued protesting the Army Corps of Engineers' regular bulldozing of vegetation in the soft-bottomed river sections, a

[80] What is interesting to note is that the USACE determined that only modifications to the lower channels of the L.A. River would be effective flood control measures for the most threatened areas within the watershed. The Feasibility Study concludes that: "Based on a thorough analysis of measures to correct the system inadequacies, it was concluded that only improvements to the lower basin channels themselves would be cost-beneficial solutions to the flooding problems identified. Other alternatives were found to be either excessive in cost…or ineffective in reducing peak flows through the critical project reaches in the lower basin…" (1991, ii). Later, it states once more that: "Upper watershed [detention] also does not address the problem of increases in lower basin local runoff, which cause the majority of the flooding problems in the basin" (83). FoLAR's alternatives, which focused heavily on upper watershed interventions, appear at odds with the Army Corps' conclusions. More discussion of the lower river issues are discussed in Chapter Seven.

practice justified by the experts' claim that vegetation reduced flood capacity in the river channels. The mounting political pressure applied to the USACE led to the eventual halting of this practice by the end of the 1990s.[81] Meanwhile, the Los Angeles chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) formed an L.A. River Task Force in 1992. The task force was created in part because Arthur Golding, one of its members, was also involved in re-envisioning plans for the river and the lands alongside it. Golding was appointed the chair of the AIA's River Task Force, which met regularly to discuss revitalization potential for the L.A. River and hosted design charrettes for key riverside properties (Interview #7, 2013). Though begun in the 1980s, organizations like FoLAR and AIA continued to co-host design charrettes and workshops for the river through the 90s. And while many of these developments began before and somewhat independently of the LACDA conflict, they were influenced, even energized, by the timely and well-publicized nature of the fight and its outcome.

Then, in the early 90s, the founder of Heal the Bay convened an informal coalition of environmentally-minded activists and academics, a group which became known as Unpave L.A. Although short-lived, the coalition represented an intellectual gathering of those concerned with a host of Los Angeles' water-related issues, including the single-purpose flood control regime of the county and Army Corps, the wasting of local water sources through stormwater mismanagement, and the continued deterioration of water quality of local rivers/streams. Unpave LA, as explained by one NGO representative, was "an informal group…working to change the way the [LACFCD] and Army Corps of Engineers and the City of Los Angeles looked at managing water" (Interview #53, 2012). In light of renewed concerns over flooding and building flood protection infrastructure, the organization approached these issues as being as much about land use and land management as it was about water governance.[82] From much of the groundwork laid down by Green and the Unpave LA group, key leaders and representatives from environmental NGOs and water agencies formed the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council (now known as the Council for Watershed Health). With membership made up of representatives from both environmental organizations and public agencies, the Watershed Council was intended to serve as a forum that would increase communication, cooperation, and collaboration among watershed-wide managers/stakeholders. At the time, the organization was one of the first formal gatherings of public and private stakeholders in Los Angeles that convened around planning for watershed-based resource management; this collaborative assembly was made all the more notable for the LACFCD's key role as forum host and participant (Drennan et. al. 2004).[83]

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[81] One river advocate since the 1990s recounted the bulldozing by the flood control agency: "The Army Corps would just bulldoze. [Around mid-90s], FOLAR was already underway and I think they put pressure on them to stop doing it. …And it used to look like it was clear cut and it would grow back pretty much every year, so it had a lot of the natives in there." Another credited the halting of the bulldozing to environmental organizations focused on a river restoration agenda: "If it hadn't been for that pressure and awareness [from FoLAR, NET, environmental groups], they would still be mowing down half of it every other year. At a certain point [the Army Corps] stopped, and it wasn't because the Army Corps suddenly got a conscience or a new vision" (Interview #69, #29, 2013). There are no clear end dates for when the Corps stops, though an L.A. River timeline asserts that it was by the late 1990s (see http://mlagreen.com/wp-content/uploads/2015-LARiver_HistoricalTimeline_sm-copy.pdf).

[82] Unpave L.A., according to this representative, wanted "to promote a watershed approach. When everyone hears the word 'watershed' they assume that we're talking about water. What we're really talking about is land. Land and water. Because the land is what the water falls on, right? The land is where people live" (Interview #53, 2012).

[83] "[The Council] grew out of concerns voiced by a number of individuals representing government agencies with responsibilities in the watershed, citizen groups and consultants who work in the watershed. Each of these individuals expressed the need to improve communication on a variety of issues within the watershed." From these came meetings of "a broad representation of stakeholders in the watershed" (Drennan et. al. 2000, 4).

Therefore, the conflict over LACDA occurred during a period of time where activist, academic, and environmental organization-driven efforts coalesced, intensified, and began making noteworthy political inroads. Certainly, the enormous amount of attention—from the media as well as elected officials—directed at the L.A. River throughout the controversy led to additional support from governing bodies and political figures. Perhaps due to the instituting of a conservative local administration with the election of Mayor Richard Riordan, political support during this period came from state rather than city agencies. In 1993, the California Coastal Conservancy (CCC) became one of the first state agencies involved in the river re-envisioning effort by producing a report examining the restoration potential of the L.A. River. The report, titled *Los Angeles River Park and Recreation Area Study*, is one of the first to explore specific opportunities for creating greenways, wetlands, habitat, and recreational areas along the river corridor, and serves as a template for future feasibility studies and plans.[84] One agency representative explained the significance of this early Coastal Conservancy report, noting that: "No one had quite done what [the CCC had] done before for the L.A. River. So as people wanted to know more about the project opportunities, [the] report…was kind of a launching point for people to look at" (Interview #14, 2012).

Then, in 1994, the Mountains and Recreation Conservation Authority (MRCA), an open space preservation agency partly under the jurisdiction of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC), began building "pocket parks", or small greenspaces for recreation, along the Glendale Narrows stretch of the river.[85] The MRCA's construction of these riverside pocket parks represented the formal endorsement and implementation of river greening activities, as a public agency took over what was already being carried out by North East Trees.[86] Two years later, the MRCA purchased a former restaurant property located near the river and converted it into a complex known as The Los Angeles River Center and Gardens. The River Center houses many river-related environmental organizations' offices, boasts a small river-themed museum as well as renovated landscaping, and offers meeting space. Like the creation of the Watershed Council, the opening of the River Center indicated a shift in the organizational network of river advocacy, as cooperation and increased dialogue among relevant stakeholders was facilitated by the formation of new institutional and physical spaces. The facility continues to serve as a hub for river/watershed and other affiliated environmental organizing.

At the county level, several significant developments were underway. In 1991, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, "in response to a renewed interest in the Los Angeles River as a valuable multi-use resource," directed the departments of Public Works, Parks and

[84] The CCC published another study in 2000 looking specifically at wetland restoration in the L.A. River watershed, drawing from FoLAR's alternative-to-LACDA plan from 1996. Then, in 2002, it funded a report looking at possible restoration options for the Taylor Yard site in Northeast Los Angeles.

[85] The MRCA was formed in 1985, and the SMMC in 1979. While the MRCA is technically a joint powers authority between the SMMC and other Southern Californian park districts, people I spoke with treated it as a sub-agency within the SMMC or referred to the two agencies interchangeably. The MRCA's mission states that it is "dedicated to the preservation and management of local open space and parkland, watershed lands, trails, and wildlife habitat. The MRCA manages and provides ranger services for almost 73,000 acres of public lands and parks that it owns and that are owned by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy or other agencies and provides comprehensive education and interpretation programs for the public" (MRCA website: http://www.mrca.ca.gov/).

[86] According to one NET representative: "The MRCA, SMMC, they were getting involved right about the same time as us. …Everyone was kinda taking the opportunity to work… Everyone was hooked up and all friends, so they were telling us their ideas and pointing out nice areas and things like that." Another shared with me the appeal of working in such underused spaces: "That was part of the excitement, that it was on no one's radar, so we were working in unknown territory. The LA River was not just in people's minds. It was not in the public awareness, people did not recognize that it was a river or that there was a river in L.A." (Interview #69, #1, 2013).

Recreation, and Regional Planning to create a master plan for the L.A. River and its major tributary, the Tujunga Wash. The following year, the Supervisors formed a multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee to oversee the planning process (LACDPW 1996). This committee included representatives from county departments, multiple municipalities, and regional, state, and federal agencies, as well as members of FoLAR, AIA, NET, CWH, among others. The final Los Angeles River Master Plan (LARMP), adopted in 1996, detailed a list of recreational, aesthetic, and ecological improvement guidelines and potential projects for the entire Los Angeles River and Tujunga Wash. Though not as radical as some environmentalists would have liked it to be, the LARMP holds the distinction of being the first master plan created for the Los Angeles River, and continues to be a guiding document for new projects and programs proposed on the river.[87] Furthermore, the formation of the Advisory Committee provided a valuable opportunity for diverse stakeholders—including activists, environmentalists, bureaucrats, and agency engineers—to meet on a regular basis for the exchange of ideas, perspectives, and knowledge concerning the river. The committee, organized by the LACDPW, continued to meet after the finalization of the LARMP (Interview #7, 2013).[88]

Perhaps most importantly, the LACDA conflict directly catalyzed institutional change around flood control management. The Los Angeles County Flood Control District, regarded by many environmentalists and activists as one of the most intractable players in the governance arena, responded to the controversy by exploring alternative approaches to its management methods. In a 1999 position paper, the agency's then deputy director explicates how and why it should evolve:

> Watershed management in the early part of the century dealt with providing protection from the devastating floods and mudflows that occurred during heavy and prolonged rains in the Los Angeles County basin. … Today, 'watershed management' has taken on a different perspective. …The interest is in a more 'integrated watershed management' approach. … As a Department, we have a challenge to transition from a 'storm drain mentality' to an 'integrated watershed mentality' (Blum 1999).

The next year, the Flood Control District, and its parent agency, the Department of Public Works, took on this challenge of transitioning to an integrate water "mentality" by forming a Watershed Management Division (WMD), a planning arm of the department that "rather than focus on single-objective solutions for these Flood Control District priorities, uses an integrated, multipurpose approach that is consistent with watershed management principles" (LACDPW 2008, 19).

The county's shift from a single-purpose flood control approach to one embracing "watershed management principles" demonstrates how initial institutional changes occurred as a result of the growing activist presence in Los Angeles' environmental politics. Coalitions like Unpave L.A. castigated the actions of flood control agencies and challenged the paradigm of state actors authorized with managing water, all by advocating for a broadened scope of the problem that would go beyond a single river or a single project (Green 1993).[89] The formation of

[87] One engineer summed up the county LARMP's significance thusly: "The LA River Master Plan was the first master plan for the river. That opened up the door for anyone who wanted to develop along the river; you can do it, all you'd need to do is meeting [certain guidelines]. …Without the guidelines that the LA River Master Plan put together, it would have been hard for us to [figure out] which projects you say yes to. And this opened up, 'okay, the river's a resource for everybody to use" (Interview #59, 2013).

[88] For a full list of Advisory Committee stakeholders, go to: http://ladpw.org/wmd/Watershed/LA/larmp_advisory.cfm.

[89] Green, the founder of UnPave L.A. states in an *L.A. Times* response that: "Unpave L.A. is a coalition of major environmental groups and others who are concerned, among other things, about the Army Corps of Engineers' single-purpose response to

the WMD in post-LACDA years was indicative of the county's adoption (in language, if not entirely in practice) of a different paradigm of resource management. According to county engineer:

> [T]here was a lot of pushback from the environmental community… Because, rightfully so, they would say, 'you know, water is a resource and here you are a manager of it and your system is based on a philosophy of picking the water up and getting it out to the ocean as soon as possible. You don't look at the quality of it.' We do have a water conservation program but the general philosophy of flood control is get[ing] it out of the properties and away. *So I kind of consider [LACDA] to be the watershed project that started our department thinking differently about how we were treating water…as a resource* (Interview #66, 2010, emphasis added).

The controversy over LACDA saw activists with a diverse set of concerns (water supply, habitat, poor urban planning, etc.) coalescing around the Los Angeles River, highlighting once more how the river was emblematic of a host of environmental problems afflicting the region. The mobilization of activists demonstrated how, "in the current post-Fordist period, a multiplicity of voices in civil society contribute to the construction of a local environmental policy space", where "struggles occur concerning the regulation of societal relationships with nature" (Keil and Desfor 1996, 311). The injection of civil society, in the form of activist protest and organization, into urban environmental policymaking around the watershed would intensify in the next decade.

URBAN PARKS AND WATER QUALITY PROTECTION: EARLY- TO MID-2000S AS TIPPING POINT

Many watershed proponents and environmentalists regard the early 2000s as a turning point for the Los Angeles River movement. The first half of the new decade saw a significant rise in involvement from local state actors and the implementation of noticeable alterations to the river. Although the activist presence remained central to the constellation of efforts arising around the river and the broader watershed, the local and state government played larger roles in kick-starting or financially supporting these efforts. Moreover, other environmental and/or urban issues came under the umbrella of river restoration and revitalization, further diversifying the assemblage of issues, organizations, and ideas now associated with this already multifaceted movement. The expansion of issues and objectives related to the Los Angeles River was in part due to organizations' shifting their approach and handling of the river, no longer as just a linear channel but also as part of a dynamic and multidimensional ecosystem composed of water flowing both above and below land. As a result, issues of land-water connections—and how they relate to sources of water pollution, urban parkspace, and stormwater capture—became major areas of focus, litigation, and advocacy work. These developments resulted from momentum gathered over the past fifteen years, and, as environmental discourses are fully incorporated into the cultural and political milieu of, are no longer on the fringes of U.S. policy.

Warehouses versus Urban Parks: Environmental Justice Comes to the River

The most significant developments during this new decade were the land use conflicts around the Taylor Yard and Cornfield sites that ultimately led to the construction of two state parks near the L.A. River. In two separate but similar occasions, river-adjacent properties were

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managing storm water. Pouring more concrete in an effort to control or manage Mother Nature doesn't always work. …Rather than pour more concrete downstream, we propose to greatly reduce the flow upstream. Downstream flooding is now being projected because the San Fernando Valley has been paved over."

purchased by private developers and subsequently planned to be converted into warehouse complexes. In both instances, a coalition of environmental, social justice, and community-based organizations formed to oppose the warehouse plans, used legal strategies (including the claim that developers failed to conduct a full environmental impact review under CEQA) to halt the developments, and utilized state bond funds to create urban parks at the sites instead. The first conflict began in 1999, when Lennar Partners, a development company headquartered in Florida, purchased a parcel at Taylor Yard, a defunct railyard owned by Union Pacific Railroad. Because of its adjacency to a soft-bottomed stretch of the L.A. River, the Taylor Yard properties had long been a targeted site among environmentalists and river activists for wetlands restoration and greenspace creation (Interview #48, 2012; #60, 2012). Upon learning that the developer intended to build a complex of industrial warehouses at the 40-acre site, and that the city approved the proposal without a thorough environmental impact report, a coalition of organizations and individuals (calling themselves The Coalition for a State Park at Taylor Yard), filed a lawsuit against the developer in 2001 (Roth and VanderHaar 2006). The lawsuit, taken to the Los Angeles Superior Court, was adjudicated in favor of the Coalition on the grounds that a more rigorous environmental review was needed. In 2002, the land was purchased jointly by the California State Parks Department and the city of L.A., and park construction commenced soon after. Through a series of negotiations between state and city agencies and community organizations, the park included wetlands, native landscaping, walking paths, and sports fields. Now formally known as the Rio de Los Angeles State Park, the site is one of the most heavily used urban parks, not only in Northeast Los Angeles, but also in the entire city.

The second conflict began in 1999 as well. The site in question, popularly referred to as the Chinatown Cornfield, served as a Union Pacific railyard until the 1980s, when it was decommissioned and left as a vacant lot. In the late 90s, Majestic Realty, the powerful real estate developer that constructed the Staples Center, purchased the Cornfield property with the intent of converting it into an industrial warehouse complex. Majestic's proposal was supported by the city's mayor and district's councilmember, as well as slated to receive $12M in federal subsidies through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (Sanchez 2001). Because the Cornfield is close to downtown and the L.A. River, and is surrounded by racially and socioeconomically diverse communities (such as Chinatown, the William Mead public housing complex, and the county jail), it was considered an ideal site for a park and community center. Similar to the Taylor Yard case, a collection of over thirty environmental, community, and social justice organizations formed a coalition known as the Chinatown Yard Alliance (CYA) and sued Majestic Realty for failure to comply with a full environmental review under CEQA. Through several fortuitous personal connections between involved environmental organizations and the head of HUD, the CYA managed to stop Majestic Realty's project when HUD threatened to withdraw federal support unless a full environmental impact review was completed (Kibel 2004). Faced with these new obstacles, Majestic gave up its warehouse proposal, and the Cornfield was purchased eventually by California State Parks department in 2001, and renamed the Los Angeles State Historic Park.

A more thorough analysis of the complex racial, historical, and cultural politics of the Chinatown Cornfield and Taylor Yard conflicts will be presented in the next two chapters. It is, however, important to note here that by the late-90s, environmental justice activism, spearheaded by low-income communities of color mobilizing against harmful land use projects (such as the incinerators proposed in South Central and East L.A.), had become a powerful political presence throughout Los Angeles (Pulido et. al. 1996). By the time of the warehouse proposals, the

discourse of environmental racism/injustice and practices of activist mobilization were familiar to the political landscape of L.A. The growing environmentalism and environmental justice activism in L.A., therefore, combined to favorably tip the outcome of the two land use conflicts toward the river movement's objectives. These two cases were crucial victories for the pro-river movement. In both cases, organizations and individuals advocating for the revitalization of the L.A. River—such as FoLAR, The River Project, and the NRDC—played key roles in the coalitions' efforts to stop the warehouse projects. Therefore, the outcome over the fight for Cornfield and Taylor Yard was considered a legal, political, and symbolic victory for them (Hymon 2007). Not only did these land-use conflicts result in the successful creation of two of the largest urban parks in the city, but they also represented a critical turning point for river advocates via the legitimacy gained through political backing from state actors. No longer ridiculed as an environmental pipe dream, the vision of a restored river corridor now appeared achievable as well as desirable due to the endorsement from elected officials and commitment in government funds.

The Chinatown Cornfield and Taylor Yard conflicts also expanded the river movement to articulate with explicitly-outlined environmental justice concerns. Both of the sites are located in neighborhoods made up predominantly of lower-income residents of color, and these neighborhoods are also park poor, impacted by industrial land uses (such as railroads and brownfields), and have limited community development opportunities (Garcia and White 2006). The environmental and economic conditions of these neighborhoods had been a matter of concern long before the warehouse conflicts erupted, and efforts to increase open and recreational space for these communities had been undertaken for a number of years. According to one planning consultant, there was, "especially in the 90s", a growing "desire to create open space—whether it's active or passive—in park poor areas in the city of Los Angeles" that was unfolding "concurrent to [growing river interest]" (Interview #18, 2012). And while the knowledge of these park-poor neighborhoods—and the desire to create parks in them—had been present for years, there were challenges that prevented sufficient amelioration of these inequities. As explained to me by the planning consultant:

> If you look at a map, it was obvious that disadvantaged, low-income community areas were park poor. And existing zoning, interim control ordinances, simply the geography, and also cost, disallowed you from building parks (Interview #18, 2012).

These environmental justice interests were assisted and supported by environmental groups' shared interest in converting riverside parcels into thriving parks.

Therefore, although the victories at both railyard sites are rhetorically handled as major landmark moments in the narrative of the river restoration movement, they were also the outcome of environmental justice struggles among communities fighting for cleaner neighborhoods and access to parks. In particular, the future of the railyards in riverside neighborhoods like Glassell Park and Cypress Park was a topic of contention among residents, community leaders, and elected officials who had long lived with the air pollution from these facilities (Interview #18, 2012; #21, 2013). The councilmember for Council District 1 (where Taylor Yard is located) had held workshops in previous years, hoping to get community feedback on what types of land uses could replace the defunct maintenance railyards and brownfields. As one CD1 representative explained to me, for the residents, the Taylor Yard site was not an environmental issue, but rather a matter of restoring everyday quality of life:

> But [the Taylor Yard site] to some extent was not necessarily identified as a river park, it was more identified as a community issue, a community environmental justice issue because of what they were going to do there, the industrial [development]. Then it was changed over to a community park (Interview #45, 2012).

Thus, the uniting factor for these coalitions was not necessarily a vision for ecological rehabilitation along the river, but rather opposition to an industrial development project that was perceived as bringing little benefit to the surrounding communities. However, the formation of these opposition coalitions brought about several significant benefits to all involved stakeholders and marked a turning point for the river movement. Community and social justice organizations gained allies in environmental organizations that brought in more resources and helped reframe the conflicts as more than just neighborhood politics (Interview #16, 2012).[90] For traditional environmental/conservation organizations and river activists, involvement with the coalitions allowed them to develop political ties with community leaders as well as justify their vision of a greener L.A. River on environmental justice grounds as well. Now improving the river was explicitly about promoting green justice as well as establishing better watershed governance.

Water Quality Regulation and Protection: Cleaning Up Polluted Waterways

In addition to urban park conflicts, struggles for the enforcement of water quality regulations became another political arena that gained significant advancements during the first half of the 2000s. Having researched the history of the river movement in Los Angeles, I conclude that it is within the arena of water quality regulation that several of the most significant struggles for the Los Angeles River played out. It is also, perhaps due to its more technical and legalistic nature, an area of water activism and policy change that has received less visibility in the narrative of the Los Angeles Rivers' rebirth. Regardless of its diminished role within popular accounts of the river's resurrection story, the arena of water quality politics was and continues to be a crucial front for watershed protection. As previously discussed, with the enacting of the federal Clean Water Act in 1972 and California's Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act in 1970, environmental organizations in Los Angeles possessed the legal justifications and mechanisms to push for water quality control in the region's waterways. And again, in 1985, the environmental organization Heal the Bay sued the city of Los Angeles for stricter water treatment at its municipal sewage facilities. As a result, by 1986, the city's four wastewater treatment facilities were now updated to comply with stricter water quality standards through more intensive treatment operations. With a 1989 amendment to the CWA, one which extended water quality standards to cover nonpoint sources of pollution, environmentalists now possessed the legal means to enforce cleanup of stormwater, and by extension, its conveyance system, the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4).

In 1997, Heal the Bay, NRDC, and another water quality NGO, Los Angeles Waterkeeper,[91] filed a lawsuit over claims that the Clean Water Act was improperly enforced, resulting in impaired water quality and inadequate monitoring at the Los Angeles and Ventura

[90] One advocate who works for a national-level organization, explained to me the coalition of community, environmental, and social justice organizations that remain loosely connected since the Taylor Yard park conflicts. This coalition remains in a quasi-active state, and recently came together to protest Union Pacific's offer of the G2 Parcel of Taylor Yard to the developer Trammel Crow in 2012 (see Chapter Four). Other organizations include The River Project, FoLAR, Urban Semillas, The City Project, to name a few.

[91] The organization was then known as the Santa Monica Baykeeper, and had formed in 1993. It is a frequent partner of Heal the Bay in filing suit against agencies and dischargers in legal water quality battles.

River watersheds (Interview #63, 2013).[92] From this lawsuit came a Consent Decree in 1999 that set in motion the creation of Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for the impaired watersheds of Southern California, including the L.A. River (USEPA 1999). TMDLs, or quantified limits to the amount a specific type of pollutant can be present in a waterbody at a given period of time, are set through the CWA's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program. They are enforced, according to the Porter-Cologne Act, by regionally distinct enforcement agencies known as the Regional Water Quality Control Boards which are overseen by the parent agencies, the California State Water Resources Board and the U.S. EPA. As required by the 1999 Consent Decree, the first TMDL for the Los Angeles River—which specifically targeted trash—was formed in 2002, under the regulatory oversight of the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (LARWQCB). Since then, other TMDLs targeting a range of pollutants—from bacteria to metals to nutrients—have been developed for the Los Angeles River watershed. And as a response to the lawsuit and the resulting consent decree, the city of Los Angeles embarked on a planning process known as the Cleaner Rivers through Effective Stakeholder-led TMDLs program that created other pollutant limitation standards through more collaborative, proactive methods (Jones et. al. 2006).[93] Faced with tightening water quality regulations and no funding mechanism for compliance, city officials placed Proposition O, a general bond allocating $500M towards water quality improvement projects, on the 2004 ballot. Proposition O was approved by voters during what is considered a pro-environment climate of the city, made possible in a period of local economic growth.[94]

The legal and advocacy efforts of environmental organizations such as Heal the Bay and Los Angeles Waterkeeper forced regulatory agencies and local governments to seriously address pollution in the region's streams, rivers, and the MS4 stormdrains discharging into them. Activists pushing for the L.A. River to be recognized as a river and for water agencies to utilize stormwater as a resource both participated in and ultimately received a boost from these legal battles. Perhaps because of the technical nature of TMDLs and cleanup standards, along with the relatively invisible aspects such as water quality monitoring and strategic legal cases, the impact of struggles for water quality protection on the river movement has been downplayed or passed

[92] As one engineer informed me: "The city of Los Angeles in 1972 decided to challenge [the CWA] and they decided not to go full secondary. So that started in 1972 with a series of lawsuits all the way to 1986 where we had agreed to go [full secondary]. I move you from 1986 to the early 1990s now… It wasn't just purely the force of the permit… There was a shift in the city of LA. The entire system, they realized that there is a benefit for us to [cooperate with environmental organizations]" (Interview #63, 2013).

[93] According to Jones et. al. (2006, 2354): "The result of the CREST effort, facilitated by the City of LA, is achieving TMDL development and implementation strategies that will address multiple pollutants through a combination of integrated projects. These integrated projects will provide water quality improvements to comply with TMDLs and greater community benefits including green-belt restoration, community park and wetland enhancements, and institutional facility improvements." The CREST process, according to a city representative, also facilitated collaborative actions between the city of Los Angeles and other municipalities with jurisdiction over the watershed: "Over the years we have put the focal point on us to work with other municipalities. And because the [MS4] permit does provide us with the opportunity to do watershed planning, it is to the benefit of everyone. …A few years ago we did CREST… We invited all the municipalities that are discharging into the L.A. River to increase their scientific knowledge of: where does the bacteria come from, how is the bacteria transported, what happens to them in the L.A. River? That venue created a lot of support [among] scientific, nonprofit, and municipality participants" (Interview #63, 2013).

[94] According to one city agency representative, support for water quality enforcement is part of larger trends in the economic stability and political drive in Los Angeles. As he states it: "Other, bigger factors were impacting the city government at that time. Coming back now to 2001 [and Prop O passing in 2004], there was a good feeling in the nation to do something good not just for the environment but for everyone. So we caught the wave as it was going up. …When the Hyperion Treatment Plant went full secondary, we wanted to bring the '84 Olympics to L.A. Politicians get influenced by other factors to move it that way. Yes, it's a good thing to do, but outside factors influence the movement. It's just a matter of when you 'catch the wave'" (Interview #4, 2013).

over. Yet engineers, municipal bureaucrats, and environmental activists alike agree upon the lasting significance that enforcement of water quality regulations, like the Clean Water Act, had upon the broader movement to restore the Los Angeles River (Interview #44, 2013).[95] One engineer explained the impact of the law on city water departments' work:

> The CWA…has been a huge driver…that's led counties and cities to rethink stormwater and rethink their waterways. …The CWA is definitely—and it's a long-delayed implementation—but the effect that it's had is definitely an important part of the story. Because why are cities spending money on watershed revitalization? Because of the CWA! That's why (Interview #4, 2013).

Another longtime environmentalist and river advocate also attributed water quality regulations as instrumental to institutional changes that benefit impaired waterways such as the L.A. River:

> The things that have historically helped to push [environmentalists] forward are things like…lawsuits. …*That is one of the things that moved us forward with the river because of the water quality*. Suddenly the Bureau of Sanitation had to get heavily involved, with their Watershed Protection Division, because if they didn't do something then the city would be liable for massive amounts of federal fines. So, suddenly, they're all involved. Which is great. It's not a happy thing that we have to sue [the city] to comply with a law that had been out there for thirty years (Interview #48, 2012, emphasis added).

These two comments, from both bureaucratic and activist perspectives, are representative of the beliefs held by those involved in management of the Los Angeles River watershed. Though enforced decades after its enactment, federal and state clean water acts provided the legal mechanism for better water quality management and initiated substantial advancements in the river movement through the participation of government actors, investing of public funds, and symbolic power of protection through federal legislation. Legal conflicts and policy negotiations over water quality standards for L.A.'s streams became a permanent fixture in the environmental politics of watershed protection and river restoration.

Public-Private Efforts Increase for the River Restoration Agenda

In addition to social and environmental justice organizations, river advocacy during this period began to incorporate other issues and participants. Academic interest in the river, which had begun in decades prior, took up formal structure when, in 1999, FoLAR partnered with Occidental College's Urban and Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI) to conduct a year-long series of workshops, field studies, and public events on past and future of the Los Angeles River.[96] Led by Lewis McAdams and Occidental College professor Robert Gottlieb, and titled "Re-Envisioning the Los Angeles River", the UEPI program organized a series of events designed to advance river restoration through education, awareness, and advocacy work (Gottlieb 2007). The UEPI's events included, among other things: co-hosting in 2001 the Mayoral Candidate Debate on the L.A. River and Urban Environment (UEPI 2000); promoting collaborative events with artists, academics, and design professionals; and inaugurating the intersection of bicycle advocacy with river/watershed activism. Gottlieb and students at the UEPI also participated in the Chinatown Cornfield activism that erupted soon after.

[95] One lawyer from Los Angeles Waterkeeper explained that the organization's role was "complementary" to the river revitalization efforts, though it remained distinct from the coalition of actors involved in the river.

[96] There are excellent accounts of the details and analysis of the Re-Envisioning program hosted by Occidental's UEPI. These include Gottlieb (2007), Gottlieb et. al. (2001), and Gottlieb and Azuma (2005). Gumprecht (1999) also discusses the academic work that has been carried out on the L.A. River, including early masters thesis work on the river in the 1970s.

In particular, by partnering with the bicycling community in Los Angeles through a one-day riding event along the L.A. River, UEPI's yearlong program catalyzed a strategic alliance that proved beneficial to river activism, since "the experience [of a river bicycle ride] established a recognition not only that the River did actually exist but that it had value for the community" (Gottlieb et. al. 2002, 9). Bicycle advocates, like Joe Linton, and pro-bicycling organizations, like the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition (LACBC), became permanent working partners in the river restoration movement (Interview #37, 2010). Connections between river and bicycling activism also received local government support, as city and county agencies had, since the early-90s, begun constructing bike paths along the L.A. and San Gabriel Rivers, and their major tributaries, like the Arroyo Seco, Rio Hondo, and Coyote Creek. For L.A. city's transportation department, the Los Angeles River was identified as viable bike path as early as the mid-1970s, with the department's bicycle advisory committee envisioning a riverside bikeway for the entire fifty-one miles of the mainstem (Interview #50, 2012).[97] The linking of river restoration and bicycling activism found common ground in both groups' desire to undo Los Angeles' unsustainable urban planning, manifested in the enclosure of potentially beneficial public space and the continued prioritizing of transportation infrastructure centered around private automobiles. Since the first river ride through the UEPI, the LACBC hosts its annual Los Angeles River Ride; meanwhile, the city's major bicycling event, CicLAvia, includes routes along the L.A. River.

While organizations engaged in legal conflicts over the state of parks and water quality of the Los Angeles River, activists continued to coordinate events simply designed to increase visibility of the L.A. River. FoLAR began to host annual river cleanup events which, while mocked in the first years, eventually drew in crowds of thousands who volunteered to pick trash out of miles of the river (Coates 2013). The local chapter of the Audubon Society was holding regular birdwalks and nature hikes in the Sepulveda Dam Basin of the river, in the San Fernando Valley. Though technically illegal, kayakers and boaters frequently were found in the riverbed, motivated both by a desire for adventure and to protest the general public's restricted access to recreate in the river. Organizations like the Council for Watershed Health implemented programs fostering watershed education, such as water quality monitoring and landscape workshops. Jenny Price, an environmental historian, writer, and recent L.A. transplant, started to hold guided tours of the river; these tours, through positive word of mouth, grew in number of participants who wanted to enter into prohibited stretches of the city's infamous river. Through these ongoing activities, which regularize events occurring at or about the L.A. River, the concrete waterway gains more attention. Media coverage of the river, which had grown since the controversy over the LACDA project and FoLAR's lawsuit, continued to grow (Donahue 2000; Price 2001; Waldie 2002). This is especially the case with Price's 2001 series in *L.A. Weekly*, which extensively covered the natural history, mid-century transformation, and current revitalization efforts of the Los Angeles River. Her series, which is the first media publication covering the

[97] Despite the vision for an L.A. River bikeway, there was resistance from flood control agencies in the early stages of planning, in the 90s. As a city representative told me, the initial foray into a riverside bike path required careful planning and, like the early pocket parks, occurred with little support from politicians or the general public: "[In creating the bike path] the county and the corps were very clear in that they didn't want a whole lot of public folks in there because they built the channel…to move a lot of water quickly. There were a lot of concerns about inviting the public in. So we had to address all those agencies' concerns…a lot of complex, bureaucratic governmental stuff that we had to clear before we could move forward. And you have to remember nobody was doing anything like this on the river at the time. We didn't have the movement now, we didn't have [city] council really excited about this, we didn't have a river revitalization plan—none of this stuff was anywhere on the horizon" (Interview #50, 2012).

comprehensive range of issues and histories associated with the river, became a landmark moment in media coverage of the current plight and future potential of the L.A. River. The combined efforts of these advocacy and activist organizations set up, in the first half of the decade, the conditions for more government involvement in the latter half of the 2000s.

Both the fights for Cornfield/Taylor Yard and the lawsuits over water quality protection demonstrate the pivotal role that nonprofit and community organizations played in pushing local and state government to enact substantive environmental policies during the first half of the 2000s. Since the 1970s-80s, the onus of mobilizing for real changes in policymaking and management practices around environmental issues fell upon nonprofit organizations (Keil and Desfor 1996; Pincetl 2003). And in contrast to the previous decade's contentious relationship between environmental nonprofits/NGOs/activist groups and government agencies, there were signs that by the early-2000s, governing bodies were seeing the advantages of endorsing the Los Angeles River cause. For example, at the city level, the 2001 mayoral race saw, for the first time, the inclusion of the Los Angeles River as a major topic of debate and part of candidates' campaign platforms. Antonio Villaraigosa, then Speaker for the State Assembly, ran that year with promises of action to restore/revitalize the river; his win in 2005 was heralded as a victory for a mayor running on campaign with a strong "green" agenda (Orlov 2010). The same year also saw the election of Ed Reyes as councilmember for Council District 1 (which included the Cornfield site) and in 2002, he formed the Ad Hoc River Committee within the city council, which was dedicated solely to develop and oversee improvement projects along the L.A. River ("Ed Reyes leads" 2002).

At the state level, support for environmental issues comes in the form of funding measures and legislation passed. Beginning in 2000, a series of bonds allocated for water improvement and park development projects was proposed and approved in quick succession. In 2000, Proposition 12 and 13 passed; two years later, in 2002, Propositions 40 and 50 were passed, and then in 2006, Proposition 84 was passed.[98] Proposition 12, a bond allocating over $2.1B for park improvement and development (and, not incidentally, was authored by then Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa) provided the funding for the acquisition of the Rio de los Angeles State Park as well as the Los Angeles State Historic Park at the Cornfield.[99] In addition to bond monies, several state legislators sought to pass legislation that could help coordinate jurisdictional oversight of river-related activities. In 1999, State Senator Tom Hayden authored Senate Bill 754, which would create a river conservancy, or, a state level agency authorized to oversee and coordinate projects within the entire Los Angeles and San Gabriel River watersheds; the bill was ultimately vetoed by the governor due to opposition from elected officials in the lower-L.A. River areas (Mozingo 1999). Nonetheless, the state legislature overwhelmingly approved Assembly Bill 1355 in 1999, which established another river conservancy, the Lower Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers and Mountains Conservancy. Known as the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC), this new river agency is authorized to acquire property for the enhancement of riverside areas in the designated lower L.A. River and San Gabriel River watersheds. AB 1355 was also strongly supported by the County Supervisors representing constituencies in the lower L.A. River watershed.

[98] It is through Proposition 50 and 84 that more than $500M of public monies are allocated for funding the Integrated Regional Water Management Plans. The IRWMPs are discussed in the next section.

[99] The Taylor Yard site was purchased with a $45M earmark of the bond money, while the Cornfield site was purchased with $36M of the bond.

The rise of public-private cooperation with regards to environmental legislation is a significant development in local and state policymaking. According to Pincetl, nonprofit organizations played a critical role in the shaping of environmental policy, particularly on creating and preserving parkspace, in both Los Angeles County and the state of California. As municipalities lost a vital revenue source through the passing of Proposition 13 in 1978, politically savvy representatives of environmental nonprofit organizations began to find new ways of gaining widespread support to pass bonds and ordinances that would fund parks at local and state levels (Pincetl 2003). These nonprofits are representative of the expanded role of private entities and civil society sectors in social services/urban amenities provision in the wake of government devolution and competitive global cities. She concludes that by developing new strategies to obtain funding for parks, the nonprofit sector is "an active and effective actor in local urban regimes", and that in Los Angeles, "environmental nonprofits have effectively become partners in the local urban regime and in local governance arrangements" (2003, 981). As park creation and urban greening are central components to restoration of the Los Angeles River, her analysis of nonprofits as key players in urban regimes provides context to how the continued work of environmental nonprofits contributed to municipal and state governments' receptiveness to policies/legislation that increased parkspace, water protection, and environmental improvement for California and Los Angeles. The cooperation and working partnership between nonprofits/NGOs and governing bodies remained a central component to the environmental politics of the L.A. River in the years to come.

THE MAKING OF "BIG PLANS": FORMALIZATION AND COORDINATION IN THE LATTER-2000S

During the second half of the 2000s, the involvement of government agencies, especially that of the city and county, increased significantly, predominantly through the creation of formal planning reports and studies. These reports, which required multi-stakeholder advisory committees, agency oversight in existing conditions and activities along the river, and millions of dollars of public funding, signal the full formalization of river restoration agendas by coordination of state actors. State involvement also signified a shift in the river movement, which until now was largely driven by the work of environmentalists, activists, and community organizations. The development of such large-scale, costly, and ambitious plans for the Los Angeles River demonstrate the success of the river movement, as agencies, seeing the economic, ecological, and political value of restoring the river, no longer resist activists' efforts to draw plans and implement improvement projects. On the other hand, the further formalization of the Los Angeles River watershed revitalization enrolls earlier efforts in bureaucratic and institutional processes (which place emphasis on technical aspects of projects and limits those who can participate) while constraining the free-form and creative uses of the river through the state's desire for greater legibility and control over river space. This "institutionalization of the movement", which involves solving problems identified by the movement through "new government regulations and agencies", marks a common pattern for social movements that reach a certain level of political success (Dunlap and Mertig 1991, 211).

The City of Los Angeles Becomes the "Biggest Player in the Room"

The mid- to late-2000s was marked by the city of Los Angeles assuming a much greater role in the agenda of river restoration and watershed management. The formation of the city

council's Ad Hoc River Committee (chaired by Councilmember Ed Reyes) in 2002 established a formal governing body intended to deal exclusively on planning and implementation of projects on the Los Angeles River. The most important river project undertaken by the city during this time is the creation of the Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan (LARRMP). The master plan, conceived of and approved by members of the Ad Hoc River Committee, endorsed enthusiastically by the newly-elected Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, and funded by the Department of Water and Power (with a $3M grant disbursed over a three-year period), was launched in 2005. Principally carried out by the Bureau of Engineering (BOE) within the city's Department of Public Works (and supported in various degrees by multiple other departments), the LARRMP set out to create a fifty-year template for ecological rehabilitation, economic redevelopment, and cultural revitalization along the thirty-two-miles of the L.A. River within the city's boundaries (City of LA Council Motion 2005). A massive undertaking that hewed closely to the multi-issue agenda originally outlined by the 1990 Task Force Workplan, the LARRMP identified four main objectives to river revitalization: 1) Revitalize the River; 2) Green the Neighborhoods; 3) Capture Community Opportunities; and 4) Create Value (LARRMP 2007). The entire planning process took two years to complete, involved eighteen public outreach meetings (and numerous other stakeholder input and outreach events), and enlisted the aid of several private consultant firms (City of LA LARRMP Website 2017). The final master plan identifies five "opportunity areas", or targeted sites along the thirty-two-miles of the river's mainstem, where a combination of geographic and economic factors recommends them as particularly promising for revitalization.

During this relatively short period, the city of L.A. embarked on numerous other projects dedicated to the restoration and revitalization of the Los Angeles River. In 2006, the city's planning department began work on a river improvement overlay district (RIO), which sets out to impose design and landscaping standards along ½-mile borders on either side of the river. The same year saw the launch of the one of the biggest endeavors along the river, the $10M Army Corps of Engineers' ecosystem restoration feasibility study. Through a partnership between the Los Angeles District of the Army Corps and the city's Bureau of Engineering, the restoration study examines a slate of habitat restoration alternatives for an eleven-mile stretch of the L.A. River, from Griffith Park to downtown.[100] Meanwhile, in 2008 the city's Department of Transportation completed a crucial portion of the L.A. River bikepath in the Glendale Narrows. A year later, based on analysis of the LARRMP and an industrial land availability study, the planning department undertook the creation of the Cornfield Arroyo Seco Specific Plan (CASP), a new zoning plan for a community area encompassing key river sites such as the Chinatown Cornfield, Arroyo Seco-Los Angeles River confluence, and several riverside neighborhoods (Interview #15, 2012). Proposing completely new zoning standards and design requirements to promote high-density, mixed-use, transit-oriented urban development, the CASP has been celebrated as an innovative and equitable alternative for future green development in Los Angeles (Fraijo and Emmen 2013; Jao 2012).

Moreover, based on suggestions outlined in the 2007 LARRMP, the governance structure overseeing the L.A. River restoration was re-shaped and adopted into practice two years later. Upon recommendation that a multi-agency Joint Powers Authority be formed, the city, county,

[100] Another Army Corps restoration feasibility study for the Arroyo Seco tributary began in 2001. However, that study is not completed as of writing this chapter due to federal budget cuts. More information about the ongoing study can be found at the website for the Arroyo Seco Foundation, the tributary's chief restoration advocacy organization (http://www.arroyoseco.org/corpsstudy.htm).

and Army Corps signed a joint memorandum of understanding (MOU) to form the River Cooperation Committee (RCC) in 2009. The RCC is a governing body designed to update and coordinate watershed undertakings among the city, county, and federal agencies assigned primary jurisdictional authority over the L.A. River watershed. The city, working through the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA-LA) then created the River Revitalization Corporation (RRC) in 2010, a nonprofit organization charged with facilitating the implementation of the LARRMP through economic development and property acquisition (Interview #9, 2010). A third branch of the governance structure, a River Foundation, has yet to be formed.

The city's amplified involvement with plans for the L.A. River now positioned it as the central actor among the body of restoration supporters. It also reveals the municipal state's continued subscription to environmental agendas for earning political goodwill, as well as redoubled attempts to standardize and make legible the numerous yet decentralized improvement efforts on the river. Additionally, the city's greater role was also encouraged by the proliferation of other urban waterfront redevelopment efforts undertaken by municipal governments in numerous other cities, an outcome of the "territoriality and relationality" of a particular urban environmental program/practice (Cook and Ward 2012). With the failure of the proposed river conservancy in the late-90s and no signs of abatement of restoration efforts, city representatives identified the need for coordination and centralization of these activities. After speaking with representatives from various city departments and council offices, I conclude that the planning documents and governing bodies formed by the city in the latter-2000s signify the juncture in which the formal state, in this case the city, gained control over the agenda to restore the L.A. River watershed.

While state agencies participated in processes of re-envisioning the river since the 80s, it was not until twenty years later that the county and especially the city assumed more than a reactive role in determining how the river was to be re-configured, re-scripted, and redeveloped. One environmental policymaker, who worked on putting together the LARRMP, explained the necessity of the river this way: "There needed to be some sort of city assistance because so many things were happening piecemeal and there certainly needed to be some place where you could focus on the river as a system as opposed to just 'oh, lemme buy this piece of property here, lemme do this here'. There wasn't any sort of comprehensive planning" (Interview #45, 2012). According to one city official, the LARRMP was a step towards scaled-up, multi-stakeholder and multi-issue planning:

> [T]here was no focal point to address the layers of issues that go with the river corridor. … The stage needed to be big enough to fold in not only local, municipal concerns, but state, county, federal, and layer in all the different stakeholders who feel that sense of ownership and who feel they know what's best for the area and for the corridor" (Interview #21, 2013).

Amidst the ongoing work of river NGOs, activist groups, and community organizations, the city concentrated its efforts and funds in order to proactively organize and oversee the institutional and spatial modifications to the river. One environmental consultant summarized the city's actions—and the ramifications—in this way:

> The L.A. River is by far the biggest focal point of this environmental movement in Los Angeles. …[And] the biggest player in the room is the city of Los Angeles. Even though the county and the corps and everyone else have their roles, the biggest player is the city of Los Angeles. …The L.A. River is a very political creature…and the city itself is a political creature (Interview #46, 2013).

Integrated Water Management and the Scaling Up of Plans to the Watershed

Other branches of local government increased their presence within the river agenda by tackling a series of issues. At the county level, the Los Angeles County Flood Control District became involved in agendas targeted toward multi-purpose water management at the scale of the watershed. One of the most important projects for the county was the formation of Los Angeles' Integrated Regional Water Management Plan in 2005. The prior year saw two California water agencies—Department of Water Resources and State Water Resources Control Board—forming a program incentivizing regions throughout the state to generate integrated regional water management plans (IRWMPs) designed to implement water resources management at the regional scale, through collaborative processes and institutional arrangements, and in an integrated, comprehensive approach (Hughes and Pincetl 2014). The County's Department of Public Works, which houses the Flood Control District, became the lead agency in the plan produced, titled the Greater Los Angeles County Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (GLAC IRWMP) and approved by the Department of Water Resources in 2006 (and funded through Prop 50). The GLAC IRWMP laid out strategies "to improve water supplies, enhance water supply reliability, improve surface water quality, preserve flood protection, conserve habitat, and expand recreational access in the Region," which encompassed multiple watersheds, including the Los Angeles River watershed (GLAC 2006, 1-4). Incorporating analyses from over thirty existing (and ongoing) studies/reports for the L.A. River (including those outlining river restoration), the GLAC IRWMP was created as a planning tool to address the interconnected problems of the watershed.[101] Key participants in committees that planned and vetted the IRWMP drafts included many agency and NGO stakeholders who also involved in river restoration efforts, such as the MRCA, Council for Watershed Health, Arroyo Seco Foundation, and individual consultants.[102]

Establishing IRWMPs throughout California was part of a much broader change in water governance, one centered on the prominent rise of an integrated water management (IWM) framework as a dominant paradigm. Beginning in the 1990s and throughout the next decade, North American and European nations increasingly adopt IWM as a framework of water governance, which stresses comprehensive treatment of water resources, collaborative stakeholder engagement, and privileging the watershed (or catch basin) as the superior spatial unit of planning (Cohen and Davidson 2011; Mitchell 2005; Molle 2009). In Los Angeles, the dominant discourse of IWM provided agencies with the tools, language, and procedural mechanisms necessary to demonstrate an evolved water regime, a departure from the single-purpose, engineering-focused one responsible for projects such as LACDA. For example, the creation of the Watershed Management Division within the county's Flood Control District in 2000 was in response to environmentalists' outcry against LACDA; the WMD, according to their 2008 Strategic Plan, "*rather than focus on single-objective solutions for…Flood Control District priorities*, uses an integrated, multipurpose approach that is consistent with watershed management principles" (LACDPW 2008, 19, emphasis added). With regards to the Los Angeles River movement, the ideas and language of the integrated water paradigm were utilized by environmental NGOs in their insistence that restoration plans handle the river not just as a linear

[101] For a full list of existing plans and studies on the Los Angeles River Watershed at the time of the IRWMP planning process, see Section Two: Analysis of Existing Plans and Studies, in the Integrated Regional Water Management Plan for the Los Angeles River Watershed (2005. 2-1—2-16).

[102] For a list of participants in the IRWMP leadership and steering committees, see Section 1-5 of the GLAC IRWMP Final Report (1-8—1-18).

channel but as an integral part and expression of a dynamic and multidimensional system. Organizations such as the Council for Watershed Health, FoLAR, Tree People, and The River Project pointed to the Los Angeles River as a stark illustration of the region's deleterious and ineffectual water governance regime: spending millions of dollars importing water while disposing of local sources and degrading existing resources through continued armoring of single-purpose infrastructure.

Aside from the GLAC IRWMP, other policies and institutional changes occurring during this time indicate the region's adoption and implementation of IWM and watershed approaches. On the local level, the city responded to the demands among water activists for better waste- and stormwater infrastructure. In 1999, the city embarked on their Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), which involved multiple L.A. city departments jointly coordinating and negotiating a long-term comprehensive water resources management plan.[103] Environmental activists who pushed for the IRP campaigned on familiar arguments drawn from the integrated water resource paradigm: that the region's current urban water regime was not only deleterious but also ineffectual, as millions of dollars were unnecessarily spent importing water while ecologically destructive and single-purpose stormwater/floodwater infrastructure disposed of precious local water sources. Several years later, one of the IRP's major participants, the city's Bureau of Sanitation's Stormwater Division, changed its official title to the Watershed Protection Division in order to better reflect the programmatic—even paradigmatic—changes the agency was undergoing in their approach to achieving water quality compliance.[104] In 2008, the LADWP, the city's water supply agency, created a Watershed Management Group (WMG) tasked with "developing and managing the water system's involvement in emerging issues associated with local and regional stormwater capture" they understood that by doing so, "other watershed benefits can be achieved including increased water conservation, improved water quality, open space enhancements, and flood control" (LADWP 2010, 138). The forming of the WMG reflected, according to one city representative, a markedly evolved approach to local water sources, where:

> [T]he mentality of the department was just recently getting involved in these new technologies of watershed management. […] Around the same time, that's when we had some pretty heavy droughts in the city. …So they were ramping up the water conservation at the same time they were ramping up the water resources group. …And on top of that add the watershed component to it (Interview #6, 2013).[105]

The LADWP's reasoning reflects the statewide motivations for implementing programs such as the IRWMP, with periods of little rainfall and problems with existing infrastructure contributing

[103] According to one watershed activist: "The IRP is the Integrated Resources Planning process that began more than a decade ago and it started out initially to deal with wastewater. Some of us, Dorothy Green and myself and Mark Gold pushed the city to include stormwater into it since it sort of came out of issues arising from the interface of stormwater and wastewater, as well as wastewater infrastructure that needed adjusting. We asked them to also include stormwater planning in the process that became a big, big component of it and ultimately laid the groundwork for the low impact development ordinance that passed" (Interview #48, 2012).

[104] As one BoS representative shared with me, the name change came through water quality permits: "[T]he watershed concept was more emphasized [in water quality compliance permits] than before. …This was the first permit that talked about actual development planning, construction planning, and watershed. Obviously, watersheds do impact our water bodies immensely. …So the name we used to call [ourselves], 'stormwater management' became… 'watershed protection'." This change, according to him, was not just a new name but a reflection of a "paradigm shift" (Interview #63, 2013).

[105] Another city representative gave a similar combination of reasons for the formation of the Watershed Management Group, claiming that: "Knowing how much water just gets wasted out into the ocean, I think there was a realization. As MWD prices kept increasing and continued to increase, I think the department at the management level made a decision, like, we need to change direction here and actually out of necessity make a change and look at this [problem] and see what the benefits are" (Interview #56, 2013).

to growing awareness of possible water shortages in the future. Mounting pressure also came from environmental groups, who rallied behind the adoption of integrated and watershed-based management approaches as worthwhile solutions to California's (and Los Angeles') water crisis. One environmental activist succinctly told me that: "If you ever hear the city say 'watershed', it's because we made them say watershed. When you hear DWP talk about getting off of imported water, it's because we've sort of forced them in that direction" (Interview #48, 2012).

The overwhelming amount of work carried out by the city and county of Los Angeles during this period should not detract from the continued activism and river advocacy of NGOs and nonprofit environmental organizations. Organizations involved with both the Taylor Yard and Cornfield land use conflicts continued to participate in the design and creation of the Rio de los Angeles State Park and Los Angeles State Historic Park. Partnering with academics and professional design firms, these organizations produced reports on the cultural, economic, and ecological significance of these new park sites and pushed for plans reflective of community demands/needs (Garcia et. al. 2004; The River Project 2002).The Council for Watershed Health embarked on an urban water capture and augmentation study that resulted in green infrastructure retrofits in the neighborhoods of Sun Valley and Frogtown and new data on stormwater capture as feasible local water source (*Figure 3.3*). In 2009, FoLAR and a local school partnered with a local television station, KCET, to launch the Los Angeles River Departures project, a "web-based resource that gives people amazing access to the L.A. River" via "interactive maps, interviews with River advocates and stakeholders, and stunning images of the River's past and present." (FoLAR website; *KCET* Departures website). KCET continues to provide extensive coverage of the most recent developments at the Los Angeles River, cementing itself as one of the strongest media advocates within the river movement (Interview #39, 2012).[106] Water quality NGOs continued pushing for better standards, compliance, and monitoring at the Los Angeles River, filing a lawsuit against the county in 2008 (discussed in later sections). Like the earlier efforts of the 1980s, the activist work behind the Los Angeles River remained diverse and loosely affiliated, emphasizing different aspects of how the river could be improved.

Figure 3.3. Bioswales of a green retrofitting project in Sun Valley. (Source: Photo taken by author.)

[106] The Departures coverage, however, is partly funded through the city. One city policymaker told me: "We funded KCET for them to do the Departures part of the LA River, so they did a lot of the interviews with people" (Interview #45, 2012).

From Instigators of Change to Professional Partners: The Changing Role of Environmentalists

The latter half of the decade was a period within the L.A. River movement marked by the city assuming a dominant role in plans to restore and revitalize the river. It also saw further formalization of new practices in water governance, through the institutional enrollment and operationalizing of integrated water resources management principles and concepts (such as watershed-as-unit). As the momentum behind efforts to restore and enhance the Los Angeles River became an undeniable political force, the city asserted control over its direction by channeling dollars, technological expertise, and bureaucratic labor power into plans outlining *how* that restoration was to proceed. It additionally set up new institutional arrangements, such as the formation of the River Revitalization Corporation and a formally established procedural space to coordinate with other invested agencies (such as the County Flood Control District and the Army Corps of Engineers). This unfolded during the time the city undertook other environmental projects through Mayor Villaraigosa's *Green L.A. Plan*, which would reduce the city's climate change impacts and create a "cleaner, greener, sustainable Los Angeles" (City of LA Office of Mayor 2007, 4). The Los Angeles River, then, fully became an item within the city administration's sustainability agenda. In addition, the incorporation of the L.A. River watershed into watershed-management plans such as the GLAC IRWMP strengthened the discursive and institutional connection between the river and other major regional water issues, such as managing water supply, enforcing the Clean Water Act, and promoting green infrastructure. Through these developments, the L.A. River movement shifted from a primarily activist-led effort to a formalized suite of state-directed programs targeted to a host of environmental issues within the region.

This state formalization process of river restoration efforts did not spring up suddenly, but rather developed over the course of twenty-five years, beginning with the mayor's creation of a river advisory committee in 1989. Activists and environmentalists sought legitimacy for their new vision of an ecologically-restored, recreationally accessible urban river through appeals of support from political and governing bodies. Through gains of political support for a river restoration agenda, the movement experienced increased government oversight not only of the river itself, but of the plans and projects for its improvement as well. Plans such as the LARMP, LARRMP, CASP, RIO, and the USACE's Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study signaled state investment into restoration through participation of local, state, and federal agencies, but they also established formal, even bureaucratically ensconced avenues of planning/implementing restoration projects. Though the work of activists, environmentalists, and community oriented NGOs remained vital to the movement, their primary role as *instigators* of change diminished as a result of the intensified procedural and institutional presence of state actors during this period. Instead, the role of the environmental organizations and NGOs underwent an alteration from *provocateurs*, in a sense, to consultants and collaborative partners in government-led programs. This pattern, according to Keil and Boudreau, is commonly found in environmental mobilization; this "'mainstreaming of local environmentalism", comes about as:

> the political astuteness of the environmentalists…while highly successful in changing the urban metabolism of [the city]…became more accommodationist in the process. The protest/activist mode of urban political ecological groups was slowly moulded into a more policy/consultant mode. The growing professionalism of…environmentalists was at once a necessary outcome of the changed political landscape after amalgamation, a function of the career of environmentalist

> organizations, and the willingness of urban bureaucracies—which at that point contained many environmentalists themselves—to lend an open ear to the complaints of the movement (2006, 50).

The willingness of urban bureaucracies to respond to environmental demands, and the subsequent professionalization of environmental organizations, both clearly occurred with regards to the Los Angeles River during the latter half of the 2000s. These shifting roles have not entirely gone unnoticed, however, as river advocates commended the local government's expanded role in greening the watershed while also criticizing some of the ways it has attempted to wrest full control of the process in order to standardize and make legible the spaces and uses of the river.

Making the spaces of the Los Angeles River legible have come with costs. The creative—and illegal—uses of the river, such as boating, fishing, encamping, and graffiti-making have always been and remains an integral part of the river's rich social history since channelization. With increased attention to the river, both by political actors and the broader public, however, these uses became increasingly monitored, regulated, and policed. The tagging of channel walls, once prevalent, began to be removed en masse in 2009 through the Army Corps of Engineers' use of stimulus funds from the American Reinvestment and Redevelopment Act; policing of graffiti activities also intensified through the LA County Sheriff Department (Burns 2009). Fishing in the river, an activity largely unregulated in previous decades, became increasingly enforced through the requirement of permits by the California Fish and Wildlife Department. For many longtime fishers (who are low-income and dependent on caught fish for supplementing diets), who fished in the river without permits, enforcement of this activity represented financial burden and exclusionary state intervention.[107] Moreover, homeless encampments in the riverbed came under intensified threat of removal as police departments engaged in more aggressive patrolling of the L.A. River.[108] Even with activities considered beneficial to the river, such as creating greenspaces along the tops of the channels, the bureaucratization of river improvement resulted in complicated planning procedures that excluded actors who lacked the resources and/or access to continue their work in restoration efforts. According to one environmental consultant I interviewed, projects such as the pocket parks in the Glendale Narrows were "the projects that Northeast Trees pioneered over ten years ago." However, she continued that:

> It says something about the way agencies work that this has now been adopted and mainstreamed by local, county, federal agencies as the kinds of projects to do. So you have these little pioneer organizations who now are actually struggling to remain funded and in business to continue doing

[107] Also, author communication with residents, recreationists, and fishermen from March to August 2013.

[108] The issue of the homeless population in the Los Angeles River is an ongoing and complicated one. Many homeless people have expressed preference for living in the river due to its spaciousness and quiet relative to other encampment areas, such as Los Angeles' notorious Skid Row. City, county, and federal agencies with jurisdiction over the river claim that the primary reason for removing homeless encampments from the river is safety, as the river can flood quickly and unpredictably. Numerous cases of rescue teams pulling out homeless individuals during storm events do impart truth to these claims. However, there is no denying the fact that removal of these camps is also partly motivated by a desire to placate "legitimate" users of the river who find the presence of homeless populations unwanted and/or dangerous. In numerous meetings/gatherings I attended, the topic of the homeless was brought up by residents in river-adjacent neighborhoods who feared that new parks or greenways along the river would attract undesirable segments of the urban population, including homeless people. Moreover, when the Army Corps razed part of the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve, one of the presented reasons for doing so was clearance of the area to prevent criminal and/or unwanted human activities from being established/carried out. The homeless population is indeed part of the broader discourse of public safety, danger, and crime associated with the L.A. River specifically, as well as the general discourse of waste, undesirability, and dirt attached to homelessness and public space. It is a deeply political and contentious issue that has yet to be resolved, and I cannot fully address the complexities of the issue in this chapter. See Bodago 2015; Goffard 2009; Moore 2012.

> the kinds of projects that they do. While these big fat agencies and big engineering companies and landscape architecture firms that are well-established now taking on the kinds of projects that the little guys did (Interview #34, 2012).

Thus, though river proponents during the latter half of the 2000s received political support from city, local, state, and federal agencies, the amplified role of the formal state in restoration agendas marked a change in the movement's progress. State agencies exerted control over how restoration would unfold via development of formal plans (LARRMP, USACE study), establishing new institutional bodies (RRC, Cooperation Committee), and compiling projects under a massive rubric of watershed management (GLAC IRWMP). In attempting to formalize and make legible the management of the river/watershed and its future possibilities, these state actors reinforced the boundaries between permitted and unsanctioned uses of the river, formalized, bureaucratized mechanisms for implementation of changes, and physically altered the spaces of the river to conform to legitimate management schemes (Scott 1999). This formalization and institutionalization, though not totalizing, resulted in excluding certain actors from not only accessing the river but also procedurally participating in its restoration and redevelopment.

2010-2015: Federal Support and Growing Recognition Amid Continued Contestations

The next five years of the river movement was marked by significant federal attention and amassing of mainstream support, all the while running into the conundrum of severely limited funding. With formal programs and "vision" projects outlined through activities of previous decades, the beginning of the new decade faced the challenge of ecological possibility constrained by economic reality. The financial crisis of 2008 left municipalities with stark budget cuts, the freezing of state bonds beginning in 2009, the dissolving of the California Redevelopment Agency, and the local scrabble for federal grants in the wake of the economic recession. Despite these financial constraints, the momentum gained by the river movement, from the onset of the 2000s and formalized within the 2005-2009 period, continued, particularly under the guidance of local political leadership. Beginning in 2010, those advocating for L.A. River restoration enjoyed heightened recognition of their efforts at the federal level, especially through environmental programs created by the Obama Administration. Although the federal government had always maintained an integral authoritative presence in the management of the watershed (as agencies such as the Army Corps, US Forest Service, EPA, and to a lesser extent, FEMA claiming some form of jurisdictional authority over different aspects), the shift from agencies merely acting as regulatory participants to one of collaborative partners for proactive projects took place during this period.[109] To many who had been advocating for improvements to the L.A. River watershed, the plans detailing these improvements were expensive, almost prohibitively so. Funding beyond local sources was needed to carry out grand visions into actuality.[110] Alongside appeals for federal support, advocates also strove to garner more attention

[109] One longtime river activist explained to me the perceived connection between federal recognition and federal funding held by many other restoration proponents: "The Army Corps of Engineers has the potential to open the federal spigot and a lot of money in the billions could flow eventually through that spigot" (Interview #7, 2013).

[110] According to an engineer who works with green infrastructure projects: "We [the city department] have taken our journey of what we call 'one water' and we are working [to take that to] the national level. …You will see that these ideas of [integrated

for the river, including public acceptance of restoration and national coverage of the ongoing issues related to improving the watershed.

Navigability, Access, and Recreation: Does the River Deserve Regulatory Protection?

One of the most important—and dramatic—moments in the river's recent history was the conflict over its navigability status. Because two federal agencies were embroiled at the center of this conflict, it gained national level attention and received widespread support. While the broader political-cultural implications of this conflict will be discussed in the next section, here I present the major events and issues central to its creation and development. In 2006, Wayne Fishback, a landowner with property in the foothills of the upper watershed, proposed an infill project that would have impacted a seasonal stream that fed into one of the L.A. River's tributaries. Fishback, faced with the legal requirement of obtaining a permit for his proposed project, appealed to the Army Corps of Engineers for a permitting waiver. His request prompted the federal flood control agency to examine the specific details of his case and resulted in their conclusion in 2008 that the Los Angeles River and its tributaries were not a Traditional Navigable Waterway (TNW) and therefore no longer under the stringent protections of the Clean Water Act (Carstens et. al. 2010; Murphy 2006; Schoch 2008; Wylie 2008). The Corps' designation catalyzed a highly coordinated and vigorously vocal response from river advocates and environmentalists that involved historical documentation, hydrological analysis, and legal strategizing to prove the river's navigability. Publicity of the conflict intensified in July 2008, when a group of environmentalists, activists, and artists decided to actually demonstrate the L.A. River's navigability by undertaking a three-day kayaking trip down the entire length of the river. The combined efforts of documentation, legal argumentation, and the kayak expedition resulted in the EPA's intervention in 2010, which led to a review the river's navigability case and the subsequent announcement that the entire watershed retained its status as "navigable waters" of the U.S. (Carstens et. al. 2010).

The navigability conflict, especially the 2008 kayak expedition, was highly publicized. The entire conflict—captured in the simple yet effective narrative of a vilified agency's attempt to callously strip a waterbody of essential environmental protection—gained attention at both the local and national level, and raised the general public's awareness of the Los Angeles River. With increased awareness also came sympathy for the current condition of L.A.'s infamous waterway and the band of activists fighting to improve those conditions. As a result, the EPA's reinstatement of the river's TNW status was a victory on several different fronts: first and foremost, it maintained legal protection; second, it upheld activists' efforts to re-script the Los Angeles River as an actual river once more; and third, it vindicated the entire river movement's mission, which continued to face criticism and ridicule. The significance of this victory is summed up in one environmentalist's outlook on the EPA's determination:

> It's huge in lots of ways. One is just, it's symbolic. 'Hey, the feds say it's a river!' …And people pay attention to that. […] Probably the most important thing it did, even more than the legal stuff…it gave the river legitimacy, people who were trying to do things on the river legitimacy. And actually this is enormously important, it will bring all kinds of federal funding, and the feds have more money than anyone else on the river (Interview #33, 2012).

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water management] are echoed throughout the nation. …The program right now is in a state where part of it is in need of sources of funding. It needs new sources of funding for sustainability…to maintain these green projects" (Interview #63, 2013).

Therefore, to restoration proponents, the outcome of the navigability conflict not only indicated the federal government's political and legal support for their efforts, but also provided opportunities for federal funding.

During the period of determining the river's navigability status, related contestations over water quality protection also emerged. In 2008, NRDC and LA Waterkeeper filed a lawsuit against the county's Flood Control District on the legal grounds that the agency was not in compliance with their stormwater discharge permits, and that monitoring stations at points throughout the watershed showed pollution levels that exceeded the stated compliance levels in the county's permits. The lawsuit, which was challenged by the Flood Control District as baseless, since the agency's stormwater infrastructure only conveyed—not generated—waterborne pollutants, was adjudicated at various courts for the next six years, reaching the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013, and then revisited at the 9th Circuit Court in 2014. Although the decision reached by the Supreme Court resolved little of the legal debate central to the lawsuit (Nelson 2014)[111], the litigation itself was an attempt by environmental organizations to require water agencies to address what they saw as an ongoing problem of stormwater pollution by setting up monitoring programs, best management practices, and infrastructural modifications to comply with CWA water quality standards (Interview #44 2013; #65, 2013).[112]

Meanwhile, a reevaluation of the "beneficial uses" designation for the Los Angeles River and its tributaries began in 2010. The reevaluation process, known as the RECUR study (Recreational Use Reassessment), reviewed the engineered stretches of the river mainstem and tributaries in order to assess whether the "recreational use designation"—a status assigned to waterways protected under the beneficial uses section of the Clean Water Act—applied to these portions of the watershed. The RECUR process was instigated during the triennial review of the basin plan for Los Angeles and Ventura County watersheds, when stakeholders and pollution discharge permit holders requested that the L.A. Regional Water Quality Control Board assess whether the "recreational use" designation applied to engineered portions of the L.A. River watershed (LARWQCB 2013; Interview #26, 2012). To environmentalists and river advocates, the RECUR reevaluation threatened the current CWA protections for the river, as modifications to these use designations could reduce the water quality standards for those waterways determined as not supportive of recreational uses (LA Waterkeeper 2014; Shellenbarger 2013).[113] After three years of analysis, monitoring, stakeholder workshops, and review of public comments, the Water Quality Control Board maintained the existing recreational use designations for the Los Angeles River mainstem and its multiple tributaries, preserving the level of protections of these waterways against levels of discharge pollutants (LARWQCB 2014).

[111] According to Nelson, "ultimately…the Supreme Court's decision did little to clarify the complexities of MS4 liability under the CWA" (2014, 22).

[112] As representatives of LA Waterkeeper shared with me: "I think that, for a long time, we've obviously been trying to address the stormwater problem throughout Los Angeles and Southern California. It's the largest source of pollution to the bays. And the largest conveyor of stormwater in LA is the county flood control district. So when we were looking at how do we deal with this egregious problem and how do we get the most impact from litigation. LA County is at the top of the list because they're the largest conveyor. … We don't actually have to *prove* that they're the ones causing all the pollution; we just have to show that they're contributing to the pollution" (Interview #44, 2013).

[113] The LA Waterkeeper letter states: "Even during the three years since RECUR was initiated significant changes to how Angelinos view the River have occurred… This speaks to the importance of urban waterways and the public's desire to recreate in the River. Delisting or re-designating engineered channels of the Los Angeles River watershed at this time could set a bad precedent and incentivize limiting access and channelizing more segments of the water body at a time when public sentiment is to remove concrete and increase recreation opportunities."

These conflicts over the determined level of water quality protection for the Los Angeles River unfolded as a result of tightening environmental regulations around polluted water bodies, and the persistent attitude among a number of L.A. stakeholders that those regulations should not be applied to a water body as physically engineered and hydrologically disrupted as the Los Angeles River watershed. At the same time, the contestations over water quality in the L.A. River came out of resistance to the growing policymaking around stormwater management as an urgent environmental problem. Increasingly, stormwater is becoming a major issue within urban water governance, as experts and practitioners point out the benefits of capturing "wasted" water, installing green infrastructures, and practicing integrated water approaches to successfully establish sustainable urban water management (Browne et. al. 2009; Lennon 2015; Van der Meene 2011). As legal and political negotiations over the extent of water quality protection afforded to the Los Angeles River unfolded through developments such as the RECUR study and the NRDC and LA Waterkeeper lawsuit, they raised complicated and broader questions: what does sustainable water management in Los Angeles consist of, how it would be carried out, and perhaps most importantly, who would be funding the costly measures needed to comply with CWA standards? During this time, as a way to address these questions, the County Flood Control District developed and proposed in 2012 the Clean Water, Clean Beach Measure, a countywide property fee that would be a funding mechanism for the estimated billions of dollars needed to implement institutional and infrastructural changes for compliance of CWA-outlined water quality standards (LACDPW 2012b). Faced with strong opposition from NGOs, schools, and property owners, the clean water fee was not placed on the county ballot and soon after was essentially abandoned (LA County Board of Supervisors 2013). Though the clean water fee met vigorous resistance, it highlighted once more the problem of funding for water quality improvement projects.

In the same year, the L.A. Regional Water Quality Control Board began the formal process of establishing a new MS4 permit for Los Angeles County, which prompted more than a year of regulatory jostling between permit holders, including municipalities, who wanted less stringent water quality standards, and environmental organizations, who argued that the new permits should require more comprehensive compliance and monitoring measures. The finalized 2012 permit allows local permit-holders to form collaborative organizations responsible for creating and implementing Enhanced Watershed Management Plans (EWMP), or watershed-level strategies for meeting water quality standards (LARWQCB 2012). Environmentalists and river activists commended the Water Quality Control Board for promoting watershed-level planning, but some still voiced skepticism of how effective the EWMPs would be and how stringently discharge standards would be enforced under new "safe harbor" measures under the 2012 permit. The issue of water quality regulation, which gained legal recourse with the passing of the 1972 Clean Water Act, remains a complicated and contested environmental problem for Los Angeles and the revitalization of the L.A. River. One environmental lawyer summed up the current opportunities and constraints of water quality regulation and politics in this way:

> People know more about [the issue] so there definitely is a recognition of how important water quality is, not just for environmentalists but people who live here. Especially now with the new types of solutions to water quality problems which don't entail building a treatment plant but go back to the natural processes which utilizes soil, infiltration, building swales, having more greenspaces—everyone's talking about that. It's definitely more desirable way of dealing with those issues. So decision makers understand them better on some level. But on the other hand, the recession, economic issues, lack of money and all that, it's become harder as well. Because from

> the city's perspectives, and not just [municipal and local government] but also regular persons on the street, it's an issue of choosing: What do I fund? (Interview #65, 2013)

Her view of the current state of water quality regulation in Los Angeles was echoed by others, both environmental activists and city bureaucrats alike—that with the prominence of the river movement and the growing acceptance of decentralized and green water infrastructures, municipalities understood the urgency of addressing water quality but were strapped with funding shortages.

Aside from the ongoing developments in water quality protections, the EPA's determination and ongoing RECUR study brought front and center the issue of public access to the Los Angeles River. Though people had been entering the river channels and engaging in a wide range of activities for decades, the flood control agencies' maintained their official position that going into the river was illegal, dangerous, and liable to expensive fines. However, now with the federal agency's upholding of the river's status as "navigable waters of the nation", environmentalists possessed a specific legal platform upon which to challenge the long-existing policy of prohibited access to the river. Beginning in 2010, FoLAR, in partnership with lawyers from the Environmental Law Clinic at UCLA's School of Law, worked to open up access to the Los Angeles River. Claiming that "the whole question of river access is one of the fundamental issues" (Interview #43, 2010), representatives from FoLAR and the Environmental Law Clinic wrote the draft and campaigned for Senate Bill 1201 (SB 1201). This state bill, passed in August 2012, amended the 1915 California Flood Control Act to mandate the LA County Flood Control District to provide greater recreational access to the L.A. River channels.

The legal justification for public access was that the federal designation of the river as a TNW meant that it fell under the authority of the California Public Trust Doctrine, which, according to the language of the bill, mandated public access to the state's public waters:

> The United States Environmental Protection Agency's July 2010 designation of the Los Angeles River as a 'Traditional Navigable Water' under the federal Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. Sec. 1251 et seq.), combined with the demonstrated recreational navigability of the river, means that the river is subject to Section 4 of Article X of the California Constitution, *which guarantees the public a right of access to the navigable waters of the state that must not be obstructed by any individual, partnership, or corporation, and* to case law protecting the public trust. Therefore, the river must be held in trust for the public and managed for public access and use. The public's interest in use of the Los Angeles River for recreational and educational purposes continues to increase dramatically. However, since the river was channelized, it has been managed for flood control purposes without adequate provision for public access and use. The *current regulation and inconsistent enforcement of public access to the Los Angeles River at multiple levels of government are inadequate to ensure the public's right of access to the river in a safe manner*... (CA State Senate 2012, emphasis added).

The waters of the L.A. River watershed, with the passage of this bill, are now legally interpreted as being held in trust by the state of California as public waters, a protective status that guarantees the public right to access these waters. Spurred on by the 2010 navigability decision, SB 1201 opened up sections of the Los Angeles River to recreational activities such as boating, fishing, and swimming. One example, the River Recreation Zone program, run by the MRCA, first began to run in May 2013 and since then has enjoyed increasing publicity and popularity. To environmental activists, managing the river as a river meant implementing practices that protected river waters from pollution and upheld the right of the public to access it.

Local, State, and Federal Efforts Grow around Watershed Protection

Over the course of 2010-2015, new projects were increasingly planned and developed, demonstrating the growing momentum of restoration/revitalization during this brief period. In 2010, the President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative (AGO) designated the Los Angeles River as a priority project. The AGO Initiative was established through a Presidential Memorandum that called for federal agencies to coordinate their operations to find opportunities to promote outdoor conservation of and recreation in the nation's significant outdoor areas. While not a direct funding program, selection by the AGO Initiative nonetheless conferred national recognition to the L.A. River and formally designated it as one of the nation's valuable natural resource areas (USDOI 2012). Then, in 2011, the L.A. River was named as one of seven pilot locations supported by the newly formed Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP), a program intended to "reconnect urban communities, particularly those that are overburdened or economically distressed, with their waterways by improving coordination among federal agencies and collaborating with community-led revitalization efforts to improve our Nation's water systems and promote their economic, environmental and social benefits" (UWFP 2011). The UWFP provided a HUD representative to coordinate the various projects attached to the Los Angeles River, and allowed the assembling of a formal working group made up of government and NGO representatives, activists, and environmental stakeholders. Like the AGO Initiative, the UWFP did not necessarily guarantee federal funding, but local river advocates regarded being selected as a pilot project as a political success carrying symbolic weight of river restoration's national significance. According to one longterm river activist, "[The UWFP] is not a panacea, but something good will come out of it. Just by saying, hey, we're important nationally to be given this designation, that makes it a little more real for people who still don't believe it's a river" (Interview #48, 2012). Moreover, according to one federal agency representative, selection through the UWFP Initiative meant recognition that could be translated into a competitive boost in funding allocations:

> Ideally what this is doing is putting a spotlight on the LA River watershed… Traditionally or historically when the Corps has attempted to get funding for projects here, it's really been a big challenge. One of the big problems is the cost of land here. And they also have to compete against other projects around the country that other districts are applying for. But…by having this designation of being a national partnership pilot project, it basically enables them to get a rung up in the competitive process. …There's never enough money going around, but if you can tie it to some national priority, then you may have a better chance of getting funding (Interview #38, 2012).

In a region with sometimes exorbitantly high real estate prices, and with municipalities struggling with budget shortfalls, the availability of federal funding for restoration projects becomes crucial.

Indeed, the Los Angeles River restoration agenda, due to its size, level of organization, and support from local governments, in addition to national recognition, did benefit from federal grants and funding sources. The 2007 Water Resources Development Act allocated an unprecedented $25M for restoration and redevelopment projects at the L.A. River; in 2010, Congress approved $100K of those funds to initiate a restoration plan for the Bowtie Parcel, a river-adjacent strip of former industrial land. Additional funding came in 2012, when the city received a federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities Community Planning Challenge Grant to fund a study analyzing the potential of community development of riverside

neighborhoods in Northeast L.A. (NELA).[114] The $2.25M grant established a working group consisting of local agencies, NGOs, media sources, community leaders, and schools, known as the NELA Riverfront Collaborative (NELA-RC), and embarked on a six-month study that included workshops, meetings, surveys, interviews, and multimedia projects (NELA RC 2014). Work done through the NELA-RC was praised as a collaborative and creative way to form "a riverfront community" or a "river district" that will help "brand the river" (Interview #45, 2012).

Additionally, in 2013, the LACDPW partnered with and received funding from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to conduct a study on how to maximize water reclamation throughout the watersheds of Los Angeles County. The two year study, known as the Los Angeles Basin Study, explored what infrastructural modifications, land use changes, and protective development measures could be adopted to facilitate greater aquifer recharge throughout the county's watersheds (USDOI 2016). Funded by the SECURE Water Act of 2009, the Basin Study was the direct outcome of federal level concern over water supply security in California as climate change exacerbated drought conditions in the L.A. and Bay Delta regions. Finding that among the region's seven major watersheds, the Los Angeles River watershed "has very high runoff and lowest capture efficiency", the Basin Study asserts that "it also has the greatest potential for increasing stormwater conservation and could be targeted for future enhancements" (USDOI 2016, 41).

Arguably the most important local-federal partnership project was the Army Corps of Engineers' Los Angeles River Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study. After more than seven years and costing $10M of jointly delivered federal and city funds, this study, also known as the ARBOR (Alternative with Restoration Benefits and Opportunities for Restoration), was finalized in September 2013. The ARBOR study presents four Alternatives, or action programs, each with varying degrees of restoration work; Alternative 20 is the program with the most extensive restoration components, and at an estimated $1.08B price tag, also the most costly (USACE 2013). After its release for public comment, the mayor of Los Angeles, state-level elected officials, and environmental/community NGOs all campaigned for the Army Corps to adopt Alternative 20 for implementation. The Corps' May 2014 announcement that it had selected Alternative 20 as the restoration program to recommend to Congress was widely celebrated as a massive victory for the river movement that had begun nearly thirty years ago. Lewis McAdams, the president of Friends of the Los Angeles River and considered by many as the originator of river activism, remarked that implementing Alternative 20 could lead to "Los Angeles becoming a place with parks and river running through it again, at last" (quoted in Sagahun 2014). The ARBOR study and the adoption of Alternative 20 mark one of the biggest developments in a half-decade already characterized by strong federal support and recognition.

Advances in restoring and improving the L.A. River watershed also occurred at the state, county, and city level. Led by several California Assemblymembers and Senators fully in support of river revitalization, legislative activity at the state level continued beyond passing of SB 1201. Starting in 2008, a series of joint resolution action and bills are proposed and passed by the California legislature (*Table 3*). Political and financial support from the state, begun with the Coastal Conservancy's river study and the use of Prop 12, 13, 40, and 84 during the acquisition of Taylor Yard and the Chinatown Cornfield, continued, even increased, during this period, as the Los Angeles River was firmly cemented as an important environmental issue for Los

[114] The grant had been originally rewarded to L.A. in 2009, to the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA-LA). However, due to the dissolving of all CRAs in California in 2011, the funds needed to be reallocated to the appropriate city office. Finally, in 2013, the grant was assigned to be given to the Economic Workforce Development Department (EWDD) (Interview #20, 2013).

Angeles. Indeed, as increasing state-level legislation reveals, the L.A. River has gained enough political and cultural significance to become a common talking point for elected officials wanting to appear supportive of green and sustainable city agendas. One member of an environmental NGO, who has been working on river greening for almost twenty years, noted the rise in political support for the river. When asked if he observed the rise over the number of years working on river-related projects, he replied:

> As far as I can see, politically, the people who are in the running for positions *have* to be on board with this agenda. I mean, it's become a mandatory part of your political schpeil. If you don't know about the issues of the river, you *have* to get knowledgeable about it during your campaign. You have to at least guarantee to the community that you will continue on these issues. I have not heard one single candidate come out and say 'I don't care about [the river] and I don't care to work towards it', because that would be a death blow for them (Interview #1, 2013).

This observation, echoed by other longtime river supporters and activists, shows how far political support for the river has come since the early days of the movement.

Table 3. Proposed and/or passed CA State legislation related to the L.A. River.

Year	Motion Number	Proposed Lawmaker	Name and Description
2008	Assembly Joint Resolution 70	Assemblymember Brownley	Request EPA's special case review of the Army Corps of Engineers' 2007 L.A. River navigability status determination
2010	Assembly Bill 1818	Assemblymember Blumenfeld	Creation of a Los Angeles River Watershed Program through the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy
2010	Assembly Bill 2214	Assemblymember Fuentes	Request for Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy to create a restoration plan study for the Pacoima Wash
2011	State Joint Hearing on Los Angeles River	Assemblymember Fuentes; Senator Pavley and DeLeon	Joint Hearing held, titled: "Progress and Opportunity: The Future of the Los Angeles River and its San Fernando Tributaries"
2012	Senate Concurrent Resolution 101	Senator Pavley; Assemblymember Fuentes	Commendation of the work carried out on the Los Angeles River
2013	Assembly Bill 735	Assemblyman Gomez	Create a Greenway Initiative that will help develop greenways along rivers, including the L.A. River
2014	Proposition 1	California Legislature	Water infrastructure improvement bill that dedicates $100M in potential funds for the Los Angeles River revitalization process.
2015	Assembly Bill 530	Assemblymember Rendon	Establish the Lower Los Angeles River Working Group to coordinate and promote improvement and greening projects along the lower 19-miles of the river.
2018	Senate Bill 5 (expected)	Senator Kevin DeLeon	Over $800M allocated for projects toward water and parks improvement for climate change adaptation.

At the city, several key policies related to planning and water quality were passed between 2010 and 2015. Perhaps one of the most important is the Low Impact Development (LID) ordinance that was adopted in 2011. The LID policy, developed by the city's Bureau of Sanitation, is aimed at reducing urban runoff by requiring water capture/retention to be included as design elements in all new development projects or redevelopment projects of a particular size. Its language emphasizes the city's need "to take a new approach to managing rainwater and urban runoff while mitigating the negative impacts of development and urbanization", and exemplifies the city's attempts to comply with water quality standards (City of Los Angeles BoS 2011, 1). Soon after, in 2013, the city also passed an ordinance banning single-use plastic bags at certain businesses, such as large grocery and retail stores. Similar to the LID ordinance, proponents of the plastic bag ban connected the prevalence of these bags to overwhelming water pollution that degraded the region's waterways, beaches, and coastlines (Bureau of Sanitation 2013). (The county had passed their own LID and plastic bag ordinances in 2008 and 2010, respectively.) While these ordinances were designed largely to address water quality issues, another set of ordinances passed in 2014 focused on land use, design, and aesthetics. These ordinances, referred to as the River Improvement Overlay District (RIO) and the River Improvement Zone, establish overlays and zones along either side of the L.A. River channel, in which all new construction projects must conform to a slew of design, landscaping, and access guidelines so that development will proceed "in a manner that…contributes to the health of the river [and] establishes a positive interface between river adjacent property and the river" (City of Los Angeles DCP 2014, 2; Jao 2014b). In presentations, public feedback meetings, and policy reports regarding the LID, plastic bag, and RIO ordinances, the Los Angeles River watershed—and its improvement—was repeatedly identified as a major objective to these policy changes.

Other city-led river-related projects were implemented during this time, all of which reflect the major components of Smart Growth and sustainable urban development: expansion of bicycling infrastructure, promotion of mixed-use development, and continued greening along urban corridors. As previously discussed, the city's department of transportation began constructing bicycle paths along streamside right-of-ways since the mid-1990s; this led to miles of bikeways being built along the Los Angeles River mainstem and along tributaries. The city's commitment to expand bikeways along waterways surfaced in proposed projects in the 2007 LARRMP and the 2010 Bicycle Master Plan, as well as its ongoing negotiations with the county and NBC Universal to build a 6-mile L.A. River bike path on studio property in the San Fernando Valley (Jao 2013). What these plans lay out is a blueprint for how the city's streetwide bicycle network can become integrated into the pathways along the river, or in other words, how the routes along the L.A. River and its tributaries can be more fully incorporated into the entire bicycle infrastructure of the city, county, and region (Interview #50, 2012). Meanwhile, in 2014, the city council approved the CASP Ordinance, which sets guidelines intended to: "Transform an underserved and neglected vehicular-oriented industrial and public facility area into a cluster of mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented and aesthetically pleasing neighborhoods" as well as "facilitate pedestrian mobility, encourage bicycle use… provide access to a variety of transit options including frequent light rail and bus connections, shared vehicles and bicycles, and taxis" (City of LA DCP 2014, 1-3). Park construction along the river continued, with new sites breaking ground (Albion Riverside Park, Bowtie Demonstration Project) or nearing completion (Sunnynook Park). These assorted projects position the L.A. River as a central feature in the city's multiple plans to achieve more sustainable, transit-oriented, and livable spaces.

Since 2010, and the EPA's Traditional Navigable Waters designation, efforts, projects, and agendas around the L.A. River appear to have multiplied. City and county engineers, as well as environmental activists alike have voiced the immense difficulty of keeping track of all the emerging and ongoing activities that are linked—either discursively or physically—to the river/watershed. The river now stands as an urban environmental program of staggering size, complexity, and scope. Countless reports, plans, and studies have been or are underway, analyzing connections between the L.A. River with a multitude of issues that range from transit-oriented neighborhood development and bicycle infrastructure to expanding the city's water supply portfolio. One county engineer estimated that since the adoption of the 1996 Master Plan to 2013, over fifty river-related projects have been implemented at a total cost of $200M; at least twenty more projects are "in the pipeline" to be developed (Interview #59, 2013). The city has hosted conferences, tours, and workshops with government officials from China, Germany, South Korea, and the Netherlands, establishing an international coalition of cities committed to urban river revitalization.[115] New multi-modal pathways and bridges are either in planning stages or close to breaking ground, while summer months draw in growing numbers of participants for kayaking/boating programs. Spectacle has also come to the L.A. River, with recent developments such as the design competition for a new Sixth Street Bridge, the proposal to locate the Olympic Village for the 2024 Games at the Piggyback Yards, and the invitation for "starchitect" Frank Gehry to create his own river revitalization plan. Having received legitimacy from the federal government, and national attention, the Los Angeles River movement is no longer just a ridiculed, one-man vision. Rather, it is a constellation of policies, institutional programs, and projects aimed at reclaiming and redeveloping a city through restoring a concrete river. Determining what restoration will entail in the next thirty years will be critical to Los Angeles, for, as one city official told me, "we're right at the crux of the city deciding what kind of city it wants to be" (Interview #49, 2013).

To summarize, the last three decades of the L.A. River's history reveal how a local environmental movement to restore the river emerged amidst the changing ecological, political, cultural, and economic conditions in Los Angeles. The channelization, concrete encasing, and structural modification of the L.A. River watershed were the preferred management outcomes during the late-19th to mid-20th century period of Los Angeles' development, a period marked by industrialization, urbanization, and territorial growth under Anglo-American rule. Water management infrastructure, from the dredged harbor to the miles long aqueducts to impoundment dams, embodied the L.A. region's priorities of urban growth through control over nature. However, by the late-1980s, new sets of political, economic, and cultural conditions were in place in Los Angeles and shaped by markedly different socio-ecological forces. In the post-Fordist period marked by globalization and entrepreneurial urban governance, Los Angeles faced economic restructuring and spatial reorganization, as deindustrialization and re-industrialization unfolded unevenly. With smaller, decentralized industrial clusters spread out more widely throughout the region, and the prominent growth of service-sector economies centered around finance, real estate, and tourism industries, stretches of the L.A. River that once hosted industrial land uses became, first, vacant, then more valuable when redeveloped into commercial areas appealing to a middle-class, service sector workforce in search of spaces in the urban core (Agu-Lughod 1999; Soja et. al. 1983; Beauregard 1991). At the same time, the rise of U.S.

[115] An example of this is the 2013 Room for the River conference hosted by the city of L.A., which involved two days of workshops and meetings with officials from the Netherlands on how L.A. can learn from the Dutch to better, more sustainably manage urban water (flood control, water supply, water quality, etc.).

environmentalism, the enacting of federal and state level environmental regulations, and the growth of the environmental justice movement all transformed the political-cultural landscape of urban policymaking. As a result, resource regimes from previous decades, founded on large-scaled, centralized, hydraulic systems, faced restrictions for the first time, as public concern over drought, endangered species, and ecosystem degradation challenged the status quo of California's dependency on massive water diversion apparatuses. The Los Angeles River watershed exemplified the unsustainable and inequitable urban water regime, and environmental activists fought to materially and ideologically transform it. And during the thirty years of activism around the L.A. River, the relationship between state and civil society moved from conflict and contestation to one of professional partnership.

COUNTER-HEGEMONIC NARRATIVES OF URBAN WATERWAYS: FROM FREEWAY TO FLOOD CHANNEL TO FLOWING RIVER

The past thirty years of the Los Angeles River's history demonstrate the ongoing re-production of urban nature in the region. The transformation of urban natures that are embodied in the Los Angeles River watershed involved the transformation of both the meaning and materiality of urban space; the production of nature requires recognizing that "the production of the meaning, concepts and consciousness of space…are inseparably linked to its physical production" (Smith 1984, 77). The river's history, presented in the previous chapter, reveals how the concrete channelization of the L.A. River watershed unfolded as much upon the terrain of the discursive-ideological as it did the material: the changing representations and narrative renderings of the river reveal how critical the changing *ideas* of urban water, floods, and streams were to the transformation of its physical flows and landscapes. Constructing an expensive and extensive water drainage infrastructure system and instating a legal-managerial apparatus to oversee its maintenance was partly predicated upon the formation and acceptance of powerful discourses espousing the common sense of separating disorderly nature from orderly cities. Likewise, examining recent efforts to restore the river clearly show how the movement was and still is occupied with controlling the production of new meanings and ideologies surrounding urban waters and urban spaces. Activists' fight to establish new narratives, meanings, and representational devices related to the river exemplify the significance of environmental politics which unfold in the discursive arena.

While the Los Angeles River has not yet undergone the dramatic physical transformations ubiquitously depicted in design renderings, its discursive-symbolic transformation is arguably the most noticeable achievement of the river movement thus far. From the onset of activism, a key point of contention for environmentalists was re-scripting the river to *be* a river once more, and reinstating its visibility upon the political-cultural—as well as urban—landscape. Rather than semantic quibbling over how the river was to be referred to, activists fought for thirty years to re-script and reinstate the L.A. River as a socio-ecologically valuable urban feature and natural resource; the ongoing efforts over this issue demonstrate how much of the movement's struggles occurred on the cultural terrain upon which meanings of nature are constructed and contested. These meanings—concerning how nature is represented, framed, and understood—solidify ideologies that influence material outcomes (Heynen et. al. 2006b). For activists, the matter of what to even *call* the L.A. River deeply implicated the ways it would be materially (re)shaped: how the river was categorized, named, mapped, and scripted contributed to how it was managed, controlled, and physically altered. In this section, I demonstrate how

environmentalists and river activists practiced a counter-hegemonic politics targeted towards challenging deep-rooted and common sense ideologies of nature and urban space foundational to the logic of flood control and water governance operating in Los Angeles by the late 20th century (Kebede 2005). Discursively reclaiming the river and challenging hegemonic representations of the river meant new approaches to managing urban waterways that departed from longstanding ideologies of controlling nature with engineered solutions so that urban areas could expand without geographic consequences (Kelman 2003; Oliver 2006; Steinberg 2005).

During and after channelization, the transformation of the river included institutional changes in management and approach. Agencies charged with management of the watershed now understood the waterway primarily as the series of drainage channels constructed for flood prevention. Planning maps of the county and engineers in meetings sometimes starkly referred to the streams as "flood control channels" (Gottlieb 2007; Gumprecht 1999; Orsi 2004). In 1953, the Los Angeles section of the American Society of Civil Engineers declared the "Los Angeles County Flood Control system" one of the "Seven Wonders of Civil Engineering in the Los Angeles Area" ("Wonders of engineering" 1953). According to one city councilmember's recollections, when it came to discussing the Los Angeles River, "a common USACE refrain was, 'We do not call it a river'" (quoted in Beutler and Antos 2015, 9). This act of intentional re-naming illustrates the flood control agency's erasure of the river's very identity, as they re-categorize a geographic feature of the L.A. basin into a man-made system and thereby stripped it of the meanings and associations with nature that come from the label of "a river". By the close of the Army Corps' watershed construction period (in the 1960s), the Los Angeles River was rendered and understood more as an engineered artifact than an ecologically complex and hydrologically autonomous geographical feature.

Perhaps the example that is most revealing in the conceiving of the river as blank, inert, paved conduits is the resilience of the idea to convert the riverbed into a freeway. Popular representations in films and television presented the river as the site of chase scenes and automobile races; the famous action sequences of *Grease*, *The Gumball Rally*, *The Italian Job*, and *Terminator II* have now immortalized the L.A. River as a site of vehicular escapism.[116] These popular representations did not emerge from a political-cultural vacuum; in the last sixty years, there have been multiple political efforts to convert the concrete riverbeds into freeways. For example, in spring of 1941, L.A. County Supervisor Gordon McDonough proposed a plan for constructing a two-lane freeway either along the banks or within the bed of the L.A. River, a plan that the County Regional Planning Commission took to studying ("New freeway survey" 1941).[117] The McDonough proposal was supported by city, county, and Congressional officials, while the *Los Angeles Times* reported that:

> It is becoming more apparent every day that Supervisor Gordon L. McDonough hit upon a good idea when he suggested the desirability and feasibility of such a means for short-cutting truck shipments and motor travel from Ridge Route to the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. … It goes without saying that the savings in time and gas consumption thereby effected would be good economy, and that national defense would be served ("The river-bed" 1941).

[116] The river has appeared in almost a countless number of films, television shows, commercials, and music videos. While a comprehensive list of all these portrayals does not appear to exist, several articles discuss the significance of film portrayals of the river throughout cinematic history (Koeppel 2016; Pettas 2016; Salt 2011; Strutner 2014; Verrier 2011).

[117] The *Los Angeles Times* article goes into detail of the potential military uses of this freeway, mentioning how bomb shelters are proposed in the plan, as well as roads built thick enough to support "50-ton tanks."

The idea of a riverbed freeway emerged once again in fall of 1947, when County Supervisor Raymond V. Darby put forward the idea of allowing traffic lanes to run on a 15-mile route of the L.A. River between Griffith Park and Long Beach.[118] Hosting river tours to various state officials and receiving the support of the Board of Supervisors (who ordered a comprehensive study in September), Darby opined that "if engineering studies prove such a plan feasible, trucks laden with produce for the Los Angeles County markets and the harbor could move along the river highway without congesting traffic" ("Leads river tour" 1947; "Study ordered of project" 1947).[119] Then, there was Assemblymember Richard Katz's freeway proposal forty years later. Facing strong opposition to his proposal (which was again studied by the county with the use of public funds), Katz argued that the L.A. River was not like other rivers. It was modified beyond historical recognition, closer to a man-made highway than a natural stream, and thus should be fully utilized as one. "Only in L.A. would you think of putting cars into a riverbed, but only in L.A. would you have a riverbed in 18 inches of concrete," reasoned Katz, who envisioned "eight lanes" of traffic upon an "infrastructure" that was already "all here" (Stumbo 1989). For McDonough, Darby, and Katz, the idea of a concerting a river into a freeway was not far-fetched, as the river itself appeared as nothing more than paved, concrete channels.

In response to what was termed the "Katz Korridor" project, Lewis McAdams and Friends of the Los Angeles River, vocally protested the treatment of the river as nothing more than paved infrastructure. McAdams made frequent and public remonstrations against the Katz proposal, declaring that "the L.A. River is not a freeway" and that, despite its appearance in most of its 51 miles, government officials "have to accept the fact that it is a river" (Boxall 1989). "Birds know it's a river, ducks know it's a river, even some people know it's a river," he declared in one *Los Angeles Times* article (Pyle 1990). In another opinion piece published in the *Times*, he elaborated upon the wildlife and fragile habitats clinging to drastically-altered riparian environments, and stressed the devastation the introduction of vehicles would impose upon them:

> These separate living sections of the Los Angeles River [in Sepulveda Basin, the Glendale Narrows, and Long Beach harbor], despite utter neglect, remain intact. These stretches are probably the city's most overlooked natural resource. …The living sections of the Los Angeles River are habitat for hundreds of land- and sea-going [waterfowl] (McAdams 1989).

In bringing attention to the ecology of the "living sections" of the river, McAdams attempted to redirect the discussion around its management, to conceive of it not as utilitarian urban infrastructure but as vibrant ecosystem in need of protection, not paving. Re-framing the Los Angeles River as a natural resource meant calling for a re-organizing of the political-jurisdictional apparatus charged with managing it. "What's better for the future of Los Angeles County?" he asked, before pleading the case that a better future included a city and county embracing its lost—yet living—river.

Struggles over the meaning of the river continued beyond proposals for freeway conversion. The Army Corps of Engineers' LACDA plan in the early 1990s represented another incident of conflicting views around the river's definition (and management) coming to a head.

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[118]Moreover, another 1947 *Times* article reports that, in response to the winter flooding season, he reasoned with a group of officials that "people in Duluth don't disregard their harbor facilities just because they're frozen over a short part of the year", implying that construction of transportation infrastructures need not be dictated by the vagaries of regional climate ("Leads river tour" 1947).

[119] The construction of the Long Beach Freeway, or the 710 Freeway, in the 1950s, provided the express roadway for truck transport that these county officials had been looking for in the river conversion proposals.

For restoration advocates like FoLAR and Unpave LA, raising of the channel walls along the lower L.A. River not only meant intensified armoring of the river but also the retrenching of a single-purpose flood control logic which attempted to solve complex environmental problems with simple engineered solutions. Though the Corps' plans outlined in the LACDA proposal possessed a wholly different objective than that of converting the riverbed into a freeway, it nonetheless reflected the agency's attitude that what it was dealing with was infrastructure, not a dynamic river ecosystem. In an editorial piece in the *L.A. Times*, the co-chair of Unpave L.A. reminded readers of what the L.A. River, despite its transmogrified appearance, was: "Pouring more concrete in an effort to control or manage Mother Nature doesn't always work," she stated, before warning against the region's dependency on "engineered solutions" by asserting that "by moving the water out as fast as possible, we only create new dangers while we deprive ourselves of all the benefits that natural systems can provide" (Green 1993). McAdams recalled that the fight over LACDA was "a symbolic issue, a battle over the definition of the river, and what the river is going to be" (quoted in Gottlieb 2007, 145). Regarding the nascent FoLAR of the 1980s and 90s, Gottlieb writes that "the initial goal of the organization was to focus on language and symbols by insisting that the L.A. River was indeed a river" (2007, 137). This language—whether it was disrupting a meeting by repeatedly calling out the word "river"—and these symbols—which eventually included images of fish, frogs, waterfowl, and other fauna that had once teemed at the river—were deployed in a "discourse battle" that "pitt[ed] the language of river renewal against the sixty-year history of flood control and its own language of danger and hazard" (Gottlieb 2007, 148).

And though, in the twenty years since the conflict over LACDA, "FoLAR and its allies had been able to challenge the prevailing engineering language regarding the river", the fight over discursively re-framing and re-constructing the river erupted in new forms (Gottlieb 2007, 147). As discussed in the previous section, one of the most significant fights unfolded over the river's navigability status in the latter half of the 2000s. By 2008, even as the L.A. River appeared to enjoy widespread political support and growing public attention, the decision by the Army Corps of Engineers to designate only a fraction of the river as Traditional Navigable Waters indicated the sheer endurance with which agencies' legacy of viewing the river only as flood control infrastructure prevailed. The question of whether to roll back Clean Water Act protections for the L.A. River came about partly through the legal ambiguity created by the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Rapanos v. United States* in 2006. The court's *Rapanos* decision required that for wetlands or waterbodies to remain covered by the CWA, there must be a demonstrated "significant nexus" between them and an existing Traditional Navigable Water (Murphy 2006).[120] The "significant nexus" test exposed the determination of protected waterways to ambiguity and uncertainty, and further opened up the possibility of removing many waterbodies—especially ephemeral or intermittent ones—from previously conferred regulatory protections.

This is indeed what happened with the Los Angeles River and its tributaries in the 2008 Army Corps' determination. The federal agency, after considering the physical characteristics, past and present uses, and future navigable potential of the river, concluded that a significant nexus to a TNW was only found at the San Pedro Bay, at the end of the river, thus leaving the

[120] Murphy, in examining the differing arguments and even definitions of terms used by the Justices, states that the Rapanos decision is "one of the most confusing environmental rulings since Congress passed comprehensive environmental statutes in the late 1960s and 1970s." He points out the confusion and increased litigation certain to come out of the decision, as "regulatory agencies will be tasked to consider on a case-by-case basis in order to protect many wetlands and, potentially, tributaries" (356).

entire rest of the waterway and its tributaries as non-TNWs (USACE 2008). In reaching such a conclusion, the Army Corps' reasoning and justifying language revealed the deeply rooted attitude it carried that the river was too modified, too artificially man-made, to be categorized—much less treated as—a *real* river:

> No historic navigational uses upstream of the tidally influenced outlet could be identified. Presently, the occasional use of kayaks and/or canoes on other reaches of the river are sporadic and do not support any associated commerce (in addition to being illegal). […] Finally, the capacity to provide navigation at some point in the future is highly doubtful given *the river's configuration, hydrology and fundamental use as a flood control channel* (USACE 2008, emphasis added).

There is little ambiguity in this language; the Corps' justification for determining almost the entire Los Angeles River watershed as non-navigable waterways is based on the agency's belief that its "fundamental use as a flood control channel" precludes it from being classified as a navigable river. Throughout its determination, the Corps also repeatedly references the modified physical form of the river ("flows are confined to engineered flood control channels of various configurations") as well as the reason for that modification ("the hazards posed by dangerous flood flows and impaired water quality"), both of which discursively reinforce the river as first and foremost flood control channel that neither looks nor behaves like a natural river.[121]

The concern and outrage sparked by the Corps' non-TNW determination should not be understated. Environmental activists and lawyers assembled evidential documentation that contradicted the Corps' claim that the river did not support past navigational activity, compiled relevant data on the hydrology and morphology of the river, formulating legal arguments as to why the Corps' designation should be reevaluated, and wrote letters formally requesting the EPA to assume jurisdiction over the case. In addition, the three-day kayaking expedition in July 2008 garnered enormous attention and media coverage, and much of the trip itself was filmed by members of the trip. Central to all of these efforts was counteracting the "prevailing engineering language" utilized by the Army Corps through the deployment of legal arguments, historical documentation, and visual representation that all portrayed the Los Angeles River as a river, and one that met the requirements of being navigable-in-fact (Interview #24, 2012). One of the key organizations involved in mounting a reevaluation of the river's navigability status, Los Angeles Waterkeeper, relied upon environmental case law to prove that the Army Corps' analyses were faulty and incomplete, concluding firmly at the end of its analysis that "the LA River is a TNW in its entirely because *it has the characteristics of a navigable waterbody*" (Los Angeles Waterkeeper et. al. 2009).[122] The head of the kayak trip, George Wolfe, in his report to the EPA of the characteristics and navigable feasibility of all fifty-one-miles of the river, concluded unequivocally that "the Los Angeles River *exhibits all of the characteristics of a major Western U.S. River* (i.e. an ephemeral nature), and includes many of the characteristics of a 'traditional'

[121] The framing of the river as dangerous and therefore justifiably handled as a flood control system is reiterated in other documents produced by the Army Corps of Engineers during this time. In one letter to a former employee, the Corps' chastises said employee for participating in the July 2008 kayak trip down the river, reasoning that "boating is not allowed in the Los Angeles River" and that "one of the reasons for the Corps navigability determination is that boating is considered unsafe in the Los Angeles River flood control channel." Again, the emphasis on danger, flooding, and questionable legality of certain activities serves to disassociate the river from traditional river forms and activities in order to highlight its central form and function as engineered infrastructure. See: USACE August 7, 2008.

[122] The letter from Los Angeles Waterkeeper (then the Santa Monica Baykeeper), NRDC, and Heal the Bay cites court decisions to make the case that that "the navigability of a waterbody does not depend on the size or type of vessels used for navigation" nor does it "require that the entire waterbody be navigable", or that "evidence for future plans for navigation are not documented or yet formalized."

[Eastern U.S.] river (i.e. soft-bottomed, mud-and-tree lined, rapids, fish, etc.)" (Wolfe 2008, 2, emphasis added).

In addition to photographs and excerpts from historical reports, environmental organizations compiled letters from numerous stakeholders and residents, all testifying to their either having already boated in the river or their interest in being able to do so. These letters demonstrate, as one environmentalist attested to in her letter, that "a great number of Angelenos…have always done what we expect people to do with a river—walk, fish, wade, watch wildlife, boat" (Price 2008). By demonstrating the sheer volume of interest in boating on the Los Angeles River, as well as the substantial amount of boating that already occurred, these testimonies attempt to legitimize the status of the river by highlighting one of the most common human activities associated with a river—boating. Taken together, these attempts by environmental organizations exemplify the "discourse battle" (to use Gottlieb's terms) waged over the very ontology of this troublesome urban waterway, to discursively transform the Army Corps' flood control channels *back* into a living river.

The outcome of the navigability conflict was heralded as one of the greatest victories for the L.A. River and its proponents. That the EPA saw reason to take over the case and subsequently make its determination—that the entire Los Angeles River and its extensive network of tributaries was a Traditional Navigable Waterway—which overturned the Corps' 2008 decision, signaled an enormous achievement within the long process of restoring and revitalizing the L.A. River. Not only did the river retain its water quality protection, but it received federal recognition in the special case review conducted by the EPA. As one longtime river advocate explained it, Los Angeles was a critical battleground for other Clean Water Act cases and therefore the victory was all the more symbolically significant for the federal law:

> [Navigability status] was not something that was given to us all of a sudden. It was something that was under threat of being removed. And we were able to keep that from being removed. …You're in LA. If there is *any* place where we can make the case that this is not really a river, this is going to be [it] (Interview #48, 2012).

Another environmental activist saw the conflict as "putting the issue [of Clean Water Act coverage] front and center". Meanwhile, one city official described the change in attitudes toward the river, especially in light of recognition by the federal government with the navigability case, but also the selection of the river for other national-level water and natural resource programs. He recalled that, ten years ago, people were "cynical and resistant…about this notion of the river", but now he sees "where we are at with this river has taken on a whole other level of energy…and the navigational status [determination] was critical" to building that energy (Interview #21, 2013). That energy around the river, including the simple notion that kayaking down the Los Angeles River was not a laughable or inconceivable proposition, but now a desired one, culminated in the 2010 announcement by the EPA to reinstate navigability status to the river, thereby formally recognizing its status as more than concrete flood channels. It was official, final—the L.A. River was an important and valuable waterway.

Re-defining the river as a river was so important because of its close connection with the issue of access. The matter of who can access what parts of the watershed once again exemplify the inextricability between the river's meaning and representation, and how it is materially shaped and managed. And the matter of access—to the L.A. River—is a complicated issue. Since channelization of the river and its tributaries in the 1930s, public access to these concrete-lined waterways is prohibited for safety and liability purposes. The discursive construction of urban floods as natural disasters, so effective in the first three decades of the 1900s towards promoting

the structural flood control program, justified and normalized this restricted access—if the river was portrayed as a dangerous place, then no one would *want* access to it. As such entering or recreating in the river channels, according to L.A. County Flood Control District regulations, was (and in many stretches, still is) illegal. These legal, physical, and discursive barriers combined to spatially produce river landscapes as invisible to and ignored by the lawful members of the public; these landscapes became the 'underbelly' of the city.

However, restricting mainstream public access to the river by hiding and restricting it actually opened up these invisible spaces for use by subaltern communities such as the homeless, gangs, and graffiti artists. One environmental activist explained that after channelization, "the jurisdictional fuzziness has worked in favor of access, unofficial access, what they would call illegal access" (Interview #33, 2012). Indeed, as the *gatitas* on the stormdrain covers and the elaborate graffiti murals on the channel walls indicate, the public access and use of the river were never completely eradicated; it just became illegal. "For us the river is like the last adventure in the city," proclaimed one artist, who further explained that "we would go into tunnels under the river and you feel like you're the first person that's ever been down there" only to discover "that people were here before me" (Guanuna 2015).[123] These marginalized river inhabitants represent a diverse spectrum of urban occupants, and their long history of living in and making use of the flood control channels subvert the popular narrative of the river's disuse, even death. Without romanticizing their uses of the river, which did include activities such as crime and gang violence, the subaltern communities of the Los Angeles River demonstrate the host of creative acts committed in attempts to reclaim urban space—river space—for their own purposes. For one writer, the illegal occupation of river space by these marginalized communities signaled the ongoing significance of the access issue:

> Long before organizations were pushing for cleanup efforts or arts initiatives and the river was largely regarded as a repository for urban runoff, graffiti artists were bringing life and vibrancy to the river, something that had been missing since it was paved over (Guanuna 2015).

Whether it was for fishing, boating, or spray-painting a mural, the question of who could access the river remained relevant despite the legality behind it.

From the start, access to the river had been a core issue for activists. For McAdams and his fellow artist-activists back in 1984, cutting the fencing around the river and entering into the restricted space was a symbolic act of re-occupying the space of the river and reclaiming it for public use. One early activist noted that, "cutting the fence was an attack on the idea that the river was owned by the County Department of Public Works", an act which served to directly contest flood control agencies' mode of management, which barred people from accessing a valuable natural resource (Interview #43, 2010). Therefore, to McAdams and members of the fledgling FoLAR, the issue of access to the river was as important a goal as environmental rehabilitation and cultural regeneration. Another early pro-river organization, Northeast Trees, held a similar objective. Planting trees in riverside lots in the mid-1990s, often without having undergone the proper permitting process, members of Northeast Trees believed that their actions constituted the "necessary heavy push to reclaim every little square inch as possible". According to one member, the act of planting a tree by the river was about

> reclaiming land as *public* space. Because right now, the way the river's been treated is often the privatization of land… [We reclaimed space] by inching our way in there, parcel by parcel, square

[123] Evan Skrederstu is quoted in the article. He, along with his colleagues, co-authored a guide to the art in the Los Angeles River. For more information and documentation of the river's mural and art pieces, see: Brand et. al. 2009.

> foot by square foot, saying, 'no, this should be the commons, this should be for everyone, human and nonhuman.' …Everyone should be able to go to the river, everyone should be able to. It should be a productive part of all life, in that place (Interview #1, 2013, emphasis added).

Following these early activities of FoLAR and NET, the push to increase—or even open up—public access to the river remained a central issue of river activism. Years before Union Pacific sold the Chinatown Cornfield property to Majestic Realty, environmentalists and designers envisioned the site as parkspace or some other community space; one designer shared that though this group "had no money and no relevant political allies" to implement their vision, they nonetheless "were agitating to make it a public space" by the L.A. River (Interview #7, 2013). And according to the UEPI's Robert Gottlieb, studying the Los Angeles River was "an intense and ambitious type of program that would advance ways to reenvision the river." Re-envisioning a new form and function for the L.A. River, Gottlieb claimed, could help "identify a 'right to the river,' an idea I associated with the suggestive concept of the right to the city" (Gottlieb 2007, 149). Integrally embedded in this concept of *the right to the river* through the 1999-2000 UEPI/FoLAR program were ideas of access, public ownership, and reclamation of urban space. In the following decades of river activism, the push for public access to the river, for the right to the river, continued to be a major rallying point.

With the EPA's 2010 TNW designation, the issue of public access has acquired a renewed urgency. The official reinstatement of the L.A. River as navigable waters of the nation, along with the growing interest and demand for actual boating to be allowed on the river, and the media coverage that promulgated a portrayal of the river as a natural resource, all reinvigorated the question of who could access the river. For environmental organizations and pro-restoration advocates, the river's TNW designation confirmed its status as a publicly-owned resource that then should be accessible to the public. Two concrete projects that were implemented shortly after the navigability determination—the passage of Senate Bill 1201 in August 2012 and the creation of the L.A. River Recreational Zone in May 2013—depended upon the enforcement of the California Public Trust Doctrine to provide public access to the river.

As discussed in the previous section, SB1201 was developed by FoLAR and UCLA's environmental law clinic, and leveraged the river's recently upheld status as "navigable waters of the state" to argue coverage by the public trust doctrine, as laid out in the California Constitution. Because the Public Trust Doctrine dictates that navigable waters be held in trust by the state government for the use and benefit of the public, the waters of the Los Angeles River watershed, which are covered by the doctrine, must be managed to allow the public to use and benefit from said watershed. Therefore, based on Article 10, Section 4 of the California Constitution, "no individual, partnership, or corporation…shall be permitted to exclude the right of way to such water whenever it is required for any public purpose, nor to destroy or obstruct the free navigation of such water"; this legal argument applies to flood control agencies who prohibit access to and use of the L.A. River, and SB1201 sought to address that discrepancy by mandating that the Los Angeles County Flood Control District, where possible, allow for public access to the river (State of California). Based on the passage of SB1201 and the legal coverage of the Public Trust Doctrine, the state agency Mountains and Recreation Conservation Authority launched in May 2013 the inaugural recreational program along a stretch of the Glendale Narrows (*Figure 3.4*). Titled the Los Angeles River Recreational Zone, the program permitted legal boating and recreational activities in the L.A. River for the first time in over eighty years, thus reinstating public access to parts of the river (Martinez and Button 2013). "At last,"

trumpeted one *CNN* headline, the "Los Angeles River opens to public recreation after 80 years!" (Martinez and Button 2013).

Figure 3.4. Kayakers boat down the Recreation Zone of the river. (Source: Photo taken by author.)

As these two examples illustrate, the meaning of the L.A. River as a natural resource and its legal definition is inextricably linked to how it is physically managed and maintained. The production of meaning and activist consciousness around the L.A. River is bound up in the production of its material forms: in this case, the insistence that the river was a river, that it deserved to be designated a Traditional Navigable Waterway directly placed it within the legal protection of the state's Public Trust Doctrine and opened up its channels and waters to the public. For the environmental activists who had long fought for opening up the river to the public, to promote the reclamation of river space as *public* space, the argument that "the public trust doctrine's overarching thrust is one of public access" and therefore "makes the doctrine a democratizing force" holds true (Blum 1988, 579-80). Even with these achievements, with the discursive re-scripting of the L.A. River as a river, which is codified by federal environmental legislation and now accommodates public use and access, river activists see the need to continue to push for transforming the river into public space. One FoLAR representative simply noted that "that battle [over access] hasn't been won", citing that tracking the legal basis for who maintains ownership of the river "is a very confused history" as "there are a lot of people who claim they have a right to do things on the LA River but what it's based on is very unclear"; ultimately, this battle is important to continue because "if you call [the river] a river, there's a whole new way of looking at things" (Interview #43, 2010). Meanwhile, another environmentalist shared her thoughts about river access in terms of the obdurate legacy of agencies' institutional practices:

> I think the third battle that we're still in the early stages of is about access. Because here we have a river but…there's actually 'no trespassing' signs along it. …And the problem is the legacy of

> having it managed as a flood control channel. So you have all of these laws [and] you had all these habits of managing the river…as a flood control channel, that [agencies] are *very* reluctant to let go of. They're loosening their hold on the green sections; so the fact is no one's been monitoring those for a decade now. But in terms of the concrete sections, there is still this determination, in general, on the part of the public agencies to keep people out. Which I think is wrong-headed. …I mean, you *need* public support, and you can't have support for an area that still has 'no trespassing' signs on it (Interview #33, 2012).

For both of these individuals, the materiality and the discursive meaning of the river cannot be separated from one another. Restoring the river by greening its banks, establishing wetlands, and rehabilitating hydrological function must also include re-defining it as a natural feature and re-inscribing it with the values/concepts/meanings that get attached to urban nature.

Despite the widespread acceptance among political and environmental entities that the Los Angeles River is a river, advocates pointed out that changing the meaning of the river was incomplete. Many acknowledged that the river enjoyed strong political support from elected officials at all levels of government; however, among the general public, there was still a lack of acknowledgement that the second largest metropolitan area in the country was bisected by a river. One longtime river activist and architect acknowledged that "the biggest single thing—and that's what we all said at the beginning when we were talking about how to make this all happen—the biggest thing is the changing of consciousness of the river", though he also pointed out that "while public consciousness hasn't changed much, political consciousness has" (Interview #7, 2013). Another activist articulated the lack of recognition by claiming that the river "is an unmarked space," and that based on her years of advocating for the river:

> Most people in LA still don't know where the river is. A lot of them don't even know there is a river, although that has improved, most people have at least heard something is going on. A lot of people turn their noses up and say it's not really a river. Almost no one in LA can tell you where it goes, from top to bottom. I would say the knowledge is very low about the river. And they don't even know that all these efforts are going on…that there are revitalization efforts going on (Interview #33, 2012).

This lack of awareness and knowledge concerning the L.A. River is in part attributed to the effectiveness of the flood control system, its distance from wealthier neighborhoods in the westside, as well as the state of the river's appearance along most of its fifty-one miles.

It is also, according to one NGO representative/urban design consultant, an outcome of the city's tendency to forget its past. Because "L.A. has a long history of tying to erase its memory," there is difficulty in building the public's consciousness around the river, its history of flooding, and the reasons why an urban center settled in the middle of a floodplain" (Interview #49, 2013). For these environmentalists, public consciousness is critical to moving forward with restoration, as it translates into public support for state funding, such as the California Propositions of the 2000s which paid for water and park projects. As the failure of the county's water quality fee assessment program taught, investment into clean waters and sustainable watersheds requires the public's investment into improving urban nature. Yet as efforts to re-inscribe the river as valued urban nature continues to face challenges, it is once more a reminder of the obduracy of our cultural notions that nature should look and behave a certain way.

While struggles over representations of the Los Angeles River continue, it is nevertheless worth examining the evolving discursive and narrative formations of the river. The movement's efforts to promote counter-hegemonic narratives and discourses regarding the L.A. River resulted in noteworthy achievements. Desfor and Keil note that while "there are more shades of grey in the discursive landscape of the river", the mobilization around it "has been the result of

story lines and discursive interventions that have literally put the river on the map of urban environmental policy making" (2004, 138-9). These "discursive interventions", while perhaps not eradicating all scornful comparisons of the river to a giant gutter, have ensured that in arena of policymaking, the language and representations attached to the river have undergone a significant shift.

The L.A. River is a popular green agenda for many politicians and elected officials to rally or campaign around. Images and portrayals of the river, though still steeped in the discourse of disaster and danger, now include elements associated with wilder, more natural rivers—tree-lined banks, vibrant clusters of waterfowl, fishermen on the banks, and kayakers floating down currents. Agencies are increasingly confronted with regulations or demands to adopt more sustainable management practices, whether it is sediment clearing in upstream dams or being held to stricter water quality standards. As one environmental agency representative told me, the success of the river movement in re-representing the river as a river is evidenced by increased awareness; whereas:

> Twenty years ago, people would say 'what L.A. River? what river?' And people don't say that anymore. […] That is a major change and major achievement for the whole river revitalization movement of the last 20 years. It's just that people have gone from saying 'what river?' to 'wow, we have a river and we want it to be better and we want it to be part of our community' (Interview #14, 2012).

This sense of achievement was echoed by another longtime watershed proponent and member of an environmental NGO, who explained to me that:

> I think we've really grabbed the attention of Los Angeles, here, and made everybody realize the river is *not* just a wasted resource, it's *not* just a flood control channel, it's a really vital natural resource that we can all benefit from in various ways. And those are lessons that…will only build in the future. So I'm very hopeful, even though it's taken very long (Interview #68, 2013).

As a result of the activism, dissent, and policy advocacy of the past thirty years, new meanings and ideas are attached to the L.A. River watershed: the river, once portrayed and perceived as dangerous, disorderly, and in need of techno-engineered taming, is now re-presented as an ecologically and economically valuable natural resource and urban feature. Changing the narrative of the river—from a source of natural disaster to man-made flood control infrastructure to a living, urban river symbolizing sustainable urban management—also required changing the discourses around the relationship between nature and the urban. No longer could cities be seen and planned as centers of purely human-driven activity, removed from nature and therefore no longer subject to the caprices of its forces. Instead, coming to terms with the fact that Los Angeles had a river that remained an active agent in shaping the landscape of the region required accepting that geographical and biophysical characteristics were inextricably caught up in the formation of the urban. This momentous step was achieved through thirty years of activists' "discursive interventions" and "agitating" for the river to be protected, valued, and accessible to the public.

CONCLUSION: CAN RESTORING THE RIVER BRING ABOUT A GREENER L.A.?

The history of the Los Angeles River in the past thirty years reveals what it took for Mayor Garcetti to announce his campaign for a $1B L.A. River restoration project. This chapter presents the significant material and symbolic-discursive changes that have unfolded since its

channelization into flood control infrastructure. From its status at the end of the 1960s as a concrete drainage ditch to a nationally celebrated navigable waterway by the mid-2010s, the L.A. River's transformation reveals how changing political, economic, biophysical, and cultural processes came together to resurrect an invisible river. Faced with multiple environmental crises—shortages and rising costs in water imports, higher flood risk due to floodplain urbanization, degraded habitat and wildlife biodiversity—institutional and bureaucratic actors responded to the growing demands among environmental activists to adopt more ecologically and socially sustainable watershed governance. A coalition of diverse actors—artists, environmentalists, community leaders—formed a local environmental movement that challenged the dominant modes of urban land and water management that had been established by the mid-20th century. Understanding that material and symbolic-discursive transformation of urban natures are interwoven, the movement also fought for the re-scripting of the L.A. River. River advocates sought give ecological and historical context to the river in order to discursively transform it from a dangerous flood threat or man-made conduit into a vital geographic feature of the L.A. basin. Achieving this counter-hegemonic narrative of the Los Angeles River as an actual river was inextricably linked to reinstating public access to the river.

There is no denying that the river movement has made considerable achievements. Dick Roraback's "Great Eunuch" is regaining its strength, beauty, and presence upon the urban and cultural landscape. Once ridiculed ideas of restored riparian ecosystems and popular recreational zones are now adopted into multi-agency initiatives. Millions of dollars have been spent or are dedicated to improvement projects dedicated to daylighting streams, managing dam sedimentation, retrofitting green infrastructure, and expanding system capacity for water infiltration. Environmental engineering and landscape architecture firms consult with public agencies to produce elaborate and technically abstruse reports, demonstrating the professionalization of restoration planning. Newsworthy projects of a grand and spectacular nature—Frank Gehry's river design plan or the massive Sixth Street Viaduct construction project—elevate the national and international recognition of the L.A. River. Agencies and elected officials at the municipal, county, regional, state, and federal levels endorse restoration measures and pledge dedication to the sustainable regeneration of the river. Taken together, these policies and programs toward achieving urban sustainability can support a right to the river—and the city—by ensuring that equity and justice lie at the center of what is sustainable.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE PROMISES AND PERILS OF PARKS: THE "PARADOXICAL" ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE POLITICS OF URBAN GREENING

INTRODUCTION AND MAIN ARGUMENT

Three quarters of the way into a panel discussion on future possibilities of a restored Los Angeles River, the conversation took a tense turn. I was attending an event hosted by Antioch University's Urban Sustainability MA Program, titled "Reclaiming the City". After an enjoyable twilight dinner served on the patio of the beautiful grounds at the River Center, the event participants—made up of graduate students, NGO representatives, and community stakeholders—watched and listened as three invited speakers gave presentations on how they envisioned a reclaimed, revived L.A. River. Two of the speakers, representing an artist collaborative and a fair housing coalition, respectively, spoke of the creative potential and challenges for just redevelopment tied to the river. Then, it was the turn for the lone representative from the city's River Office to present the numerous ways that the city government was committed to bringing the river back into L.A.'s environmental and cultural consciousness. Audience members listened attentively as the city representative, Carol Armstrong, enthusiastically described restoration projects and proposals, expounding on how these projects would "reclaim" benefits for the millions of residents living along the waterway. While the audience appeared to positively receive these presentations, the open Q+A discussion afterward quickly moved onto the topic of gentrification, with several individuals in attendance voicing concerns that restoration projects would accelerate gentrification if the city provided little policy intervention. As the discussion on gentrification continued, with the other panel speakers joining in to question *who* the river was being reclaimed for, Armstrong, as the sole city representative, grew defensive. Responding to the arguments made, she exclaimed that gentrification as a problem extended far beyond the L.A. River, and addressing it required cooperation, not critique, so why didn't the audience "stop blaming me and try to help me, instead!" Conversation continued long after this tense exchange, but no satisfying resolution was reached among panel presenters and attendees.

Sitting in the audience, I could understand where Armstrong's discomfort and defensiveness stemmed from, though I remained completely unsurprised at the turn of conversation. Throughout my months of fieldwork, I had become familiar with the critiques of the city's plans for restoring and revitalizing the Los Angeles River, particularly the concerns over riverfront gentrification. And while I could sympathize with Armstrong on an individual level, I found her response to the gentrification issue unsatisfying and, more importantly, representative of the city's official stance on the topic as it pertained to the river. Those in the local government acknowledged that gentrification was a likely outcome of restoring, improving, and enhancing the L.A. River; however, it was also a much larger and more *urban* problem than that confined to the river. For advocates of restoration—those from both public agencies and environmental organizations—the real and tangible benefits of improving the river outweighed (or even counteracted) the possibility and likelihood of gentrifying riverside neighborhoods. Moreover, according to them, gentrification was *already* occurring throughout Los Angeles, driven by processes that were (seemingly) unrelated to or operating beyond those involved in restoring the river, and therefore outside of the scope of the environmental agenda. By separating out gentrification as a *housing* issue or an *urban* issue—not an environmental one—and positioning it as a problem that extended beyond governance of the river, these arguments

worked to shift critical focus—and responsibility—outward from discussions and initiatives around the Los Angeles River. Raising concern for restoration-induced gentrification, appeared to be seen as questioning the validity and value of restoration itself. But for those in the audience, myself included, who viewed rivers and real estate markets, parks and policies, as inextricably entangled in the (re)production of urban natures, these concerns were central to—not beyond the scope of—discussions of how to reclaim a river.

The Reclaim the River event hosted by Antioch University encapsulates one of the core issues at the center of the restoration of the L.A. River. In one sense, Los Angeles *is* reclaiming its lost river. Enormous amounts of public funding and departmental manpower has been expended towards restoring the river in order to bring environmental, economic, and social benefits to the city and county. Furthermore, local agencies' attempts at excavating this forgotten waterway indicate a symbolic reclamation from the cultural scorn, historical amnesia, and narratives of urban devastation long associated with the river. However, when analyzed from a more critical perspective, there are current and potential problems embedded in the restoration agenda itself. One problem, as identified by the participants of the panel event, is environmental gentrification. While it could be argued that the problem of restoration-induced gentrification was/is exaggerated, a product of predictable handwringing from a room full of overly critical academics (as we certainly were at the Antioch University event), it remains a pressing concern among riverside communities and even some policymakers/bureaucrats. More importantly, the problem of gentrification speaks to a much broader set of questions regarding fairness, equity, and justice: who is the river being reclaimed for? who benefits from—and who is hurt by—a restored, revitalized watershed? how will local government ensure equitable change when such an ambitious environmental program unfolds upon a deeply inequitable urban landscape? During the early years of the river movement, environmentalists argued that *how* Los Angeles treated its river indicated, at the core, *what* kind of city it was. Therefore, raising concern over issues such as gentrification as it relates to the L.A. River is not simply an exercise in academic handwringing, but a demand that the river be reclaimed in pursuit of forming a more just—as well as sustainable—city.

This chapter explores the tensions between environmental improvement and injustice embedded within the agenda to reclaim and revitalize the Los Angeles River. The movement to restore the Los Angeles River provided opportunities for the advancement of environmental justice goals and activist collaborations between traditional and justice-oriented environmental organizations/communities. As shown in the previous chapter, the push to restore the L.A. River was driven by a diverse coalition of activists and organizations, and included multiple socio-environmental objectives with regards to *how* the restoration was to be implemented. One objective was a demand that the river be managed as a valuable environmental resource, a viable public recreational space that was accessible to *all* residents. Because this line or argument was framed as a sort of call for "the right to the river" (Gottlieb 2007), it had potential to connect with select environmental justice issues involving equitable distributions of open space/parks and improved community well-being and public health in disadvantaged neighborhoods. The potential for river restoration and equitable greenspace agendas to intersect was realized in the mobilization around the Chinatown Cornfields and Taylor Yards parks, as traditional environmental organizations collaborated with community-based and social/environmental justice groups to contest the environmentally burdensome land use patterns found in several low-income, nonwhite neighborhoods. As restoration advocates called for the greening of the river in order to restore its ecological health and weave it back into the social and physical fabric of Los

Angeles' everyday landscape, they were able to add an overt social justice dimension to that call by joining together with those focused on the inequalities prevalent upon that landscape. As a result, the intersection between urban river restoration and urban environmental justice agendas produced several significant land use victories as well as the permanent incorporation of EJ issues, discourses, and actors into the wider framework of river/watershed sustainability.

However, despite these notable achievements, efforts to restore the Los Angeles River could also contribute to environmental injustice. While urban greening initiatives connected to river restoration/watershed sustainability do bring environmental improvements to disadvantaged neighborhoods located along the Los Angeles River, they can also produce the unwanted consequences of ecological/green gentrification. As marginalized and underserved neighborhoods experience improved environmental conditions through river projects—through remediated brownfields, increased parks/greenspace, transit enhancements (such as bikeways and pedestrian pathways), and green infrastructure retrofitting—they may increase in desirability by higher class urban residents and become susceptible to gentrification (Checker 2011). And with the influx of middle-class residents, the rising costs of housing in the neighborhood, and eventual displacement of lower-income and longtime residents to other, less improved neighborhoods, the environmentally unjust outcome of the socioeconomically privileged living in environmentally superior areas is replicated elsewhere and reinforced on a wider scale (Gould and Lewis 2012, 2016).

Therefore, given that urban places are shaped and reshaped by processes guided by the logic of capitalist accumulation through urbanization, installing environmental amenities in underserved neighborhoods without consideration for how these neighborhoods could become enrolled in new rounds of accumulation does not ensure the advancement of environmental justice. Rather, it could even set the conditions for continued or exacerbated environmental *in*justice, as green gentrification drives lower-income residents into environmentally undesirable neighborhoods. As I demonstrate in the second half of this chapter, there are strong indicators that urban greening along the Los Angeles River watershed could result in or intensify environmental gentrification in certain riverside neighborhoods. The focus on redeveloping deindustrialized waterfronts, reliance upon market-based strategies for riverside revitalization, and limited conceptions of EJ based on distributive models of burdens vs. benefits all signify the worrying trajectory of river restoration's contribution to environmental gentrification and the inability of river advocates to address this "new conundrum" of environmental injustice (Anguelovski 2016b, 29). The Los Angeles River may be reclaimed from its concrete straightjacket and tarnished reputation, but the benefits of reclamation may not extend to all.

This chapter examines the promises and perils of urban greening by restoring the L.A. River. First, I discuss the issue of inequitable park/greenspace distribution in the Los Angeles County area, and describe how the land use conflicts in the city's Council District 1 led to partnerships between Los Angeles River restoration advocates and community groups and environmental justice organizations contesting environmental conditions in these neighborhoods. These alliances resulted in the river restoration agenda taking on an environmental justice dimension, as restoration came to be seen as ameliorating the park-poor conditions of riverside neighborhoods. In this way, I argue that environmental justice issues have become incorporated into the broad coalition and multi-objective agenda associated with the L.A. River watershed, presenting the promising intersection and articulation of urban sustainability and socio-environmental justice agendas. While recognizing these patterns as significant achievements carried out by river-proponents, I then present the current direction that river restoration is

heading towards and how they indicate a disturbing possibility of catalyzing environmental gentrification in riverside neighborhoods. This discussion is grounded in arguments about the urban growth machine and its ability to utilize environmental concerns/problems to lend appeal and legitimacy to economic growth strategies. I argue that the numerous plans for revitalizing targeted areas, such as deindustrialized riverfront properties, indicate the local state's facilitation of "green" growth machines and the environmentally unjust outcome of green gentrification that may result. This chapter is based largely on discursive analysis of planning documents and media reports, as well as interviews with dozens of key NGO and government representatives.

RECLAIMING L.A.'S "LOST EDEN"?: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE THROUGH URBAN GREENING

The history of the Los Angeles River, from the 1980s to the mid-2010s demonstrates how a grassroots environmental movement sprang up from local activists' resistance to an urban water regime that produced detrimental socio-ecological outcomes. By focusing on restoring the Los Angeles River and sustainably managing its watershed, these activists challenged different aspects of how urban land and water were being managed in the region, including: the overreliance on imported water supply, continued urban development in flood-prone regions, dependence on engineered solutions to flood management that ecologically degraded streams, and propagating discourses of danger and disaster that in part legitimated the regime's unsustainable watershed management practices. River activism embodied more than just a straightforward restoration agenda of an urban waterway, as illustrated in the movement's decades long struggle to re-script the L.A. River as a river once more. This struggle was a matter of representational and discursive (re)construction of urban nature, one deeply interconnected to issues of who could access this public resource, how was it to be managed, and how could it be materially re-configured to address the region's land-water governance problems. Though not originally an explicit issue of the political agenda, the river movement soon developed an environmental justice element—that of equitable distribution of urban parks and greenspace. In this section, I argue that the river movement facilitated local environmental justice concerns and efforts in its promotion of greater access to and equitable distribution of urban greenspace in primarily low-income communities of color.

As discussed in Chapter One, the environmental justice movement (EJ) in the United States began from protests against the inequitable distribution of hazardous land uses and sources of pollutants, and the disproportionate exposure of lower-income communities of color to these environmental contaminants (Bullard1993, 2000). However, those within the EJ movement gradually began to examine the issue of inequitable distribution of environmental resources, amenities, and benefits as well. Because these environmental "goods"—such as parks, open space, wilderness areas, recreational space, urban gardens—have been well documented as providers of multiple ecological, social, public health, and even economic benefits, the question of whether certain populations were able to enjoy these benefits more than others came under the mantle of urban environmental justice (Jennings et. al. 2012; Wolch et. al. 2014). Studies utilizing both spatial-quantitative and political economy analyses broadly confirm that in many major U.S. cities, there is a notable correlation between lower access to these urban environmental "goods" and neighborhoods composed of lower-income communities and nonwhite residents (Boone et. al. 2009; Dai 2011; Heynen et. al. 2006c; Landry and Chakraborty

2009; Li et. al. 2015; Sister et. al. 2010).[124] Moreover, in many cases, urban planning and zoning practices lead to neighborhoods impacted by both a greater exposure to environmental pollutants/harms, and diminished access to environmental amenities and resources (Wilson et. al. 2008). Communities living in these areas, therefore, face multiple forms of inequalities that cumulatively lead to reduced health, socioeconomic disadvantages, and an erosion of general well-being. Expanding the umbrella environmental justice allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the burdensome environmental conditions these afflicted communities live in.

With regards to Los Angeles, a robust body of scholarly studies has proven the inequitable distribution of environmental "goods" across the region. Similar to those studies which documented the distribution of environmental harms and pollutants, these academic works confirm what many lower-income communities of color had been claiming for years—that they had less access to environmental benefits/amenities than their whiter, richer counterparts. These analyses, based on both rigorous methods of mapping and statistical analysis, as well as historically-based analyses of urban political economy, reveal that poorer/lower-income and nonwhite communities are disproportionately burdened by lack of access to quality parks and urban greenspace (Sister et. al. 2010; Wolch et. al. 2005). Moreover, research also finds that public funding for parks is also inequitably distributed across the Los Angeles region (Joassart-Marcelli 2010; Wolch et. al. 2005). The ways that reduced access are manifested and experienced are shown to be varied and multi-causal, driven by a host of spatial, economic, and even racial factors. While oftentimes lack of access is a result of a dearth of parks/greenspace in close proximity of certain neighborhoods, on other occasions, communities lack the means (transportation, time, expendable income etc.) to frequent certain open space areas, avoid using certain facilities due to their poor quality and congestion, or are even repelled from visiting places due to undertones of racial exclusion and/or hostility (Byrne 2012; Byrne et. al. 2009; Byrne and Wolch 2009; Loukaitou-Sideris 2006; Sister et. al. 2007). Rather than an anomalous or an unfortunate outcome of neutral urban policies, these disparities attest to the systemic organization of urban space that diminishes the everyday environmental conditions of poorer, predominantly nonwhite communities.

Outside of academia, the environmental injustice of disproportionately park-poor or park-deprived neighborhoods in Los Angeles has also been well documented by environmental NGOs and local public agencies. In 2006, a park report card from a UCLA planning professor gave Los Angeles County a C+ score for lower park acreage and funding compared to other large cities (Loukaitou-Sideris 2006). According to a Trust for Public Land report, in 2014 Los Angeles ranked 45th out of the U.S.'s 60 largest cities in terms of park access, size, and funding; in TPL's 2015 City Parks ranking report, Los Angeles ranked 52nd among the nation's 100 largest cities for park funding (Trust for Public Land 2014, 2015). The Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust, a local land trust organization, found in a 2014 policy report that the city's park funding mechanism—the Quimby Ordinance—was inadequate in providing the needed parkspace for neighborhoods already impacted by environmental burdens and facing economic hardship (Spivak et. al. 2014). Meanwhile, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health concluded in a 2016 report that:

> Large geographic disparities in park space per capita were observed. Cities and communities with less park space per capita on average had higher rates of premature mortality from cardiovascular

[124] These studies also accounted for social barriers, such as fear, lack of time, and perception of danger, as well as the more commonly analyzed physical barriers of distance and means of transportation. For example, Cutts et. al. (2009) found that social barriers were a greater factor in select communities' poorer access to urban amenities in Phoenix, AZ.

> disease and diabetes, higher prevalence of childhood obesity, and greater economic hardship compared with cities and communities with more park space per capita. African Americans and Latinos were more likely than Asians and Whites to live in cities and communities with less park space per capita. *The findings highlight current socioeconomic and racial/ethnic inequities in park space availability across Los Angeles County* and suggest that prioritization of resources for park expansion in communities with less park space could help reduce health disparities in the county (LACDPH 2016, 2, emphasis added).

The county's conclusion that certain racial and socioeconomic communities still lack proper parkspace speaks to the continued inequities that remain throughout the county. Taken together, these numerous studies present the incontrovertible proof of the disproportionate burden carried by low-income communities of color in their lack of access to good greenspace, parkspace, and recreational amenities. Furthermore, they attest to the ongoing and inadequately addressed status of this particular environmental justice issue, which has been described and analyzed for a number of years. Given these poor assessments of park availability, the fifty-one miles of the Los Angeles River (not to mention the hundreds of miles of its tributaries) appear ripe for possibilities of expanded urban greening.

Access to the River: Re-framing Recreation as a Matter of Justice

Indeed, issues related to urban greenspace—such as park creation, industrial land conversion, recreational access, public health promotion—had long been included in the L.A. River restoration agenda. However, they had not been specifically framed as an environmental justice issue or a matter of social equity. For example, in 1980, the Army Corps of Engineers released their LACDA System Recreation Study, which explored the potential of creating a regional trail system of recreational and green space along the L.A. River flood control corridors (USACE 1980).[125] One of the earliest reports to comprehensively examine the recreational and ecological restoration potential of the L.A. River was the 1993 California Coastal Conservancy's Los Angeles River Park and Recreation Area Study. In that report, one of the major recommendations for river planning is to increase recreation and public access, especially "as the population density in the Los Angeles area increases" and "the need for additional park and open space has reached a critical state" (CCC 1993, 85).[126] Its specific recommendations for adding to L.A.'s overall parkspace through river enhancement projects support its claim that "the Los Angeles River has the potential to become one of the region's greatest recreational resources" (85). Likewise, the county's 1996 L.A. River Master Plan identifies opportunity areas available through river corridor enhancement; one of these areas is "the need for recreation" (LACDPW 1996, 5). "Los Angeles County lacks sufficient parklands and open space for its population of more than nine million," reports the master plan, citing also the city's meager 4% of land dedicated to open space/parks as "the lowest of any urban center in the nation." Because of these insufficient available lands, as well as examples which revealed the importance of parks to L.A.

[125] Another report, published ten years later, evaluated the recreational programs available at Army Corps facilities spread throughout the Los Angeles County Drainage Area system. See USACE, 1990.

[126] In the Coastal Conservancy's quarterly publication, the issue of the L.A. area's low per capita parkspace is again discussed in relation to the L.A. River (Williams 1993, 17): "The city and county of Los Angeles have less per capita park acreage than any other major metropolitan area in the United States. The severe lack of parks and recreation facilities in most communities is being exacerbated by the region's increasing population. As newcomers continue to pour into the area, the pressure on such facilities grows, as does the need to ameliorate the problems of increased air pollution and traffic congestion. Enhancement of the Los Angeles River as a recreational and environmental resource could help to meet these needs, and this potential is being recognized by local politicians, community activists, and environmentalists." As with the agency's report, the issue of park availability is not discussed in relation to inequitable distribution, disadvantaged communities, or other EJ terms.

residents (such as surveys through ReBuild LA and the passage of Proposition A), an objective of river improvement was to meet "the need for a variety of recreational uses along the river by adjacent communities" who perhaps could not easily take a trip to the mountains or beaches. Increased recreational opportunities could also improve public health (LACDPW 1996, II-3).[127] These reports indicate the awareness of insufficient parkspace in both the city and county (and offers the L.A. River as a potential mechanism by which to increase these spaces), though it does not specify if certain communities are disproportionately impacted by this environmental problem or what the racial/ethnic and socioeconomic makeup of these communities are.

The language and mobilization of the river movement began to explicitly frame and promote these issues *as* matters of environmental justice in the late-1990s/early-2000s, propelled by the land use conflicts at the Chinatown Cornfield and Taylor Yards. Both of these sites are located in Council District 1 (CD1), which is characterized by many lower-income/working-class and predominantly Latino neighborhoods; these neighborhoods also live in close proximity to industrial sites such as warehouses and railyards, which have long been considered an environmental burden to the disadvantaged communities. There had been interest, both among river activists and community organizations, in converting the industrial sites in CD1 into cleaner land uses more conducive to community use; among the former group, restoration interests were especially focused on the Taylor Yards complex. Once a bustling railroad maintenance facility owned by Southern Pacific Railroad, the railyard closed in 1985 and the company began selling parcels soon after. Much of the property was sold to another rail company, Union Pacific, in 1996, while another parcel was bought by the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission in 1990 and converted into a commuter-rail maintenance yard (Gordon 1985; Moran 1992).

Because of the sheer size of the available property, as well as its advantageous location on the east bank of the L.A. River in the central city area, community organizations, river restoration advocates, and even flood control agencies alike saw the potential for decontaminating and converting these brownfields. While agencies evaluated the site's potential for acting as a flood control barrier, city officials representing the area began holding a series of workshops to examine alternative uses for the Taylor Yards (CCC 2002). Meanwhile, planners and environmentalists conducted workshops and design charrettes that explored the potential of riverside properties, especially former railyards, for ecological restoration purposes; one such workshop was the Taylor Yard design charrette hosted by the American Institute of Architects in 1992. Meanwhile, the Chinatown Cornfield brownfield, which by the late-1990s was no longer used for rail purposes, also became targeted by river advocates/environmentalists as a site for future restoration and connection to the L.A. River (Chatten-Brown and Delvac 2002).

While environmentalists developed habitat and wetland restoration plans for these sites, community concern around public health and environmental inequality was also growing in these neighborhoods. Community activists emphatically pointed out to me that, for them and the residents they represented, the Taylor Yard and Cornfields sites were not about river restoration per say, but more specifically focused on matters of social justice, sustainable economic development, and environmental improvement of CD1 neighborhoods. One city representative

[127] In Part II: Introduction of the LA River Master Plan, there is a discussion of the "Need for Open Space", which includes consideration of the multiple benefits of providing this open space. This includes "access to close-to-home parks and open space" for the "millions of urban residents who do not travel long distances to county, state or federal parks and forests"; it also includes health benefits, such as "opportunities for stress-reducing exercise, which contributes to better health" (p.II-3). Both of these benefits, though not framed or identified as issues of environmental justice, nevertheless overlap in their idea of who could benefit the most from expanded parkspace and how.

who participated in the city's Taylor Yard workshops in the early-90s claimed that these gatherings:

> were not so much about the river but about Taylor Yard and how they could be designed to improve the community around… Even at that time…we wanted to have parks, we wanted to have housing, we wanted to have industrial development (Interview #45, 2012).

Likewise, an environmental agency representative, while researching the parks and wetlands restoration potential of the L.A. River, found that among river-adjacent communities, there was a high interest in the social benefits of greening. He found that:

> the demand that most people had was not so much for habitat, really, but it was more for parks. People wanted to have places for their kids to play…There was just this huge demand for active recreation, for passive recreation (Interview #14, 2012).

This finding confirms that community interest in greening brownfields along the river centered largely on the social and public health components of restoration, over the purely (or at least traditionally conceived) ecological. While passive and active parkspace would inevitably carry ecological benefits conducive to restoring the L.A. River, the focus lay in creating alternative land uses that would first and foremost benefit the residents who lived near or next to the river.

Concern for the health and well-being of these communities intensified with the decision to sell part of the Taylor Yard complex to the LA County Transportation Commission, who the created yet another railyard, the Metrolink Central Maintenance Facility (CMF) without what many considered proper environmental review.[128] The creation of the CMF, according to one community development consultant, "was an environmental justice issue" that resulted from decades of the city "put[ting] everything that is kind of unsightly out of the way" into these impacted neighborhoods because "[the community] won't complain'" (Interview #18, 2013). This belief was also held—and voiced—by the councilmember for CD1 at the time, Mike Hernandez, who took to the *L.A. Times* to explain why the Metrolink CMF was a continuation of environmental injustice in his district:

> We residents of the First Council District are being victimized by illogical decision making by the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission in our discussions over the future of Taylor Yard. LACTC chose Taylor Yard as the site of its maintenance facility for the light-rail and commuter-rail lines. *In an area with high density, limited open space and, already, a dumping ground for public sector equipment and maintenance facilities*, LACTC identified this area without even conducting an environmental impact report. […]*How long can we be viewed as the dumping ground for projects other areas would never even tolerate?* No one would consider running a commuter-rail car maintenance facility in Woodland Hills; yet many think nothing of putting it in our back yard. […]This is our home. This is where we live and raise our children (Hernandez 1992, emphasis added).

Hernandez's argument emphasizes the disproportionately burdened environment in which residents of CD1 build their homes, raise their families, and call their "backyard". His statement,

[128] Metrolink, a regional commuter rail system that serves the entire five county Southern California metropolitan region, was created in 1992. The rail network is governed by both LACTC and the Southern California Regional Rail Authority (SCRRA), set up by a joint powers authority and composed of representatives from all five counties' (Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernadino, Ventura) transportation agencies form of an 11 member board. According to their website, Metrolink "operates over seven routes through a six-county, 512 route-mile network" and is "the third largest commuter rail agency in the United States based on directional route miles and the seventh largest based on annual ridership" (see www.metrolinktrains.com).The former-Taylor Yard site is being used as the rail agency's Central Maintenance Facility (CMF), which performs maintenance of train engines, runs safety checks and service tests, and carries out refueling and switching of trains. Chapter Six describes in greater detail the ongoing issues between the CMF and nearby communities.

which relies on and draws from clear EJ language, makes the claim that these areas not only deal with the problem of maintenance facilities but also the insalubrious effects of dense development and lack of parks/open space.

Fortuitously, the conversion of one Taylor Yard property into the Metrolink CMF angered not only CD1 residents and Councilmember Hernandez, but also environmental activists/groups that had had their eye on the Taylor Yard for quite some time. As already stated, many who supported river restoration had long eyed the Taylor Yard properties as key sites for greening projects and alternative flood control measures (such as wetlands). For them, the announcement that Southern Pacific had sold the vital riverside real estate to Metrolink's parent agencies delivered a blow to their visions of restored riparian landscapes in one of the most industrialized corners of Northeast L.A. One longtime river activist related how the pro-river groups regarded the process by which the Metrolink CMF was created:

> There was a huge struggle [for Taylor Yard]. Part of what galvanized people was when the Metrolink Yard went into what was then just this empty railyard. And it was done with no EIR, no EIS, because it was rail- to rail- [land use]. *And when the river folks learned about it, we were outraged.* I remember Lewis [McAdams] and I talking about this and we were absolutely outraged. …There is no written documentation, but those who were around at the time…remember that we were promised that it was gonna be a temporary yard for 10 years. […] So when it happened…we were so bent out of shape by it. *Because we were all looking at this as the biggest single opportunity along the river* (Interview #7, 2013, emphasis added).

As this statement shows, river advocates, such as himself and Lewis McAdams, were disappointed at the loss of a targeted opportunity site, and, like the communities in CD1, angered at what they considered to be unethical procedures that went into the installation of the maintenance yard. Likewise, environmental groups had been interested in the restoration potential of the vacant Chinatown Cornfield site; FoLAR had even partnered with several community-based organizations in 1999 to host a conference, *The River Through Downtown*, that explored the possibility of transforming the derelict brownfield into vibrant greenspace (Orsi 2004). When plans for warehouse development at the site were announced shortly after the conference, river advocates expressed disappointment and concern (Gottlieb 2007).

Therefore, shared interest in certain riverside properties, already intensified in the early 1990s by the controversial creation of the Metrolink CMF, laid the groundwork for the political partnership that arose around the Cornfield and Taylor Yard warehouse proposals in the late-90s and early-2000s. While the next chapter will provide more detail into the activism carried out by activist groups, the overarching motivation behind mobilization was the shared desire—by both river restoration advocates and environmental justice organizations—to see the landscapes along the L.A. River converted into more ecologically- and community-friendly spaces. As a result, strategic alliances formed between these two camps of organizations and gave rise to effective coalitions; for the Cornfield conflict, the Chinatown Yard Alliance was formed, while the Coalition for a State Park at Taylor Yard assembled in response to developments at Taylor Yard (Kibel 2004; Lejano and Wessells 2005). The significance of this alliance is encapsulated in one EJ advocate's declaration that his respect for Lewis McAdams stems from the fact that "he has been responsive to taking FoLAR in the direction of environmental justice, green justice, diversity, and not just mainstream environmental issues" (Interview #60, 2012). Indeed, the collaboration and cooperation between community-based/EJ organizations and river-advocacy groups during the period of battling these industrial land uses led to:

> a new stage in the advocacy around River renewal. Enlisting the support of a wide range of community and environmental organizations, evoking historical and cultural arguments about the significance of the site, and employing a range of legal and lobbying strategies to block Majestic's fast track to development, the River advocates displayed a new level of sophistication and capacity to act (Gottlieb and Azuma 2005, 336).

This new stage in river advocacy, I argue, was characterized by the incorporation of environmental justice discourse, goals, and organizations into the broader environmental agenda centered on the L.A. River.

To those working on river projects with an awareness of the environmental justice advancements they could provide, these early-2000s conflicts are the culmination of activism that pushed for the creation of much-needed greenspace. The legacy of EJ activism is manifested in the efforts to restore the river with the goal of park expansion as a matter of equitable distribution. Now these efforts, and their explicitly justice-oriented intentions, are formally encoded—and operationalized—within state-led programs that lend legitimacy to the importance of the issue. As one environmental activist told me:

> People like Ed Reyes, people like Antonio Villaraigosa were early champions of revitalizing the L.A. River because they come from communities that always got the short end of environmental degradation. … So these urban Latino leaders early on thought it was a good idea to move forward with these projects. [They] were very, very instrumental in working with environmental groups to push back against the Army Corps of Engineers and others.... So recent immigrant groups, environmental groups, and interests seemed to kind of come together and really take on [river] issues in a really positive way (Interview #1, 2013).

This sentiment was echoed by others, including an environmental consultant who had worked on L.A. River plans, who saw the current direction of river activism as a blend of traditional environmentalism and environmental justice activism:

> It's a great interaction of merging from…environmental justice and environmental policy, and in order to facilitate this merging so it doesn't just simply become an infrastructure project, the Ad Hoc Committee and [Councilmember] Reyes determine[d] that they needed community engagement (Interview #18, 2012).

These comments, expressed by diverse environmentalists and planners, identify the key supporters responsible for inserting an explicit environmental justice component into the larger movement behind the L.A. River. One *L.A. Times* article describes the "parks renaissance" emerging along the L.A. River, attributing these "urban oases" as the products of a new form of environmental activism that combines the proactive, conservation-oriented approach of traditional environmental/conservation organizations and the EJ movement's focus on community/public health, wellbeing, and equality (Mozingo 2000). The author continues on to attribute this "different kind of urban activism" to the recent efforts of Latino lawmakers who "see the lack of open space as a social inequity" and focus their policymaking attention on the urban greening potential of the river.[129]

[129] During this time, there are efforts to direct resources to improve the lower Los Angeles River and the San Gabriel River. In 1999, led by State Senator Hilda Solis, Senate Bill 216 is passed by the state legislature. This bill created the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC), a state-level agency dedicated to "preserve open space and habitat in order to provide for low-impact recreation and educational uses, wildlife habitat restoration and protection, and watershed improvements within our jurisdiction" (RMC 2017). The RMC was created in order to ensure that state funding could be directed to improving the environmental conditions of the neighborhoods around the lower L.A. River and the San Gabriel River. Gottlieb (2007, 155) describes the role that Senator Solis played in the formation of the RMC, and its relationship to a new framework of environmental and social justice that was being built up around L.A.'s urban waterways: "[Solis] was then emerging as a major political figure and coalition builder who was linking community, environmental, and social and economic

Urban park advocates recognized the crucial role played by key policymakers and government representatives (such as Councilmember Reyes, Mayor Villaraigosa, and County Supervisor Gloria Molina) who lent local state support for green justice/equity (Interview #12, 2012). Guided by the active leadership of these Latino elected officials, local agencies paid attention to environmental justice issues (or, at least incorporated EJ rhetoric into their plans) through the formation of new environmental and infrastructural improvement projects. Some environmental programs even identified greenspace equity and community health as justifications for their existence and funding requests. For example, during the almost three years it took to complete the 2007 L.A. River Revitalization Master Plan, the city hired consultants with public health and social justice backgrounds to carry out community outreach that would gather input and foster public participation.[130] Furthermore, the city's decision in 2005 to eventually form a River Foundation as a separately operating entity within their three-tier governance approach, according to one policymaker, was partly so that it could generate "the opportunity to really address more social justice issues" (Interview #45, 2012). The city continued to develop plans for extending riverside bikeways/walkways; this commitment, according to one city representative, was partly because "the city of Los Angeles is relatively park poor when you compare it other major cities" and these pathways provide "a number of opportunities for public recreation, especially for communities that don't have a lot of resources or amenities" (Interview #50, 2012). Greenspace and green amenity equity became fused into the language and design of these city-led environmental measures along the L.A. River.

Among NGOs, organizations that had not participated in river projects now represented integral stakeholders. Since the Cornfield and Taylor Yard conflicts, one of the strongest advocates for environmental justice issues to be addressed through changes in river management to emerge has been The City Project. An EJ organization specializing in legal strategies to address inequitable distribution of and access to greenspace/open space among communities of color in the Los Angeles area, The City Project became involved with the L.A. River through the conflicts at the Taylor Yards and Cornfield sites. Based in Los Angeles and headed by lawyer Robert Garcia, this law-based organization advocates for greenspace equity both through the creation of more parkspace in low-income, predominantly nonwhite neighborhoods and the adoption of measures that will give these same inner-city communities better access to existing environmental resources in L.A., including the Angeles National Forest, beaches, and large open spaces such as Griffith Park. Through involvement with the land use conflicts at the Cornfield

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justice issues and identifying how such issues crossed ethnic, racial, and class lines. Solis symbolized an emerging Latino voice in the community, environmental, and social-justice link, including its L.A. River and San Gabriel River dimensions. A new type of open-space and public-space advocacy was beginning to be associated with this new Latino environmental voice that connected access to open space and recreational areas with urban quality-of-life concerns."

[130] According to one consultant, the connecting factor that linked economic and ecological benefits was identified as "public health". Furthermore, the decision to hire local environmental organizer, Miguel Luna with Urban Semillas, an environmental and social justice organization, was beneficial, since "he came in with a lot of contacts from the environmental justice arena. …It was good because we were able to bring in environmental justice advocates with advocates for the poor, and find the merging in that discussion. And a lot of that the Ad Hoc Committee wanted to see and get that in there" (Interview #18, 2013). On actually building trust with communities to receive genuine feedback on river plans, another consultant shared his approach, which involved finding the right ways to frame the L.A. River so that it resonated with communities' concerns and experiences. He explained that: "We can't just go out there and provide people information. We really need to know what's going on in the community. That means, before doing a presentation to a neighborhood council or another community group, you probably have to go sit in those meetings for two months prior to that to really understand what are their priorities right now? Because you really can't go in and expect a community group to reprioritize what they've been working on for five or ten years based on what you think is urgent. …My presentations about the L.A. River, sometimes they weren't about the L.A. River. They were about lack of parks, they were about brownfields, and towards the end I said, by the way we're working on a master plan and it might fit. So you have to make the issue relevant to communities to give an opportunity for true engagement" (Interview #50, 2010).

and Taylor Yard brownfield sites, The City Project became an active advocate for urban greening of the Los Angeles River watershed to combat problem of environmental inequity. The organization produced a number of policy reports that document the disproportionate distribution of greenspace in L.A., based on racial and socioeconomic makeup of urban communities, and demonstrate through spatial and policy analyses the ways that river restoration can ameliorate these distributions (Garcia and Strongin 2011; Garcia and White 2006, 2007; Garcia et. al. 2004, 2011). Since the park conflicts in CD1, the organization acknowledges the city's response to their demands for measures to improve community health and livability; one representative stated that "we were quite thrilled that the L.A. City Council passed a resolution directing the river agencies to address peoples' needs" in 2009. The city's gradual recognition of these issues reinforced the organization's position:

> that the needs of the people are as important as the mainstream environmental concerns in revitalization the L.A. River. The L.A. River group public officials responded by producing a report on environmental justice and the L.A. River (Interview #60, 2012).

Invoking a central argument of EJ activism—that much of U.S. environmentalism often disregarded or ignored the needs of humans—organizations like The City Project demanded that "the needs of the people" be as central to the L.A. River agenda as restoring habitat and hydrologic function.

As a result, there is widespread awareness and acknowledgement among environmental stakeholders, of the inequitable greenspace experienced by many riverside communities (Interview #50, 2010; #45, 2012; #18, 2013). Activists, community representatives, and elected officials in L.A. recognize that many riverside neighborhoods, including those outside of the city's boundaries, are disadvantaged and historically marginalized communities, and that improving the river, to them, mean improving these neighborhoods. In this way, greening the L.A. River constitutes advancing environmental justice through the provision of much needed environmental benefits and urban amenities. One city representative spoke about the river agenda being labeled as "revitalization" and not "restoration", pointing out, in environmental justice terms, the multiple social and economic benefits that the city hoped to create. He implicated past injustices incurred by transforming the river, stating that:

> [W]hen they created this cement straitjacket, they created a river corridor for all the LULUs that we know. The locally undesirable land uses. And so it became a dumping corridor. It became a place where *those* people lived. …You see it in the makeup of the land, the abuse that we had. Now, this river is becoming a desirability. … It's a face lift, it's a change. …The new frontier is going to be the underused and abandoned corridor along the river. The issue is: how do you absorb what's there in a fair way, in a way that's just? (Interview #21, 2013).

Another city bureaucrat working on river projects also identified the poor environmental quality of neighborhoods residing next to certain segments of the river. She likewise connects the degradation of the L.A. River with the degradation of environmental conditions of these neighborhoods, claiming:

> I'm not a sociologist, but just looking at the way things happened, it seems like initially all the disadvantaged communities *are* clustered along the river because it's not valued. It wasn't valued and now that people are starting to realize this concept [of revitalization], it really does offer us a lot of these potential multiple benefits along the river. That property values should go up and those people will benefit. …But all of the projects that we worked on…especially have been focusing on disadvantaged communities, trying to spread the wealth to those areas (Interview #19, 2013).

Aside from the recognition that riverside neighborhoods were historically areas of higher pollution, industrial zoning, and devalued land, river proponents also explicitly acknowledge the socioeconomic status and park-poor conditions of these neighborhoods. To them, this constituted environmental injustices in the form of reduced park access and inequitable distribution within the county. One agency representative stated that:

> Most people along the L.A. River—there are some very wealthy parts but there are also some very poor communities and you get this full gamut of socioeconomic levels. …A lot of communities along the river especially south of Los Angeles, between Los Angeles and Long Beach, they're very park poor (Interview #14, 2012).

These statements represent the now commonly accepted belief among many actors working to restore the L.A. River that greening and cleaning up riverside neighborhoods was—and continues to be—a necessary environmental justice objective. Now, restoration *should* entail economic development and public health as much as habitat creation and water conservation.

This growing concern over addressing environmental injustices through river improvement is traceable in restoration reports/plans, where creating parkspace becomes increasingly framed as not only a matter of public access and recreation, but an equity issue as well. As mentioned, early comprehensive reports of the L.A. River—such as the 1980 Army Corps' Recreation Study, the 1993 California Coastal Conservancy report, and the 1996 county River Master Plan—assess to some degree the recreational potential of expanding greenspace/open space along the river corridor. These documents, while exploring the social benefits of increasing recreational spaces, given the park-poor nature of L.A. County, do not discuss these benefits in the language or terminology associated with environmental justice discourse. However, more recent L.A. River planning documents do explicitly identify and consider environmental justice impacts when evaluating plans or project designs. The city's L.A. River Revitalization Master Plan directly addresses environmental justice in its discussion of multiple issues, stating that:

> The Plan's multi-purpose recommendations also address important environmental justice issues by targeting brownfields for redevelopment, offering opportunities for non-vehicular commuting, and encouraging the creation of new recreational spaces for people of all ages. Further, natural spaces and trails would provide outdoor fitness and environmental education opportunities in neighborhoods that currently lack these amenities (2007, ES5).

As the language of the LARRMP demonstrates, the goals of greening the L.A. River include addressing environmental justice needs in communities through targeted action items such as reclaiming unused industrial land, providing more parkspace, and promoting public health through educational opportunities. These goals are framed even more as environmental justice matters in a 2014 report on L.A. River redevelopment opportunities produced by the Los Angeles Business Council Institute (LABC). In the report, the LABC Institute makes the case for how river restoration could promote environmental justice in the Los Angeles region by bringing transit accessibility, open space availability, and pollution mitigation to disadvantaged riverside neighborhoods. Citing the unnerving CalEnviro Screen finding that thirty-seven percent of census districts within one-half mile of the L.A. River are considered the most burdened by environmental pollutants in the state, the report urges that river projects be undertaken so that "all members of our region are given equal opportunities to live healthful, productive lives" (LABC 2014, 15).

More recently, the Army Corps of Engineers' 2013 ecosystem restoration report, the ARBOR Study, includes a Socioeconomic Impacts and Environmental Justice analysis as a

measure of assessing the different restoration Alternatives. The report concludes that, while the conversion of industrial land to recreational or open space uses could produce socioeconomic impacts of reduced working-class jobs, it also identifies an environmental justice benefit through increased parkspace:

> The restoration measures, combined with current and foreseeable recreation and rehabilitation projects by the Cities of Los Angeles, Glendale and Burbank, would enhance the River and its vicinity as a recreational resource for the surrounding community; *this would have a net positive affect on minority and low-income populations* as well as children's health and safety. Increased access to the River and enhanced recreational opportunities would also be consistent with recommendations from several groups that advocate River enhancement measures as a means to unite various groups and populations and *ameliorate environmental justice issues including minimal opportunities to access parks and other recreational facilities in neighborhoods dominated by minority and low-income populations*, many of which are found along reaches in the study area (USACE 2013, 5-124, emphasis added).[131]

That a report by a federal agency such as the Army Corps of Engineers, which had historically neglected ecological and social impact considerations in water infrastructure projects, contains a section dedicated to identifying potential impacts to "minority and low-income populations" illustrates the changing political and cultural climate in which it operates. It also illustrates how integrally the issues of equity and greenspace distribution are embedded within L.A. River improvement plans.

Other federally-sponsored projects, such as the Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP), also identified the importance of addressing environmental justice through the partnership's efforts. As the UWFP specifically came about through the need for federal agencies to "help urban and metropolitan areas, particularly those that are under-served or economically distressed, connect with their waterways and work to improve them," it is not surprising to locate environmental justice outlined as a crucial goal within the L.A. partnership's workplan documents (UWFP 2011). One agency representative involved in Los Angeles' urban waters partnership shared that: "There are a lot of projects in here that were given a high priority in the [partnership's] workplan because they were seen as addressing underserved areas. We have a huge challenge with lack of recreational opportunities within this watershed" (Interview #38, 2012). The plans of the ARBOR Study and UWFP indicate the extent of the river restoration agenda's dedication to and discursive integration of urban greenspace distribution, which is framed in explicit environmental justice terms/arguments.

Continued collaboration between various environmental and community-based organizations also attests to the river restoration movement's incorporation of environmental justice dimensions. Partnerships that had formed in the late-1990s during the conflicts around the Chinatown Cornfield and Taylor Yard sites remain intact, if somewhat less active than fifteen years ago. On several occasions, various organizations from these coalitions have assembled around perceived threats to the urban parks created around the LA State Historic and Rio de Los Angeles State Parks. For example, there was mobilization around plans of the High Speed Rail. In a 2004 EIR draft and a 2010 report, the California High Speed Rail (HSR) Authority presented detailed information of a rail line route option that would cut through the Cornfield state park. An outcry followed the release of these reports, with numerous environmental,

[131] Regarding the process of compiling the ARBOR study, one environmental planner shared that environmental justice groups had been consulted: "I do think that the [planning] process has actively engaged the environmental justice community. So I do see the Corps and the others be responsive to the input they get from those stakeholders. But again, it's always a challenge" (Interview #49, 2013).

community-based, and social justice organizations (many who had originally fought for the park's creation), petitioned the HSR Authority to reconsider that particular route option (Guzman 2010). River advocates and government representatives, such as Councilmember Ed Reyes, voiced strong opposition to the park's bisection by the High Speed Rail, while EJ organizations such as The City Project submitted comments disapproving the disruption of an important, hard-won community asset to reduce construction costs (Garcia and Flores 2004). Furthermore, outreach conducted through the established networks among organizations resulted in a high turnout of community members at a HSR Authority board meeting. One agency representative, who had reached out to activist allies about the rail plans, recalled what happened at the meeting:

> [W]hat I had to do was call all the people—all the groups, all the organizations, all the community leaders that I had worked with over the last decade—and let them know that our parks are being threatened. And what that did was, these people came out *en masse* to the board meeting and basically one by one stepped up to the podium and read them the riot act. [And they] said, 'coming from an environmental justice perspective, once again you're coming into this underserved community and blasting through here. Putting in infrastructure to benefit other Californians while we have to have the undue burden of the industrial development here.' […] So these community groups came out *en masse* to protest and they stopped the High Speed Rail from going through the park. And that's the power of building community coalitions and trust (Interview #62, 2013).

Another staff member from a large environmental organization shared similar thoughts on the benefits of maintaining relationships with partner organizations, claiming that "in recent years, we've been making better inroads into having more environmental activists from communities of color and low-income areas, but it's difficult… I rely almost exclusively and primarily on our community partners to spread the word [of new developments]" (Interview #16, 2012). Networks among various organizations, built through past partnerships and ongoing efforts at building trust, allow larger environmental NGOs and even public agencies to maintain ties with community groups and mobilize in the face of possible new conflicts.

These organizations also briefly mobilized in late-2011 through 2012, when Union Pacific gave a development option of the highly sought after G2 Parcel of the Taylor Yards to an industrial developer. When it was announced that a Houston-based developer, Trammel Crow, possessed the option to build industrial facilities on a riverside property long envisioned by environmentalists as a wetland park, the organizations of the former Coalition for a State Park at Taylor Yard once again rallied together to dissuade Trammel Crow from following through with purchasing the G2 site (Coalition for State Park 2011). The coalition met with representatives from the developer and began negotiations for a property exchange, which ultimately led to the city's purchasing of the G2 Parcel in 2017 (Barrigan 2017a). One coalition representative who worked on this effort explained how previous activist campaigns among environmental and social justice-oriented organizations allowed for the network of groups to easily re-mobilize. He described the social infrastructure set up among coalition members, stating that:

> These are community members, people with certain nonprofit groups, private attorneys who've worked on litigation on a pro bono basis, concerned citizens—a lot of these ties are informal, but they are continuing because we all share the same passions and interests. And now we have this shared background experience in working on these coalitions and working on these projects (Interview #16, 2012).

Events such as the High Speed Rail Authority's board meeting or the petition against Trammell Crow demonstrate how past conflicts gave rise to organizational cooperation and alliances between environmental and social/environmental justice organizations. These alliances, while no

longer as politically active, indicate a successful integration of goals and efforts with regards to greening the L.A. River for ecological and social purposes.

Aside from, but related to, the issue of increasing urban greenspace, there have been several other areas of river restoration in which environmental issues have been reframed as EJ issues. One issue is promotion of alternative transit, particularly bicycling. Facing the environmental crises of urban sprawl, air pollution, and regional overreliance on single passenger vehicles, Los Angeles in the 1980s began to consider developing alternative modes of transportation. As a result, the L.A. area has attempted to expand its alternative transit infrastructure, which includes a public bus system (through the county's MTA and city bus programs), the commuter subway system (the MTA and its ever growing lines that connect beaches, mountains, and airports), and its bicycle lane systems.

As discussed in the previous chapter, bikeways along urban waterways had long been part of the area's bicycle infrastructure network, with lanes constructed on the lower Los Angeles River, the San Gabriel River, and several tributaries such as the Arroyo Seco (Interview #37, 2010; #50, 2012). As the popularity of bicycling as a non-vehicular mode of transportation grew—alongside river restoration ambitions—since the 1970s, plans for promoting sustainable transit through riverside bikeways have become more ambitious, better funded, and extensively researched (Interview #50, 2012; #22, 2013). Bicycle advocates, such as Joe Linton, and organizations, such as the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition (LACBC, which was co-founded by Linton), participate in both river restoration and bicycle infrastructure improvement projects, and have increasingly adopted the language of equity and transportation justice. According to these transit activists, many lower-income workers in Los Angeles cannot afford automobiles and thus rely upon bicycling as a means of transportation. Therefore, the push for improvements in better, safer, more extensive bicycle infrastructure involves the EJ aspects of worker mobility and promoting transit justice (LACBC 2011). Bicycle advocates, therefore, see construction of riverside bikepaths (that are seamlessly integrated into the street bike system) as one important component of encouraging more environmentally just transit conditions throughout the Los Angeles region (Interview #22, 2013). The Greenway 2020 initiative, which aims to build bicycle and recreational trails along the entire length of the L.A. River by 2020, represents one such effort at fully combining the river corridors with accessible, expanded public transit infrastructure (RiverLA).

Yet another area in which the river movement expanded to include environmental justice aspects is its focus on youth education and community development. Since the 90s, the coalition of actors involved in river advocacy included organizations whose central objectives involved youth education and professional development for local young people. Again, these efforts and involvement increased with the expansion of the river agenda in the late-90s/early-2000s to include environmental justice issues and discourses. Now that unjust greenspace distribution and unequal environmental conditions for disadvantaged neighborhoods were among the identified issues associated with river improvement, efforts among organizations to empower youth from these disadvantaged communities intensified. Organizations that were already involved in youth development, such as Northeast Trees, Los Angeles Conservation Corps, and the Mountains Recreation Conservation Authority continued their programming that involved combining environmental education, stewardship work, and skills development for young people from

nearby neighborhoods.[132] For example, though the L.A. Conservation Corps (LACC) have been working for over twenty five years, in 2008 they created their River Keepers program, which allows LACC participants the chance to monitor segments of the L.A. River and interact with the public. Many of the youth selected for this program are locally hired, which is an added social benefit. Seen in this light, the River Keepers program is not solely an environmental one, but rather, according to one manager, "provides cleanup and protection of the environment, creates a healthier and safer community and neighborhood, employs and trains young folks, and provides an opportunity for those young folks to give or serve their communities" (Interview #9, 2010).

Moreover, with environmental justice and community development organizations joining the pro-river coalition since the early-2000s, there is increased youth involvement and activity from those organizations into the L.A. River programs. One organization, the Anahuak Youth Soccer Association, which conducted minimal prior environmental work, became involved with the L.A. River through the formation of the Rio de Los Angeles State Park in 2002 and the L.A. River Revitalization Master Plan in 2005. Now, they and other organizations working predominantly in and with lower-income/working-class Latino communities in Northeast L.A. are active stakeholders in river restoration, its projects, and procedures. For these organizations, getting involved in the Los Angeles River restoration effort meant working to beyond the confines of dominant sustainability initiatives, to address matters of justice, fairness, and inclusion into decision-making (Irazabal 2012). One activist, who works with several of these youth organizations, presented the most salient issues as a matter of: "who is getting…data, is it being provided to monolingual Spanish speaking communities, is this addressing park disparities, is this looking at health as a link to its efforts? And then most importantly, are the youth being involved?" (Interview #51, 2010).

Therefore, activism around the L.A. River was able to fold in environmental justice language and issues regarding park access, community mobility, and youth development into the broader agenda of restoring the river. This hybrid form of political activism, which initially arose around the land use conflicts in Northeast L.A., resulted from the strategic alignment of mainstream environmental interests with that of the environmental justice efforts taking place around the river. While both of these activisms can be traced back decades prior, their articulation over spaces of the river led to the environmental justice politics of the L.A. River. As one community consultant informed me:

> What you had was advocacy on behalf of the community by community leaders and local elected officials. Attention is focused; it just didn't start five, six years ago. …What you're seeing is that seed germination happening. …So that was really part of the consciousness, especially among Latinos, looking at environmental justice issues. So a lot of that consciousness you can trace back. Now we go to the river (Interview #18, 2013).

This is a significant step for both environmentalists and EJ activists, as, according to one activist:

> Part of the problem is we have a legacy in this country in general, and in L.A.…of environmental projects not being for the people who live there and environmental projects being beautification projects. So you have this instinctive response in low income communities of, 'well, who the hell are you and what are you doing, why aren't you including us?' …But that's more framed by a larger history of the problems of environmentalism, which I think is mostly environmentalism's fault. …I think that's part of the battle on the L.A. River (Interview #33, 2012).

[132] One program manager for Northeast Trees explained the organization's work in this way: "We're planting trees along the L.A. River and we're working with young people who were coming out of juvenile hall or prison… That's a great combination of environmental action and social justice action as well" (Interview #1, 2013).

According to her statements, the articulation of mainstream environmental efforts and environmental justice activism is a progressive step for the former, which has long been critiqued by the latter for ignoring social and racial justice considerations.

For river advocates, however, the politics that have emerged around the L.A. River represent a hopeful new direction for L.A.'s urban environmentalism, one that is "very cross class" and "is about social just as much as environmental issues, at which environmental justice is very much at the heart of" (Interview #33, 2012). Because the channelization of the Los Angeles River is "deeply implicated" in the proliferation of environmental injustice across the L.A. region, the restoration of the river can undo—or at least address—these injustices if the political movement remains grounded in the lessons learned through intersecting with environmental justice mobilization. While it may be that Los Angeles will reclaim its 'lost Eden' through a green river corridor and sustainably managed watershed, maintaining an environmental justice perspective requires continuing to ask who will benefit as this reclamation unfolds over time.

RESTORATION OR REDEVELOPMENT?: STRATEGIZING FOR GREEN GROWTH ALONG THE LOS ANGELES RIVER

Feeding the "Green Growth Machine": Enrolling the Environment into Economic Development

Efforts to restore and revitalize the Los Angeles River have brought significant environmental and social benefits to the L.A. area. Among those, one of the most important has been the push to create parks in underserved neighborhoods through greening of the concrete streams and waterways that make up a sprawling watershed. Environmentalists and activists involved in the river movement, becoming aware of the disproportionately park-poor status of many lower-income, nonwhite neighborhoods, incorporated environmental justice language into their arsenal of arguments for capturing greenspace opportunities along the L.A. River. Amidst changing political, cultural, and economic conditions in Los Angeles, notably the rise of environmental justice organizations and mobilized efforts in the L.A. area, those who sought to reclaim the lost Eden of the river and those who championed for healthier, more livable environmental conditions for the poor communities of color found valuable political common ground. Environmentalists, planners, and state agency workers realized that re-envisioning and reconfiguring the river to be more than an industrial stormdrain or flood infrastructure also needed to include improving the everyday living conditions of riverside communities, many of whom experienced environmental issues through the lens of inequality, injustice, and marginalization.

However, urban greening of the Los Angeles River watershed could, paradoxically, create new environmental injustices throughout the L.A. region. While activists and advocates champion for the creation of parks, greenspace, and other urban amenities—such as green infrastructure and bicycle/pedestrian paths—in often disadvantaged neighborhoods along the L.A. River, newly improved places could become susceptible to environmental gentrification. Since neighborhoods are in part shaped by wider political economic forces that constantly reconfigure urban space, these forces can converge upon an environmentally enhanced/improved neighborhood to increase real estate values and ultimately drive out the most economically vulnerable residents. This is the "paradox of urban green space" (Wolch et. al. 2014), wherein environmental projects originally intended to improve the living conditions of underserved

communities may eventually contribute to processes—land inflation, gentrification, and resident displacement—that ultimately harm those community members most in need. The paradoxical outcomes of environmental gentrification, of course, are neither new nor found only in certain geographic contexts, but are rather another manifestation of how urban natures are metabolized through processes of capitalist spatial production to create and reinforce unequal urban environments. As sustainable urban design continues to operate as a powerful blueprint for urban policymaking, "developers, planners, and urban environmental managers now harness the language of sustainability, green consumption, and ecology to facilitate green space provision and gentrification" (Wolch et. al. 2014, 239).

According to Gould and Lewis, the adoption of environmentally-oriented rhetoric and issues into strategies of local economic development represents the workings of the "green growth machine" (2016, 2017). Based on the urban growth machine thesis originally presented by Logan and Molotch (1987), this *green* growth machine capitalizes on the narratives of environmental crisis (particularly in urban areas) by promoting growth strategies under the palatable guise of addressing environmental problems through sustainable solutions. Cities, as argued by the urban growth machine thesis, are politically and physically shaped by the drive for profit maximization through economic growth; these actions are driven by "coalitions of land-based elites" who are "tied to the economic possibilities of places" and therefore "drive urban politics in their quest to expand the local economy and accumulate wealth" (Jonas and Wilson, 1999, 3).[133] Therefore, the urban growth machine, facilitated and enabled by the local state, operates from a desire for total commodification of urban land as generators of monetary value rather than places where communities reside.[134] In the last thirty years, however, with the widespread acceptance of global environmental problems (i.e. deforestation, species extinction, water shortages, climate change), these growth machines modified their approaches by adapting to the calls for sustainable development that curtailed capitalism's ecological destruction and profligate resource consumption.[135] As a result, coalitions of these urban elites increasingly incorporate environmental discourses, imaginaries, and prescriptive practices into their agenda of accumulation through maximization of urban land's exchange value; in doing so, these green growth machines rely upon environmental concerns, as their pro-growth agendas are brushed with the appealing and depoliticizing veneer of conservation, sustainability, and ecological protection.

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[133] These elites in question—rentiers, speculators, entrepreneurs, and business leaders—are a diverse collection of actors that nonetheless all work towards a unified agenda: to maximize the exchange value of urban land through pro-growth policies that will increase rents and generate ancillary sources of wealth (Logan and Molotch 1987).

[134] The urban growth machine thesis, therefore, draws from Marxist urban theories, in which processes of urbanization are entangled and propagated by cycles of capital circulation and accumulation, where surplus value is extracted from monopoly rents and urban development serves as "spatial fixes" to the crises of overaccumulation (Harvey 1973, 1989b, 2008; Katznelson 1992; Merrifield 2002). However, the urban growth machine concept also looks beyond structural analyses of urban spatial production, aiming an analytical focus on the "messy", micro-level politics of that shape urban places. Claiming that "the nature of human settlement…is a product of social arrangements and a force in the lives of people" (Logan and Molotch 1987, 49), the growth machine thesis highlights how cooperation and conflict among numerous entities (such as small-scale rentiers, large developers, municipal government actors, communities, NGOs) both promote and resist the reconfiguration of urban places as solely producers of exchange value.

[135] Revisiting their urban growth machine thesis twenty years later, Logan and Molotch identified environmental regulation/protections as one potential arena in which growth machine agendas could be somewhat curtailed. However, they also warned against blind acceptance of urban initiatives—such as high density development—that appear sustainable, arguing that "it could just be the same old growth machine but with a decorative skin", as "the new 'smart growth' mantra may turn out to be just another smoke screen for making more money" (see forward to Logan and Molotch 2007, xx).

Central to the urban growth machine's success is the local state, which, hoping to promote a business-friendly climate and attract capital investments, facilitate the commodification of urban land all the while promulgating the "growth benefits all" argument (Logan and Molotch 1987). The local state's role in prioritizing economic growth over other considerations (such as social reproduction of urban residents), of course, partly stems from municipalities' response to major political-economic restructuring of Western urban centers, from the 1970s onward; this ultimately gave rise to more entrepreneurial forms of urban governance. With the late 20th century shift from Fordist models of economic development under a Keynesian welfare state to the increasingly globalized and flexible modes of production under the rise of neoliberalism, municipal regimes shifted to entrepreneurial modes of urban governance, where priorities include maintaining/increasing a competitive edge and attracting capital investment to stimulate new rounds of accumulation (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Harvey 1989a; Smith 2002). Cities, increasingly facing the pressures to attract private investment that will foster growth and generate tax revenue, strive to remain competitive within the global arena through various strategies. Among them is the creation of cultural, aesthetic/artistic, and environmental/green enhancements that will drive urban regeneration of select places, as targeted urban districts are branded as "livable", attract workers in the service, finance, and creative sectors, and inflate real estate values (Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris 2007; Mathews 2010; Philo and Kearns 1993; While et. al. 2004). This particular manifestation of urban entrepreneurial governance, characterized by the "serial reproduction of cultural spectacles, enterprise zones, waterfront developments, and privatized forms of local governance", is not "simply an aggregate outcome of spontaneous local pressures, but reflects the powerful disciplinary effects of interurban competition" (Peck and Tickell 2002, 46). Municipal governments undertake regeneration projects—such as revitalizing the port or constructing a new downtown concert hall—in the hopes that these public investments will capture new flows of capital and spur continued rounds of accumulation through commercial and high-end residential development.

With localities now operating under an entrepreneurial mode of urban governance, along with the widespread adoption of environmental values by middle-class residents, municipalities regularly incorporate dominant ideas and discourses of sustainability into their growth strategies and endeavor to brand themselves as 'green' (Bunce 2009; Greenberg 2013, 2015; Kipfer and Keil 2002; Whitehead 2003). While these efforts, whether through policy change or rollout of planning guidelines, may address serious environmental problems, they also rely upon market logics that can lead to the prioritization of economic development over social and ecological considerations rhetorically embedded in assertions of "sustainable development" (Beal 2015; Campbell 1996; Checker et. al. 2015;). In this way, the local state's response to tightening environmental regulations and mainstream acceptance of environmental values manifests through the process of "eco-state restructuring", or the:

> *ongoing* and unfolding set of processes by which the state actively seeks to manage environmental and economic interests, together or separately, as well as the various strategies pursued by such interests towards the realisation of specific economic…and environmental…goals (While et. al. 2010, 80, original emphasis).

Therefore, the "eco-state restructuring" of municipal governments facing the pressures of both tightening environmental regulation and interurban competition, can result in policies/practices/programs that allow for the proliferation of the green growth machine. As case studies of green economic strategies in cities reveal, when urban growth and redevelopment

strategies adopt 'sustainability', it oftentimes depoliticizes processes of environmental decision- and policymaking and diminishes opportunities for advancing social justice/equity (Checker 2011; Long 2016; Raco and Lin 2012; Quastel 2009; Swyngedouw 2009). This is, of course, demonstrated in cases of environmental gentrification of neighborhoods improved by remediation and/or green amenities, where residents face the unique environmental injustice of vulnerability to displacement due to the "new conundrum" of "green LULUs" (locally unwanted land uses) (Anguelovski 2016b).

I argue that, given the current trajectory of how the L.A. River restoration agenda is being approached, handled, and implemented, this urban sustainability initiative could exacerbate environmental injustice in Los Angeles. Restoring the L.A. River and sustainably managing the watershed calls for widespread greening of riverside neighborhoods, and where many of which, without policy intervention, could become susceptible to environmental gentrification. Thus, environmental injustice, in the form of gentrification, would be reinforced and perpetuated in communities that were initially targeted for environmental improvements due to their particular socio-economic and racial-cultural characteristics. This argument is not a conclusive determination on the entire L.A. River agenda. Implementation of projects that will physically alter the river channels, surrounding neighborhoods, and connective infrastructures remains in the earlier stages; the guiding documents that outline restoration plans claim that transforming the river is a fifty-year process. Moreover, in making this argument, I am not discounting the positive material and cultural-ideological changes that will come from implementation of the current river restoration agenda; already, significant improvements are observed and forecasted in areas of reducing water pollution, providing flood protection and habitat, and developing local and sustainable water supply sources.[136] However, I do argue that there are indicators that unequivocally demonstrate how major components of the agenda to restore the Los Angeles River do approach this sustainability initiative as a mechanism for capital accumulation via reinsertion of floodplain land into strategies and avenues for urban economic growth. And while the diverse collection of elected officials/policymakers, agency bureaucrats, NGOs, academics, journalists, private firms, and individual stakeholders involved in the L.A. River effort illustrate how "actually existing development programmes contain within them a variety of competing and conflicting agendas" that "focus on the demands made by a variety of social groups", there is nevertheless an inability for EJ demands to encompass the complexity of urban greenspace as both a solution and potential contributor to environmental injustice (Raco 2005, 343).

Indeed, the tensions among these "competing and conflicting agendas" that are found under the umbrella of river restoration themselves signal how the L.A. River is positioned as a means to promote local economic development. With such a broad range of economic and environmental objectives included under the rubric of river restoration/watershed sustainability, there are conflicts and frictions among the stakeholders pushing for a more economically or

[136] In arguing that the river restoration agenda facilitates the workings of the green growth machine, I am not reducing such a broad, multifaceted agenda down solely to economic motivations. The "local state", of course, is composed of a heterogeneous assemblage of actors and agendas, and I do not discount or diminish the intention of many city and county entities that are truly committed to restoring the ecological health, social vibrancy, and sustainable water supply management through improvements to the L.A. River watershed. Many dedicated individuals, working from within municipal government, educational institutions, and the nonprofit sector, have expended enormous amounts of energy and time into bringing the river back into public and political consciousness because they believe doing so will rebuild a cleaner, more livable, more equitable city. Key resource management agencies at the city and county level have proposed and adopted reforms necessary to safeguard urban communities against unpredictable climatic events as well as reduce the region's energy-costly extraction of nonlocal water supplies. Likewise, government and nongovernment stakeholders have diligently challenged existing laws and institutional practices in order to clean up water pollution and reinstate public access to waterways, all to provide recreational relief to urban residents.

ecologically centered agenda. One way that these tensions manifest is in the disagreement over the terminology used to categorize what is even being *done* to the L.A. River watershed. Despite the wishes of some environmentalists and river advocates, plans for the L.A. River watershed involve much more than restoring of riparian ecosystems and regional hydrologic function. These ecologically "purist" perspectives, it should be noted, are a minority among river advocates, and largely do not account for the urbanized characteristics of the Los Angeles floodplain basin as well as the host of socio-environmental issues activists originally rallied behind. As a result, the majority of L.A. River advocates/proponents, I would assess, prefer to use the term "revitalization" to describe the suite of uniquely urban and socio-environmentally hybridized prescriptions planned for the river.[137] However, despite the publicly touted consensus over broad terms and labels, there is an underlying unease among a notable portion of river/watershed advocates who feel that economic interests are becoming prioritized in river-related programs/projects.

For these concerned stakeholders (who will readily acknowledge that traditional restoration or floodplain reclamation would not be possible for many years, if ever), the current direction of the L.A. River agenda focused too much on economic interests, objectives, and outcomes. One environmental NGO representative, who had worked on water-related issues in Los Angeles for over twenty years, claimed there was a direct link between the specific labels used with the river, and the agendas they signified:

> In LA, you can't say 'restoration'. It's 'revitalization'. Well, you know why they chose that word? It's because they wanted to emphasize more the economic than the environmental. See, they wanted to emphasize *riverfront* development…rather than real habitat values (Interview #68, 2013).

For this river advocate, the term "revitalization" was indicative of a larger problem of local government's interest in redeveloping riverfront land. Other stakeholders—for whom the issue of terminology was less explicitly linked to one specific agenda—also observed what they perceived as the tendency for the city government to emphasize the economic aspects of river/watershed improvement. According to one NGO representative, the city's 2007 river master plan "was really more focused on economic revitalization, in a way" than it was on addressing the environmental problems of water pollution, urban flood adaptation, and dependence on nonlocal water supplies (Interview #53, 2012). Another planner working with an environmental justice NGO shared his thoughts on why the city's master plan focused on specific mainstem stretches:

> I mean, the L.A. River goes through more affluent neighborhoods, like in the South [San Fernando] Valley, and it goes through more gentrifying neighborhoods like Atwater Village, Frogtown, Cypress Park, and stuff. And where you do see projects happening on the L.A. River, in the city of L.A., tends to be in more affluent or gentrifying neighborhoods. […] There is reason why they…focused on [these] areas… It's a development tool, you know. So *I think that's part of the reason why the city focuses on the affluent areas, it's a tool for development, especially for downtown* (Interview #47, 2012, emphasis added).

[137] While one engineer shared that "everybody I've worked with has different views of what 'restoration' in the river is" (Interview #59, 2013); another environmental consultant who had worked on the river in both a public and private capacity, explained that "restoration is a spectrum" and so therefore the plan for the L.A. River was "not *pure* restoration, but there's *some* restoration there" (Interview #46, 2013).

Other stakeholders, expressed beliefs similar to his, echoing their concerns that the city overemphasized urban economic development in their approach and plans. One environmental activist was even more critical of the city's focus, stating that:

> [The city] only thinks of land use as a profit mechanism. …[It] has made a big show of putting a plan together for a piece of land they have no jurisdiction over, instead of spending the last decade looking at making changes at where they *could* make a difference (Interview #48, 2012). [138]

Even among those who viewed the city's plan as a series of diplomatic compromises still expressed disappointment that 'revitalization' appeared to cater too much to economic development; one watershed stakeholder stated that:

> [T]he master plan is what I call a Christmas Tree. …I think it's better than nothing but I think that what the plan ultimately became was something for everybody. We're going to try restore little parts to make the environmentalists happy… and then we're going to try to improve riverfront parcels to keep the private sector happy (Interview #49, 2012).

While these may be minority viewpoints among a diverse coalition of stakeholders, they nevertheless show how a significant number of river advocates reach similar conclusions regarding the current trajectory of L.A. River restoration. Their observations, moreover, appear to be supported by recent trends emerging from the implementation of the restoration agenda, notably the efforts to redevelop riverfront land through commercial-residential development.

Spaces of New Development: Transforming the Post-Industrial Waterfront

The city's focus on redeveloping riverside and river-adjacent lands, particularly those impacted by regional deindustrialization, embodies one area where urban growth strategies are combined with adapting to environmental regulations and activist demands. Much of the land alongside the L.A. River, as discussed in Chapter Two, was used for industrial purposes, including manufacturing facilities, warehouses, and railroads/railyards. As grassroots activism around the Los Angeles River coalesced in the late-80s and 1990s, the local state entities began to explore alternative practices that could protect urban waterways while still maintaining a strong economic growth component. The polluted, enclosed, and derelict landscapes along the river and its extensive tributaries became the focus of these exploratory planning exercises. For example, the river task force assembled by Mayor Tom Bradley in 1990 explored, along with a host of environmental issues, the potential for river revitalization to enhance "commercial uses" and "adjacent land uses" in the city (City of LA River Task Force 1991). Likewise, the county's 1996 L.A. River Master Plan identified Economic Development as one of the plan's primary goals; stating that "well-designed river frontage can significantly enhance land value", the plan provides recommendations for local jurisdictions to reclaim "large tracts of riverfront property that are vacant or underused" in order to "encourage the establishment of restaurants, cafes…and similar new businesses along the river" (LARMP 1996, p.1, 6).

These earlier examples of extending political support for the L.A. River demonstrate the steps taken by the city (and to a lesser extent, the county) in the eco-state restructuring process. Local government entities began to see the merit of rolling out policies that would respond to activists' growing demands for watershed protection while also exploring the possibilities of integrating environmental protection with local economic strategies. Simply put, there was

[138] According to her, "[Councilmember Ed Reyes] worked very closely with the developers, very much believed in getting them what they wanted, fought for them to get them what they wanted. When we won Taylor [Yard] in court, he worked with the developer to try and find a way to get them the highest profit—because the state was going to buy the land, ultimately."

value—both ecological and financial—to be reclaimed in the large tracts of vacant riverfront property. Taking notice of the local state's growing interest in the river and assessing the real estate potential of such political attention, one *Los Angeles Times* article speculated that the "riverbank gamble may pay off", with "owners of L.A. River property" set to "hit the jackpot if development proposals are realized" (Colvin 1991).

The local state's interest in cleaning up and greening postindustrial landscapes along the L.A. River is shared and supported by environmental organizations and activists as well. For river advocates who want to see an environmentally restored and socio-culturally revitalized river, these industrial land uses represent immense opportunity to begin dramatically transforming the watershed (*Figure 4.1*). In 1998, several organizations, including FoLAR, the Council for Watershed Health, and the California Coastal Conservancy helped organize the *River Through Downtown* conference; this event assembled public, private, and NGO representatives who explored the redevelopment possibilities for riverside lands, including the Taylor Yard rail facility.[139] While recognizing the challenges presented by existing industrial land uses or the high cost of urban land, restoration proponents envisioned a revitalized river as a crucial step towards rebuilding a sustainable, livable Los Angeles. According to one longtime river activist, the construction of a wetland in a former railyard was indicative of urban restructuring in "the postindustrial age", of adapting infrastructure to move "from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century" (Interview #43, 2010). In FoLAR's booklet, titled *D-Town Visions*, river advocates present the case for enhancing the stretches of the L.A. River that run through downtown, claiming that: "It is essential to de-industrialize Los Angeles' riverfront and reconnect the central city to the River" (McAdams 2007, 14). This argument is developed further by another environmental activist and planner, who claims that:

> In old industrial areas…the city of New York has encouraged the development of creative retail, entertainment and residential development adjacent to more established parts of the city. These cities did not wait for manufacturing to return, but built their new economies from their outdated industrial zones. …Economically strong cities today serve as global and regional centers of culture, retail, and commerce (Rojas quoted in McAdams 2007, 14).

The desire for a postindustrial Los Angeles is partly expressed in the desire for the postindustrial greening of the L.A. River. Instead of waiting for "manufacturing to return", the ecological and aesthetic enhancement of the river would foster new economies centered in "culture, retail, and commerce." Other longtime river supporters voiced similar desires for the river, including one architect who shared that his involvement with the river initially began with his interest "in what might be done with these big railyards, because I was aware that rail operations all over the world were moving out of central cities and those properties were being redeveloped in various ways" (Interview #7, 2013). His belief that these railyards "represent tremendous potential" was echoed by other stakeholders. According to one former county engineer, river supporters were acutely aware of the imperative to acquire riverside railyards when they became available in the late-1990s. He described their sense of urgency, since the "developers [were] saying, oh, Taylor Yard, man, we'd like to come in and buy that." Because of the real estate interests, activists

[139] From that conference, the CCC provided funding for a report on the multi-benefit potential of the Taylor Yard property. An agency representative present at that conference commented that, "There have been *a lot* of studies and talk focused on Taylor Yard for years." These studies and talk all focused on "the multi-use approach to planning for future use of the river, including being able to take the concrete out and…addressing flood control, habitat creation, passive recreation, environmental education, those kinds of things" (Interview #14, 2012).

believed that "you gotta get those lands. Now is the opportunity. If you lose that, you lose a half a century. Before they recycle again, you get another shot at it" (Interview #10, 2013).

Figure 4.1. A rendering of parks and wetlands at the Taylor Yards after river restoration. (Source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 2013 ARBOR Study.)

However, for state actors, the postindustrial riverfront represents both a potential economic boon and a complicated land use challenge. While opportunity lies in these large riverside properties, which continue to open up as deindustrialization spreads throughout the county, the very materiality of these sites produce substantial challenges as well. Namely, obstacles abound due to the physical obduracy of these facilities, the remnants of industrial contamination present in the soils/waters, and the reluctance or inability of property owners to part with the land. Probably the biggest impediment to river revitalization is the high cost of land in the urban core of Los Angeles. This problem is well illustrated in the statements and assessments included in the recent ARBOR Study. According to Army Corps policy, "land acquisition in ecosystem restoration plans must be kept to a minimum. …As a target, land value should not exceed 25% of total project costs" (USACE 2013, Appendix E, paragraph E-30f). However, the report concludes that land acquisition and availability is critical yet prohibitive for the execution of a balanced restoration program:

> *Real estate and potential relocation costs are known to be exceptionally high in the Los Angeles area*. Initially, a conceptual alternative that restored the river to an area similar to its historic floodplain and removed the concrete channel within the study area was estimated to have real estate costs of approximately $7.6 billion, an excessive amount that did not include relocation costs or construction costs. […] Despite efforts to minimize land acquisition, real estate costs for the alternatives in the final array range from approximately 83 percent of total project cost for the smaller alternatives to approximately 45% for the largest alternatives. *In recognition of the unusual nature of the real estate costs of the proposed alternatives and in commitment for the project*, the City of Los Angeles proposed to waive reimbursement of real estate costs that exceed its statutorily required 35 percent share of total ecosystem restoration costs (USACE 2013, xxiv, emphasis added).

For a project that only includes eleven miles of a river, the price tag of restoration due to the high cost of urban land presents itself to be a conundrum for governing bodies. Restoring the river may raise real estate prices, but it comes at the (literal) cost of existing prices of valuable land.

The financial challenges of revitalization are compounded by the physical challenges embodied in materially obdurate urbanized land. Select riverfront properties may be postindustrial, but it remains surrounded by land uses of all types. One engineer presented the land use problems along the river in this way:

> You look at [the river downstream of the Six Street Bridge], and it's industrial, industrial, industrial. …And I bet if you went to those landowners around there and said, 'you know, the river's just not functioning the way it's supposed to', they would say, 'what are you talking about? It's actually doing a fabulous job and don't touch it!' There are opportunities but they are harder to find in areas such as downtown and south of downtown (Interview #46, 2013).

Another water agency engineer also discussed the patchwork of industrialization along the river, stating that:

> I've attended some of these conferences on the river and seen how there are railroad tracks on both sides of the river for miles and miles, and think, 'what would I like to see, but what's really possible?'…The River Office [in BoE] has a challenge in trying to implement a lot of these projects and bringing people to the river, *just because of the nature of how it's built* (Interview #56, 2013, emphasis added).

Again, these issues were raised by another city public works representative, who wondered about not only about the existing industrial land uses but also where they would be moved to if certain sections of the river were remediated and revitalized. He explained that from his experience:

> You have a cluster of a lot of industries along the river that now are causing pollution. I mean, the railyards here, all the heavy industries in Vernon and so forth. …I think you see the cluster of industries along the river and that now we're going to be trying to revitalize the river, my question is: where is that industry going now? I mean, it's [about] not just saying 'okay, we're going to have a clean river', but I'm worried [about] where [those industries are] going to move to? (Interview #4, 2013)

The physical layout and high cost of urban land along the L.A. River, as elucidated by these comments, prove to be complicating factors in the eco-state restructuring process for the city and county governments. They illustrate the oftentimes competing interests of capital accumulation embedded within the urban growth machine (Jonas and Wilson 1999; Logan and Molotch 1987); urban land is prohibitively expensive and landowners are reluctant to part with advantageously situated properties without demanding steep prices that can make them profit, at the expense of public dollars.

As a result, the process by which state agencies acquire riverfront property is ongoing, piecemeal, and often politically fraught. A key Taylor Yard property, the Bowtie Parcel, was purchased in 2003 by California State Parks, and the city engineering office along with the Army Corps, are developing an onsite flood retention demonstration project. Another property at the former Taylor Yard railyard, the G2 parcel, which has been nicknamed the "crown jewel" of L.A. River restoration, proved a most elusive real estate acquisition for restoration stakeholders (Interview #54, 2013). After many years of negotiations between the city and Union Pacific, the G2 parcel was finally purchased by the city in 2017; the forty-two acre former railroad maintenance site will be converted into a wetland and passive recreation park complex (Zahniser 2017). Just as politically contentious is the Piggyback Yard property. In 2010, FoLAR partnered

with architecture firm Perkins & Will to develop the Piggyback Yard Conceptual Master Plan; this plan outlines a restoration program for the Piggyback Yard site, an active railyard in downtown Los Angeles that sits next to the river and is one of the largest downtown properties owned by a single entity (FoLAR 2013). Though the owners of the railyard, Union Pacific, have announced their intention to remain at the present location, it has not dissuaded FoLAR, the city, and other restoration proponents (including the Army Corps itself!) from making elaborate plans of constructing wetlands, parks, and flood detention measures on the site (Interview #42, 2010).[140]

Other restoration plans that specifically incorporate design elements for industrial riverside lands include the city's Cornfields Arroyo Seco Plan (CASP, which actually sets out to preserve a certain percentage of industrially zoned land), the River Improvement Overlay (RIO), and the Army Corps' ARBOR Study. The projects centered on these acquisitions of postindustrial riverfront properties are not only touted as providing the ecological benefits of restoring habitat and retaining floodwaters, but also hinge on the operation of urban real estate markets that will raise the exchange value of redeveloped and greened land; taken together, they demonstrate how eco-state restructuring involves "environmental and ecological protection selectively incorporated into local and regional development", and how "a 'clean and green' image becomes increasingly important for local economic development" (While et. al. 2010, 81).

The city, moreover, continuously invokes other environmentally and economically viable urban river revitalization cases, touting these success stories as inspiration (and perhaps, financial justification) for revitalizing the L.A. River. Elected officials, policymakers in different departments, and consultants all point to the Platte River in Colorado, the San Antonio Riverwalk in Texas, and the day-lighted Cheonggyecheon Stream in Seoul, South Korea as celebrated examples of urban river improvement projects that successfully contributed to revitalization of surrounding neighborhoods/districts. These case studies of successful and sustainable river revitalization from cities around the world partly informed the policymaking and planning process around the Los Angeles River, sparking inspiration for how economic growth, aesthetic and ecological enhancement, and cultural visibility through improvement of a waterway could be rolled out (Interview #11, 2010). As one city official described it, the idea behind the city's master plan and ad hoc committee was couched in the widely-publicized (purported) success of other postindustrial riverfront conversion:

> Through policies that allow us to rezone areas like downtown, where abandoned office space became residential [and] abandoned warehouse space became residential in industrial zones, you have an influx of about fifty thousand people moving into the downtown area within eight years. …What does that do for the watershed and for the river? Now we're talking about new destinations, new opportunities to assimilate new nodes of developments…[to] reevaluate and reconstruct the space that has been sitting dormant since WWII (Interview #21, 2013).

Another environmental policy expert for the city agreed that neighborhoods could be revitalized "using the L.A. river as the economic engine" (Interview #45, 2012).

[140] The Army Corps of Engineers' decision to include the Taylor Yard and Piggyback Yard site in its habitat restoration study came about through the assessment of properties along the L.A. River that fulfilled their criteria of size, availability, and other factors. The ARBOR study states that: "An exhaustive search for other appropriate real estate parcels was conducted, but no other parcels or groups of parcels of sufficient size to address study objectives and fully avoid [Hazardous and Toxic Waste] impacted sites were identified. Although initial plans were developed that excluded the Taylor and Piggyback Yard parcels, they did not meet the restoration objectives for restored habitat and habitat connectivity and were eliminated through the planning process" (2013, xxiv).

These city representatives, working on policies that would improve the L.A. River with economic results in mind, viewed these spaces as underutilized and undervalued; one official declared that "the dormant, underused space along the river" was now the focus of political attention, "so in the process why not cultivate case studies for private-public partnerships" that could attract investments and drive improvements. These partnerships were important for the city's broader vision of the river, in which:

> …a riverfront district [can] design property and can be a point of access to alleviate [urban] pressures…because now you have a reason for why an investor will want to come in and change that physical space. The government alone is not going to do it; you need investors, you need financing, so they can see the value of recreating these ecosystems in the context of these urban centers (Interview #21, 2013).

Another city department representative explained that the river symbolized opportunity of all kinds; the river could be "a basis for an economic development strategy, it could be a tourism strategy, it could be a strategy to really revitalize the neighborhoods around it" (Interview #45, 2012). The idea that with enough public encouragement, river revitalization could be powered eventually by private investment/capital demonstrates the economic strategy of using postindustrial waterfronts as engines for urban revalorization and reinvigoration of land values.

A similar strategy for sustainable urban development was outlined in the 2014 report by the Los Angeles Business Council Institute. The report, titled *LA's Next Frontier: Capturing Opportunities for New Housing, Economic Growth, and Sustainable Development in LA River Communities*,[141] examined the economic development potential of river restoration. Its analysis clearly subscribes to the appealing arguments of the sustainable urban development discourse, noting that:

> The Los Angeles River revitalization presents a unique opportunity to develop underutilized land and build new transportation connections, creating a cohesive series of sustainable, thriving, equitable communities throughout Los Angeles County. Successful redevelopment along the river will be a key component of the region's sustainable growth strategy for years to come (LABC 2014, 6).

The triple bottom line of economic growth, environmental health, and social equity can be met through revitalization measures for this neglected urban asset, according to the report's authors. Given the massive public investment currently expended on the L.A. River, as well as the nodes of employment and housing growth in key areas along the river, the LABC advises that businesses should "leverage public investment" to develop "river pilot districts" that will "help incentivize catalytic developments" (25). It suggest taking advantage of existing and potentially promising financing options/tools—such as Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts and expedited permitting processes for projects—to develop economic strategies that will spur sustainable growth in the L.A. region.

Though the Business Council report's authors identify the need to implement policies that will provide affordable housing, equal access to environmental amenities, and "equitable distributions" of economic returns on river corridor enhancement, their analysis emphasizes the growth potential of investing in prime stretches of river real estate. These stretches, perhaps unsurprisingly, are areas such as south San Fernando Valley (Sherman Oaks and Studio City, North Hollywood), downtown, and Northeast LA areas—all areas identified as affluent and/or

[141] What is interesting is the use of the term "frontier" in the title of the report. Frontiers, in an urban context, evoke discourses of city redevelopment and urban renewal that leads to gentrification (Smith 1996).

gentrifying by those leery of the river becoming an urban development tool. The LABC report, intended to lay out a plan for developers interested in riverfront development, subscribes to the ideas and discourse of sustainable urban development. It espouses the dominant arguments that, with careful planning and effective governance, the Los Angeles River's restoration could facilitate a balanced yet economically valuable/profitable development trajectory for the L.A. region. This type of growth is, of course, sustainable both ecologically and socially.

Centering the L.A. River as one of the cornerstones of a local green economic development strategy could indeed produce the desired outcomes of rising exchange values of urban land. Within the last twenty years, and notably within the last seven, the private sector has noted the increase in public investment of Los Angeles River improvement initiatives. In 2015, JLL, an investment management firm specializing in real estate published a research report titled *Investment Outlook: Reinventing the Los Angeles River through public and private partnership* (JLL 2015). The report identifies key real estate and redevelopment opportunities made available through expanded municipal and federal programs/investments to remediate, rehabilitate, and restore select stretches of the Los Angeles River. It enthusiastically notes that:

> The city's plans to revitalize the river, combined with private investment in surrounding parcels, promises to rejuvenate LA's floodplain. Such proactivity will unlock new economic opportunities along the river. […] The project has transformed the flood channel into a desirable, open space amenity after respositioning many of the dormant assets. The wave of development has resulted in new, mixed-use commercial and residential projects as well as industrial conversions to creative office and retail (JLL 2015, 4).

The report pays particular attention to the "ARBOR area", the land adjacent to the 11.5 miles of the mainstem river targeted for ecosystem restoration by the Army Corps of Engineers, where "average commercial asset prices…have appreciated by 98 percent since 2010" and "sales volumes have increased a staggering 383.6 percent since 2010" (JLL 2015, 7).

In addition to the billion-dollar investment represented by the Army Corps' restoration program, the report further highlights how riverfront properties are well positioned to appreciate in real estate value due to low vacancy rates, close proximity to existing media/entertainment hubs, studio complexes, and artist districts, and ongoing growth of creative economy sectors that will raise demand for mixed-use residential spaces. These optimistic forecasts, the report notes, are supported by the "tremendous economic returns and a propelled tax base" observed in other cases of urban riverfront revitalization, such as Portland's River District, San Antonio's River Walk District, and New York's Meatpacking District and Hudson Yards (JLL 2015, 13). Therefore, according to these real estate researchers, the Los Angeles River represents "one of LA's last underutilized corridors", and the city's plans for revitalization means "a largely abandoned section of the city has been re-infused with promise yet again" to "cater to high-growth industry subsectors" that will "bolster our economy" and "create a comfortable, livable community" for all Angelenos (JLL 2015, 14).

Reclaiming the river for driving green economic growth in the city, when packaged and presented in such metrics and rhetoric, appears universally desirable. Who would not want economic growth that could make the city more "comfortable" and "livable"? Yet such a strategy raises questions about how equitable and socially sustainable these development objectives will be, and adds to growing alarm over the potential of new injustices inflicted upon marginalized communities. As case studies across North America demonstrate repeatedly, the changing role of the urban waterfront "from a place of production to one of consumption" entails the industrial-to-commercial conversion of urban land and the rise of "a new regime of accumulation" (Vormann

2015a, 357). These repurposed, rebranded postindustrial urban waterfronts, though carrying its own set of historical and geographical particularities, nonetheless are associated with similar narratives of urban decline and creative regeneration (Desfor et. al. 2010; Hagerman 2007; Kibel 2004). Physically transformed through zoning changes, remediation efforts, and everyday uses (and demographic shifts of their us*ers*), these waterfront landscapes are also rebranded as cleaner, safer, and more livable urban districts that stand in direct contrast to the polluted, crime-ridden images of its past uses. These material-discursive reconfigurations of waterfront landscapes, as well as the political-economic forces responsible for such changes, reveal the intermeshed networks of capital, policies, and discourses of cities that are actively at work behind the veneer of postindustrial redevelopment and greening the inner-city (Bunce 2009; Gould and Lewis 2017).

"Green" Gentrification as an Environmentally Unjust Outcome of River Improvement

While case studies of successful waterfront revitalization trumpet the economic benefits created in targeted urban districts, they also often demonstrate that the conversion of blighted and derelict postindustrial spaces for greener, cleaner cities unfolds unevenly and reinforces inequality. Whether it is a cleaned up port or a re-vegetated river channel, the "postindustrial waterfront" is a somewhat constructed landscape that masks the specific steps required to present this sanitized, easily consumed appearance. As Hall and Stearn (2014) note:

> deindustrialization has not removed the disordered image of the waterfront; that has come about only with the dispersal of disadvantaged residents and the reorientation of the waterfront to more aesthetically pleasing activities such as retail, recreation, and residence (601).

It is important to remember that green growth machines are not politically neutral players in the urban policymaking arena, but rather seek to "harness environmental concerns to generate publicly funded environmental amenities and restoration" that enable them to participate in "an urban redevelopment treadmill in which neighborhoods are destroyed by sustainability initiatives" (Gould and Lewis 2016, 148). As developers, property owners, and real estate investors capitalize on public investment intended to address environmental concerns, municipalities stand to receive increased tax revenues from higher-valued land. The resulting "urban redevelopment treadmill" inserts land into new cycles of accumulation and transforms neighborhoods, all at the cost of those who are displaced and/or unable move into more-desirable places. Therefore, urban greening and revitalization measures, including postindustrial waterfront redevelopment, catalyzes the "dispersal"—or displacement—of residents who cannot afford the rising cost of living in an aesthetically pleasing, mixed-use neighborhood. This paradoxical outcome—whereby revitalized neighborhoods lead to displacement of its poorer, most vulnerable populations—reinforces the unjust outcome of the most privileged residents living in ecologically healthful and recreationally enjoyable areas.

Additionally, the displacement of pollution, blight, and poverty from particular urban places reverberates on a larger scale, as select areas of the watershed become visible, successful examples of reclaimed nature and consumable leisure, while others remain polluted, congested, and largely invisible from the middle-class public. Vormann notes that:

> While processes of marketization have led to seemingly more sustainable, leisurely and safe places on the post-industrial waterfront—sites of high visibility that have come to be regarded as representative of the city as a whole—this questionable utopian discourse obfuscates the infrastructures and networked mobility spaces that are necessary to maintain these sites and makes it easy to forget the unevenness of urbanization processes. […] Poverty and pollution have been

> relegated away from the urban waterfront to other places within and outside the city (2015b, 362-363).

The transition of sites that were active spaces of urban production into those that are now spaces of urban consumption (at least for a specific set of middle-class urban denizens) does not unfold uniformly throughout the entire region, but more closely resembles a patchworked spatiality. It should not be forgotten that there remain many locales throughout Los Angeles County where the industrial waterfronts are not relics of a Fordist past, but active sites of production which do not enter into the planning calculations of revitalization, reinvestment, and restored nature. This gets to the areas outside of the city of L.A., into those neighborhoods of Southeast Los Angeles County, along the lower stretches of the LA River.[142]

The rising land values in environmentally-improved neighborhoods, the rebranding of former industrial areas into middle-class commercial districts, and the displacement of low-income residents from greened, revitalized areas all indicate the workings of environmental gentrification, a phenomenon increasingly considered an environmental injustice. This form of injustice appears ripe for occurrence along the Los Angeles River, where gentrification has emerged as one of the most pressing concerns with relation to restoration agendas. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, the topic arose repeatedly during interviews, in meetings, and within planning documents. The overwhelming majority of stakeholders I spoke with recognized, to some extent, the possibility that ecological enhancements and improvements to the L.A. River could increase land values, thereby increasing displacement pressures upon low-income and renting communities living along the river. Environmental and community organization representatives directly identified the threat of gentrification as a potential downside to restoration, while city bureaucrats, whether during interviews or informal/off-the-record conversations, acknowledged the likelihood of gentrification and the difficulty of balancing revitalization goals with mitigating threats of displacement.[143]

This concern came about despite claims by city officials and official plans that river-induced gentrification could be tempered with continued outreach to affected communities, increased public participation of community stakeholders, and mechanisms to mitigate rising land values such as community development plans (LARRMP 2007). This attempt at a balancing act between cultivating economic conditions to foster real estate development and investments, and ensuring housing protections to existing working-class communities, is encapsulated in one city representative's observations, where he recognized that "we should be fearful of [gentrification]" and "instill within the plan the capacity to build up affordable housing", but without "scaring away the investment" since "it'd be a useless plan if no one activates it" (Interview #21, 2013). This balancing act, or what he termed as searching for the "sweet spot" between incentivizing investments and protecting affordable housing, was emphasized by other river proponents from the city and elaborated upon in plans such as the River Revitalization Master Plan and the Cornfields Arroyo Seco Plan (Interview #54, 2013).

Moreover, gentrification along a newly revitalized river emerged as a major concern throughout the planning and outreach processes for river projects. For example, one representative from the city planning department shared that throughout planning processes for

[142] The issues of the lower Los Angeles River stretches will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

[143] For example, during an informal conversation with a high-ranking representative from the city's public works department (which houses the office in charge of revitalizing the L.A. River) in early 2011, the topic of gentrification arose. The representative acknowledged that gentrification was a concern and highly salient issue in connection with restoring the river, yet wearily concluded that there was not much her office could do to address it adequately.

several river-related studies (CASP, RIO, LARRMP), stakeholders voiced their anxiety and fear of gentrification resulting from these various projects. During the development of the city's river master plan (LARRMP), in particular, concern over gentrification was brought up multiple times in the public comment period for the draft LARRMP. Amidst the hundreds of comments submitted by stakeholders and members of the public in April 2007, gentrification was mentioned or referenced dozens of times, with close to two dozen separate stakeholder entities explicitly identifying gentrification as a matter of urgent concern; many others alluded to the matter by discussing related issues such as affordable housing and land use change (LARRMP Draft Comments 2007).

Environmental organizations that were integrally involved in efforts to revitalize the L.A. River recognized gentrification as a serious issue; the Council for Watershed Health asked "How will the City ensure that the present occupants will still be able to afford living in and adjacent to these [restoration] Opportunity Areas?" (133-34) while the Arroyo Seco Foundation remarked that "the plan contains no viable mechanism for addressing the resulting gentrification and displacement of existing residents" (53). Other commenters expressed more critical stances to what they perceived was the city's relative silence on addressing gentrification and complicity in favoring land developers. One commenter pointed to the "Orwellian" nature of the term "revitalization" (56), while another asserted that under the current plan, "underserved communities, also known disadvantaged communities, will become the target of developers and gentrification without the focus on their public health and public safety" (83). Meanwhile, a University of Southern California student astutely observed that:

> There are many ugly parts to this project. The biggest threat and most likely negative repercussions of this project is the threat of gentrification. All the housing developments that are currently along the river are cheap, low income housing. But once the river is beautified this will entice many real estate developers to buy out these lots and build new developments which will displace all the poor families (93).

Still others, especially community groups, requested that the city establish a task force and investigate other ways to promote affordable housing in potentially impacted riverside neighborhoods. All of these comments, when considered as a collective whole, demonstrate the significant concern over gentrification along the L.A. River. This possibility was acknowledged by the city itself, which noted in the draft plan that: "Gentrification is potentially the most serious political issue associated with riverfront development. Its effects, both positive and negative, should be anticipated and mitigated consistent with public policy" (LARRMP Draft Plan 2007, 75).

It is important to clearly identify what groups are threatened with displacement by what specific restoration projects. While arguments from the ecological/environmental gentrification literature identify lower-income, poor, and renting populations as vulnerable to displacement should greening projects raise property values, the homeless population are at risk of being displaced merely by the presence of these projects themselves. The Los Angeles River has long been a place of residence for subsets of L.A.'s homeless population (River LA 2017). And, as briefly mentioned in the last chapter, the issue of homeless people who reside in the river channel is one that restoration proponents and city officials continuously grapple with (Interview #51, 2010). Though documentation of the numbers and type of homeless communities occupying the river does not appear to exist, there has been longstanding acknowledgement among government representatives, housing advocates, and environmental organizations that a sizable homeless population lives in and around the flood control channels. Community activists have

further suggested that for many homeless individuals, the concrete river was preferable to other encampments, due to its quiet, somewhat unregulated state. With public attention redirected to revitalizing the river, converting its concrete stretches into lush greenways and bike paths, and with the continued narrative among riverside residents that 'public safety' is one of the most urgent issues for public agencies to contend with, the plight of the homeless who occupy river channels is an ongoing concern and debate among those involved in river restoration.

There is no doubt that the continued enhancement and ecological rehabilitation of the L.A. River will place increasing pressure of displacement for homeless individuals and communities currently encamped in its banks. Given this likelihood of displacement, local government agencies will need to contend with the host of problems associated with homelessness in certain public spaces—the safety of impacted communities, shortages of resources, overcrowding in other homeless encampments, etc. Moreover, they must be able and willing to address the mounting concern from members of the public who regard homeless individuals as dangerous or threatening to 'normal citizens' who use the river (Moore 2012). Sarah Dooling, one of the first academic researchers to coin the term "ecological gentrification", described this phenomenon specifically in relation to the displacement of "the most vulnerable, the homeless" (2009, 621). While the issue of homeless displacement is beyond the scope of my analysis for this dissertation, I acknowledge that it must be discussed within the context of ecological gentrification and displacement of vulnerable populations produced through L.A. River restoration. While the term has since been applied to numerous contexts, Dooling's original use of the "ecological gentrification" should be a reminder that the removal of the homeless from areas that will be transformed to be more amenable to public consumption is a critical aspect of sanitizing and reconfiguring urban public space.

Consistent with the city's view that there are "both positive and negative" effects of gentrification (Jao 2014a), river proponents likewise express concern for gentrification-induced displacement while maintaining that neighborhoods receive substantive benefits when the river is improved. For these individuals, who represent public agencies and NGOs alike, gentrification via restoration remained a serious and pressing social matter, yet was still preferable to the alternative of *not* restoring the river at all. As one environmentalist shared with me, river greening did raise rents along riverside neighborhoods, and while "some things are hard to control, like property values, gentrification", he questioned the alternative of inaction, asking "what are you going to do—leave [the river] a dump so that everyone's rent stays cheap? Is that the trade-off?" (Interview #1, 2013). Meanwhile, a city representative observed that there were "concerns that really the city was just trying to develop along the river", but those concerns could be somewhat assuaged by the fact that the master plan's recommendations "doesn't necessarily mean you're going to get high rises along the river" (Interview #15, 2012).[144]

Even among those who directly opposed the tendency for river-adjacent neighborhoods to gentrify, the conviction that, ultimately, the movement's efforts would not allow gentrification to unfold everywhere, stood firm. According to one longtime river activist:

> Hopefully [restoring the river] will not turn into a gigantic gentrification project. That would be a tragedy. And I would have to say to the city's credit, if you look at the city of LA's master plan, that's certainly not the intention. [But] in the real life world of Los Angeles and Los Angeles politics, it will be unavoidable in certain areas. But hopefully it will not turn into that along the

[144] She later went on to say that in Los Angeles, "renters make up the bigger number [of residents] but they have less voice", recognizing that city policy often catered to homeowners and property owners (who "by default earn more money"), perhaps to the overall detriment of the interests of the renting population.

> entire river. […] Yeah, it's a tough one …There are particular areas, especially along central L.A., downtown—which is already gentrifying so fast—and Boyle Heights, where it's going to be pretty hard to get the city and the county to really impose restrictions to keep that from happening there. But I think the river is big enough and long enough that I actually don't think it's going to become a gentrification project everywhere (Interview #33, 2012).

As seen in her complicated and uncertain thoughts on the issue, her concern that areas such as Boyle Heights and the central city/NELA areas (which I discuss in later sections/chapters) are already gentrifying and could be accelerated by river restoration, was somewhat ameliorated by her hope that other neighborhoods would be greened but not gentrified. For another environmental and community activist, the gentrification issue was, likewise, inextricable with the ongoing developments at the L.A. River. He warned me that those who claimed that gentrification was properly "addressed" were incorrect, as "you can't stop it, but you can slow it down" by expanding rent control, affordable housing, and programs to promote home ownership (Interview #51, 2010).[145] These perspectives, held by a diverse range of pro-restoration organizations and entities, illustrate the complexity of the gentrification issue with regards to improvement plans for the L.A. River.

Indeed, the degree to which gentrification will unfold along select stretches of the Los Angeles River, and the projected number of residents displaced from impacted neighborhoods, is difficult to calculate at this point. There are, however, indicators that greening urban streams without implementing restrictions to development and measures to preserve affordable housing along these streams can and probably will result in gentrification. Converting brownfields into urban greenspaces, as well as daylighting urban streams and revitalizing postindustrial waterfronts, have resulted in neighborhood gentrification in other major cities around the world (Essoka 2010; Gould and Lewis 2012, 2017; Hagerman 2007; Lim et. al. 2013). One consultant who worked on the city's river master plan shared with me that during the course of conducting outreach efforts for the plan, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce expressed "interest in housing" as a corollary to river restoration. His statements, as well as his own questioning of whether "affordable housing or loft housing for people with money" would be promoted by the master plan, indicate the high interest among certain private sectors to capitalize on public investment into the river with housing development (Interview #18, 2013). Real estate data since the mid-2000s illustrate the rising interest among private developers in the (re)development potential of riverside properties is materialized in rising real estate values. According to data compiled by a real estate investment firm, the average price in 2010 for land along the L.A. River was $98 per square foot; that figure has risen consistently, with the average price sitting at $193 per square foot in 2015 (JLL 2015, 7).[146]

Furthermore, significant land uses changes in select neighborhoods undergoing urban greening and/or sustainable planning initiatives indicate their current gentrifying states. For example, in areas around Chinatown and Lincoln Heights, the completion of major environmental/sustainability projects, such as the creation of the L.A. State Historic Park

[145] He also discussed the related issue of displacement of homeless people from the river, sharing with me that he had spoken to many homeless individuals who lived in the river channel, and their awareness of the changes that could come their way as river projects accelerated. To his surprise, however, many of these individuals were also greatly concerned with ecological disturbance brought about by projects and increasing public access to the river.

[146] The JLL report provides a list of recent property acquisitions, available leases, and vacancies, some of which show riverfront industrial buildings near Northeast and Downtown L.A. being purchased for millions of dollars. One building was purchased for close to $3M by a locally famous artist who is known to acquire industrial warehouses, indicating the trend of these buildings being converted for creative, mixed-use uses.

(formerly known as the Cornfield) and the opening of a new MTA light rail line (the Gold Line) in 2004 contributed to the rise of residential development in a historically significant industrial district (City of LA DCP 2011; Lin 2008). According to the city's planning department, these projects triggered a worrying trend towards residentialization in these neighborhoods, a trend that could be exacerbated by future improvements made to the L.A. River. In one report to the planning commission, the planning department staff found that:

> Over the past 10 years, investments in transit infrastructure, the Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan (LARRMP), and the Los Angeles State Historic Park (LASHP) have increased redevelopment pressures in this area (City of LA DCP 2012, p.A1).

With current—and projected—public investment directed toward developing transit, providing greenspace, and creating all of the amenities outlined in river restoration initiatives, these once-working class neighborhoods in the urban core will likely become more desirable places to live. According to one city planner, the ecological improvements and provision of urban amenities combined with the relatively cheaper land of these neighborhoods to produce the redevelopment pressures. As she explained it, with "housing prices continuing to increase [in the mid-2000s], developers want[ed] to look for cheaper land. And here was some cheaper land that happened to be near transit and not far from downtown. So it was opportunity" (Interview #15, 2012).

Additionally, an industrial land use study completed by the city planning department and redevelopment agency in 2007 reached similar conclusions on why industrially-zoned districts were increasingly overrun with residential-commercial development. Documenting the dwindling amount of industrial land in the city, the report stated that:

> Because nearly all non-industrial uses can outbid the industrial users of the relatively inexpensive industrial land, industrial conversions are causing market speculation that is driving up industrial land costs and 'pricing out' industrial tenants […] When land owners and developers raise their price expectations based on a perception that land is marketable for residential, commercial or other non-industrial uses, property values will rise above an economically feasible level for typical industrial users. This real estate speculation 'prices out' industrial tenants. …[Also] industrial land owners may hold industrial zoned land without investing in industrial operations—with the expectation that more lucrative land uses would be allowed in the future. The lack of regular maintenance accelerates the obsolescence of the structures and perpetuates the cycle of disinvestment (City of LA DCP 2007, 20-22).

Not only did land speculation price out existing and potential industrial tenants and drive disinvestment in industrial districts, but did little to provide more affordable housing. According to the industrial land use report:

> Arguments have been made that allowing residential development on these less-expensive industrial lands will result in lower home prices and help ease the City's affordable housing crisis. Yet evidence to the contrary is clear… *Less than 3% of housing on industrial land since 2001 has been affordable—and that occurred only as a result of a requirement to do so and because financial assistance from the CRA/LA or other public entities was provided.* Despite claims that industrial land is needed to help assuage the City's affordable housing crisis, the fact is that industrial land typically sells for roughly one-third of the cost of residential land, while units sell at nearly the same rates as high-end condominiums in nearby South Park (23, original emphasis).

As urban scholars have noted, gentrifying neighborhoods not only displace lower-income residents, but also existing industrial land uses, which then create the conditions for further gentrification (Curran 2007; Zukin 1989).Therefore, the residentialization of these historically industrial areas near the L.A. River and the Cornfield state park carry the double negative

outcomes of pricing out both industrial tenants and lower-income residents, as market-price units are made available on greatly inflated land.

Chinatown clearly exemplifies this pattern of environmental gentrification. While temporarily set back by the recession caused by the 2008 housing crisis, the onslaught of new development and redevelopment projects in Chinatown, the rising number of tourist attractions, and the transit access to the Metro Gold Line signals the transformation of this once industrial and working-class neighborhood (Lin 2008). In 2013, a Wal-Mart "Neighborhood Market" took over vacant retail space in the neighborhood, generating strong protests from housing and community activists for the economic and social harm the mega-retail company would wreak upon the area (Hsu 2013). Though the market closed several years later due to Wal-Mart's mass closure of California-based stores, development projects in the last several years are unabatedly proposed and filed in Chinatown. In October 2016, a proposal for a 1.1 million square foot mixed-used development project was submitted to the city; the project would construct over 900 apartments and 21,000 square feet of commercial space on a narrow piece of property abutting the Cornfields state park (Sharp 2016). A month before that proposal was filed, a 237 apartment complex opened near the Gold Line station, of which only twenty percent is designated as affordable housing, and where monthly rents for units start at almost two-thousand dollars (Wattenhofer 2016). The architecture firm which designed this new complex is also proposing a mixed-use construction project itself; located only blocks from the state park, the residential and retail space complex will add over one hundred new apartments (Barragan 2017b).

Numerous other development projects await at various stages of the permitting process with the city, forecasting the transformation of the existing Chinatown landscape with each new dense, mixed-use, and high-rise construction project completed (for list of projects, see Barragan and Chandler 2017). With the official opening of the Los Angeles State Historic Park in 2017, real estate value in the neighborhood is expected to rise, as demand for commercial and residential space next to a desirable urban environmental amenity could increase. This could threaten the existing industrial uses in surrounding properties as well as residents no longer able to afford the high land values in the flourishing historic neighborhood.[147]

Boyle Heights is another example of how river revitalization projects can exacerbate an already gentrifying neighborhood. Located on the east side of the Los Angeles River, across from the notoriously redeveloped and revitalized Arts District, Boyle Heights has long been known as a Mexican American enclave, a tightly-knit neighborhood that formed as one of the few places where Mexican residents could settle in a racially segregated city. Over the past decade, gentrification has unfolded in this vibrant yet underserved neighborhood, which is increasingly becoming a desirable place to live due to its proximity to downtown, relatively low housing prices, and reputation as a "hip" and culturally "authentic" neighborhood (Nazaryan 2017). However, in the past few years, the conflict over gentrification—namely, the influx of artists, studios, and gallery spaces—has become acrimonious, with community activists decrying the rising rents and "yuppification" of the neighborhood (Delgadillo 2017; Mejia and Saldivar 2016; Miranda 2016). Given this volatile place-based struggle over the culture and socioeconomic makeup of Boyle Heights, there is little doubt that a restored, revitalized Los

[147] Other key informants confirmed that gentrification in Chinatown was underway. One longtime environmental activist and writer described the gentrifying of the neighborhoods surrounding the Cornfields state park; meanwhile, a representative of a state environmental agency who had worked in Chinatown for almost a decade, also concluded that areas around the park were undergoing gentrification, leading to a different group of stakeholders that used the park and attended meetings for its future design (Interview #33, 2012; #54, 2013).

Angeles River will intensify gentrification trends. In particular, the city's plan to construct a new Sixth Street Bridge—which spans the Los Angeles River to connect the Arts District to East Los Angeles neighborhoods—comes with massively ambitious plans for constructing a complex of parks, bike paths, public art spaces, and pedestrian walkways around the much celebrated viaduct (City of LA BOE 2017) (*Figure 4.2*). The proposed 12-acre urban feature, known as the Sixth Street Park, Arts, River, and Connectivity Improvements Project, will bring a host of environmentally-friendly amenities to Boyle Heights. These projects, while beneficial to building safer, more sustainable, and transit-oriented neighborhood spaces, could also compound gentrification already underway in Boyle Heights (Daniel 2016).

Figure 4.2. Industrial land uses along the L.A. River at the Sixth Street Bridge. (Source: Photo taken by author.)

Another major indicator of the river's role in gentrifying neighborhoods is the rise of real estate transactions after the release of the Army Corps' ARBOR Study. With the announcement that the city and federal agency both endorsed a restoration plan with a $1B price tag, there was a documented rise in property exchange along certain stretches of the river. While I will be discussing this issue in greater detail in Chapter Six, it is worthwhile to note here the intensified real estate activity observed and documented within one particular neighborhood in the ARBOR study area. Recently, a local architecture firm documented that of the thirty riverfront properties sold in the riverside neighborhood of Elysian Valley, fifteen of those property exchanges occurred during the year after the ARBOR report's release (Lubbell 2014). In addition, the recent spate of real estate transactions—both along the ARBOR Study area and in other riverfront neighborhoods—have intensified the public and policy-related discussion around gentrification, re-centering the issue within narratives of the river's promising future. In particular, media attention and coverage of environmental gentrification increased since the latter-half of 2013.

And while gentrification is not a new topic of media discussion/coverage, the uptick in property exchange and land speculation prompted a direct front-and-center handling of gentrification by various news outlets. Headlines for various media outlets provocatively ask "How Will L.A. Mitigate Gentrification on a Beautified LA River?" (Barragan 2014) and "The L.A. River: A Cautionary Tale for Gentrification?" (Kramer 2016), while others boldly conclude "How the Elite Have Co-Opted the Future of the LA River" (Kudler 2016) and "L.A. River Becomes a Hot Property" ("LA River becomes" 2014). Another recent article, after noting the spate of real estate transactions proliferating on the riverside, gravely concludes that: "The revitalization of the LA's neglected riverfront has gone from social-justice crusade to money-soaked land grab" (Kreitner 2016). Meanwhile, the *Los Angeles Times*, through several articles, has followed the rising real estate plans and activities along the river, along with the intensifying concerns of various organizations, environmental groups, and riverside communities over what appear to be patterns signaling environmental gentrification (Sagahun and Saillat 2014; Zahniser 2015; Logan 2015; Hawthorne 2016). This recent surge of news coverage hones in on the disconcerting land use, demographic, and real estate patterns indicative of gentrification spurred on by revalorization of urban land via public investment into environmental/urban sustainability projects, patterns more acutely observed in particular underserved neighborhoods (Stodola 2016). While the media's reinsertion of this issue could heighten agencies' consideration of social and environmental justice ramifications of restoration agendas, there does not appear to be a strong commitment by the city towards actively mitigating the detrimental social effects of gentrification (Hawthorne 2016; Jao 2014a).

Ultimately, the likelihood of river restoration projects to create and/or accelerate environmental gentrification, combined with the lack of specific programs/measures to alleviate the negative impacts of gentrification, reveal the limitations of the L.A. River sustainability agenda to substantively promote environmentally justice. Green and sustainable urban policies, increasingly adopted by the local state to encourage economic growth in a manner consistent with principles of environmental protection, often fail to serve the equitable spatialization of these urban places (Pearsall and Pierce 2010; Warner 2002). The incorporation of environmental justice language to frame the issue of parks and urban greenspace are also likely to confine notions of EJ, as keeping the focus on greenspace achievement obscures other processes which contribute to injustice. Celebrating specific parks, such as the Rio de los Angeles State Park or the South Los Angeles Wetlands, as environmental justice achievements can place too much emphasis on single victories; meanwhile, according to Pulido et. al., "focusing so heavily on specific victories can potentially obscure the larger structural dynamics that systematically oppress vulnerable communities" (2016, 14). Parks and greenspace alone, without attending to the larger structural dynamics of urban segregation, real estate speculation, and unfair housing markets, no longer contribute to more just environmental places, but rather become "green LULUs" in their potential to drive gentrification and displacement (Anguelovski 2016b). What is initially regarded as an environmental good/benefit to be redistributed, when disconnected from the processes driving urban/spatial change, can paradoxically become harmful to vulnerable communities and exacerbate spatial injustices.

In the case of green gentrification, placing the central focus on creating discrete urban parks as environmental justice achievements may conceal the "structural dynamics" of capital accumulation through urban land valuation that expose communities to new injustices. The set of sustainability initiatives attached to the L.A. River are poised to create unjust spatial relations through gentrified neighborhoods. According to Gandy, the looming threat of environmental

gentrification due to the restoration of L.A.'s urban waterways calls for a continued addressing of environmental justice through policy and activism: "The specter of 'ecological gentrification' lurking behind the greening of Los Angeles suggests that the arguments for environmental justice, first articulated in the 1980s, remain vitally relevant" (2014, 183). This "lurking specter", I contend, is all the more insidious as this form of environmental injustice gets masked in the appealing discourse of sustainable urban development, livability, and "green" cities (Hall and Stern 2014; Vormann 2015b). This concept and discourse of urban sustainability has come to "represent an archetypal postpolitical construct" that:

> simultaneously opens up opportunities for scientists and experts to devise technocratic solutions to urban problems; provides a political platform for a broad range of social and environmental groups to find common purpose; enables businesses to publicly showcase their social responsibility credentials; and allows governments and policy makers to establish new grounds for the construction of partnerships and consensus-based forms of politics at multiple scales (Raco and Lin 2012, 195-6).

Despite, or perhaps due to, the desirability of sustainably planned and managed cities, the post-political aspect of the discourse of urban sustainability sets about perpetuating "paradoxical" urban changes, including environmental gentrification (Checker 2011). With newly greened urban locales boasting the reversal of previous patterns of unsustainable urban practices, critical engagement of possible adverse outcomes are brushed aside as overly conflict-ridden or uncooperative.

CONCLUSION: CAN THE LOS ANGELES RIVER PROMOTE "JUST SUSTAINABILITIES"?

As the activism to restore the Los Angeles River solidified throughout the past three decades, the river rose to prominence as a powerful symbol of the hope for a greener, more sustainable Los Angeles. This chapter demonstrates how the environmental movement behind restoration provided opportunities for the promotion of environmental justice, as the river coalition collaborated with EJ-oriented organizations as well as incorporated EJ language and issues into the movement's efforts. In particular, activists' objective of greening the L.A. River, of finally recapturing the lost Eden of the aborted 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew plan, dovetailed with social and environmental justice efforts that were calling attention to the polluted conditions of underserved neighborhoods located along the river. Activists and community leaders operating from differing perspectives on how and why urban environmental change should occur now found common ground in advocating for reduced hardscapes and more parkspace throughout the city. River restoration could not only improve water quality, mitigate urban flooding, and create wildlife habitat, but it now explicitly carried the social benefit of equitably distributing parks/greenspace and even fostering environmental stewardship among diverse youth communities. As a result, both environmentalists and environmental justice activists achieved significant victories in key land use conflicts in several disadvantaged neighborhoods, creating much needed parks in sites originally slated for industrial development. Additionally, the issue of urban greening, long a major goal of the river movement, became reframed as not only a matter of ecological rehabilitation and sustainably-sound urban design, but also one of social and environmental justice—of alleviating the detrimental environmental conditions of lower-income communities of color.

From a purely distributive standpoint, the creation of parks in underserved riverside neighborhoods appears a beneficial outcome, a substantive advancement of the goals of

environmental justice. However, the issue of urban greening proves to be much more complex, as it represents more than simply and unequivocally bringing in environmental benefits to a place. When considered from a critical urban political ecology perspective, the creation of parks and the greening of urban waterways unfold amidst a host of political-economic processes guided by the logic of capitalist spatial development. So while a more equitable distribution of environmental benefits may result from urban greening programs, urban places are neither static nor divorced from these wider processes, and thereby could become susceptible to new rounds of uneven development that result in renewed spatial injustices. Indeed, as I argue in the latter half of the chapter, 'green', eco-improvement projects may render certain neighborhoods as better positioned for new/renewed accumulation strategies, thereby intensifying the motions of the green growth machine and amplifying the conflict between the use and exchange value of land. The result could be environmental gentrification, another manifestation of environmental injustice now cloaked in the depoliticized discourse of sustainable urban development. As "green" and "eco-friendly" elements are increasingly enrolled into urban growth strategies and facilitated by an entrepreneurial local state, the agenda to restore the L.A. River—without strong policy intervention—could potentially exacerbate environmental gentrification all throughout the watershed. Given this disconcerting trend, a distributive understanding of environmental justice is incapable of engaging with the conundrum of "green" LULUs. Environmental justice must account for the dynamic, networked, and particularly situated nature of urban places, and those who purport to advance its objectives must engage in the messy politics at play in these places. This is explored in the next two chapters, which present specific case studies to examine the ways in which improvement of the L.A. River occurs upon a terrain complicated by political-economic forces, power relations, place identities, and historical narratives, and how struggles for environmental justice grapple with them.

CHAPTER FIVE
"EVERYBODY'S L.A. RIVER": RECOGNITION, PARTICIPATION, AND THE RACIAL POLITICS OF GREENING THE WATERSHED

INTRODUCTION AND MAIN ARGUMENT

This chapter examines the specific ways in which environmental justice objectives and racial politics play out within the broader environmental movement of restoration of the L.A. River. As the landscape of the watershed is fraught with injustices due to the historical geography of Los Angeles, restoration and other urban sustainability measures associated with the river unfold upon highly politicized terrain. In particular, because these riverside landscapes carry legacies of racialized and racist spatial formation, which contributed to both the production of unequal urban environments *and* specific place-based community identities, the project of restoring the river in these areas is anything but a straightforwardly environmental one. I present two case studies to illustrate the different ways in which the racialized politics of environmental justice and urban sustainability intersect at the locus of the L.A. River watershed, and in doing so argue that the limited conceptualizations of what environmental justice *is* and what it necessarily *entails* hamper the meaningful engagement and substantive advancement of it by river advocates/agendas. By examining the environmental justice politics unfolding within the agenda of river restoration, I also demonstrate the diversity of environmental subjects engaged in these politics in Los Angeles, and highlight the ways in which racially-inflected and place-based difference operate in the environmentalism of urban watershed sustainability.[148]

As presented in the previous chapter, environmental activism around the L.A. River watershed began to noticeably intersect with environmental justice issues and advocates in the latter half of the 1990s, through the conjoining of community activists seeking cleaner neighborhoods and environmental/river activists continuing to advocate for greenways along the river. Since the coalescing of these interests in the late-90s and early-2000s, the political agenda of the Los Angeles River has retained an explicit environmental justice component. River advocates and allies, both from NGOs and government agencies, have adopted environmental justice perspectives and rhetoric as one of the justifications for why the channelized fifty-one miles of the river must be greened, restored, revitalized. According to these commonly-presented arguments, urban greening through restored streams, retrofitted infrastructure, and sustainably managed watersheds foster neighborhood improvement in addition to advancing ecological health and 'green' economic growth. To the L.A. River movement's credit, their enthusiastic incorporation of environmental justice discourses and even political strategies (such as lawsuits, coalition building) into their arsenal of efforts illustrates the movement's commitment to increasing equitable distribution of greenspace/parkspace by pushing for environmental improvement projects in underserved and marginalized neighborhoods. This was, and continues to be, a significant development within the environmental politics associated with river restoration and watershed sustainability. And given the environmental injustices prevalent in Los

[148] By focusing on race as the category around which social difference is constructed and privilege is conferred, I do not mean to ignore other axes of difference (i.e. gender, age, class, sexuality) or argue that race is the more prominent or determining category at work; nor do I intend to ignore the intersectionality of race with these other categories, which obviously shape the politics of difference present in Los Angeles. However, through a combination of my limitations during my fieldwork (time, resources, access to different informants), the subtle yet persistent ways in which racial identity and racialization came to the forefront of issues through conducting of fieldwork, and my intentional privileging of race as *one* of the lenses by which to examine the politics of difference, the analytical focus of this chapter remains firmly rooted in race. In doing so, I hope to address the concerning lack of explicit analyses and/or considerations of race and racial politics within accounts of the Los Angeles River.

Angeles County—and throughout the greater L.A. metropolitan area—and considering how many communities stand to be impacted by improvements within the largest watershed of the region, the enrollment of environmental justice rhetoric, concerns, and actors into the L.A. River agenda provides opportunities for establishing cleaner, more equitable neighborhoods.

However, despite the inroads achieved by the L.A. River restoration movement to address matters of equity in the implementation of its agenda, I argue that the movement's efforts currently remain unable to substantively incorporate environmental justice concerns and facilitate in addressing those concerns. In other words, the urban sustainability agenda around the L.A. River operates in a manner that stymies a more integral encompassing and effective implementation of environmental justice objectives. The central reason for this still somewhat limited articulation of the two agendas, I argue, is the adoption, among many within the restoration/sustainability group, of a limited conceptualization of what environmental justice is and how it should be carried out. For many actors working on river restoration and watershed-based urban sustainability, their understanding of what constitutes environmental justice remains predominantly associated with conceptualizations of distributive justice. Whether intentionally or due to a lack of time, energy, education, and/or resources, those who push for environmental rehabilitation and revitalization of the L.A. River watershed operate under the idea that environmental justice is primarily achieved through the equitable distribution of environmental harms and benefits, a matter solely concerned with *what* land uses are placed *where*.

Therefore, to many of these advocates and activists, of which all if not the majority sincerely do want to undo environmental injustices through urban sustainability initiatives, justice is conflated with distributive justice, or else conceived of as mostly pertaining to matters of distribution. However, as those in the environmental justice literature and movement have argued, justice encompasses more than equitable distributions of environmental benefits and harms—it includes the recognition that places and communities are marginalized, Othered, and degraded, as well as the active combating of procedural exclusion that leaves certain populations and/or communities outside the arena of decision- and policy-making (Holifield et. al. 2009; Schlosberg 2007; Walker 2009a). Though land use distribution *is* a critical aspect of environmental justice, focusing entirely on the distributive justice aspects precludes the other modes of exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination which contribute to spatial separation and environmental degradation; it also falls into the danger of viewing urban space as static, bounded, and fixed in time and place. Approaching injustice as ultimately and singularly solved by ensuring a fair and equal distribution of harmful/beneficial land uses, in the end, disregards or fails to consider that spatialization is an ongoing process, whereby environments are shaped and reshaped continuously through the underlying forces of capitalist urbanization that produce uneven development at different scales (Boone 2008; Forster 1993; Harvey 1989b, 1996; Kurtz 2003). Moreover, framing environmental justice as a matter of land use distribution reduces this diverse and complex political movement around a single issue, which does not reflect the multidimensional nature of injustice many communities face (Schlosberg 2013).

Understanding environmental justice as an agenda that conceives of justice as an ongoing process that goes beyond matters of distribution requires adopting a Lefebvrian approach to the dynamic, material-discursive, and multidimensional nature of space (Lefebvre 1996; Merrifield 1993b). Specifically, handling certain environments as spatialized unequal social relations necessitates understanding the role that place formation—namely, the racialized histories, structural forces, narratives, and identities that shape the material and discursive landscape of the city—plays in the unfolding of that political-cultural-spatial process (Pierce and Martin 2015).

Recognizing the broader forces that produce specific places as dispossessed and degraded, and intentionally exclude specific disempowered communities/parties from participating in how those places are produced entails recognition of the role that race and racialized projects play in spatial production (Lipsitz 2007; Pulido 2000). As such, an environmental justice approach to urban sustainability must grapple with the deeply rooted histories of racialized spatial production and active place-making strategies of inhabitants throughout Los Angeles. In L.A., as in many other U.S. cities, the manifestation of racial projects in specific spatial configurations produced the injustices of environmental racism that communities have been battling since before the creation of these terms/labels; the powerful legacies of these racialized histories are embedded within the material and imagined configurations of city spaces and continue to influence the politics of environmental change.

Therefore, projects geared toward urban environmental transformation are inextricably caught up in the realities of racialized spatialization in Los Angeles, and improving the spaces of everyday lives cannot be removed from recognizing and engaging with the workings of race, power, and inequality. The restoration movement's focus on the single issue of greenspace distribution (or transit infrastructure or recreational amenities) is an inadequate engagement of the underlying racial politics that materially and discursively/symbolically shape places and the identities rooted in those places. To recognize and combat environmental injustice is to acknowledge that the city's geographic history was and continues to be shaped by racial discrimination, the institutional oppression and marginalization of people of color (and also, low-income/poorer communities), as well as the racialized nature of dominant discourses around environmental activism, conservation, scientific knowledge, and the nature/culture divide. If environmental justice is conceptualized in this way, then it can be operationalized in restoration projects and environmental agendas to do several things: privilege the lived and embodied experiences of marginalized communities, identify the specific structural forces that endanger their health/wellbeing, create policies and measures that can begin to address these forces, and ensure the expanded inclusion of impacted communities within decision-making spaces. It is through a multi-pronged approach to just sustainability that the multiple dimensions of maldistribution, misrecognition, and procedural exclusion are targeted.

My arguments for this chapter are supported by the presentation of two case studies of racialized environmental justice politics. In both of these cases, there was concerted community effort which led to the concatenation of environmental justice objectives with the restoration and sustainability agenda unfolding around the L.A. River. I explore how these political articulations were achieved, particularly how activists who were working around environmental justice issues were able to politically and discursively connect with the activism and policy-work around restoring the L.A. River. In both of these cases, organizations that were not traditionally categorized as 'environmental' were able to participate in projects and/or policies that could improve neighborhood environmental conditions through restoration of an urban waterway. These organizations were able to discursively or politically connect with the opportunities made possible or facilitated by the broader L.A. River watershed agenda, such as gaining funding or technical knowledge or political support. Not only gleaning visibility and legitimacy through association with the urban sustainability initiative that the L.A. River has become, these organizations leveraged their specific identities and place-based experiences in order to navigate the political terrain of advancing their urban environmental agendas. However, the ways in which this happened, and the outcomes produced by these momentary concatenations were quite different, and ultimately, the success by which EJ was actually able to be carried out differed

substantially as well. This was due to the critical issue of how specific issues were framed, who was leading the charge, and what kind of support was made available to these different sets of actors. In presenting these cases, I am not attempting a straightforward comparative analysis of the two; the circumstances surrounding each are too distinct for any such comparisons to be especially useful or illuminating. Rather, I utilize these two cases as ways to specifically illustrate how environmental justice objectives are at once carried out *and* constrained by the implementation of sustainable watershed management around the Los Angeles River.

My first case study centers on the Chinatown Yard Alliance and the *Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio* coalitions. These organizations formed in response to a land use conflict over a deindustrialized site in central L.A. city, and were responsible for the injection of environmental justice concerns within the more traditional environmental agenda of L.A. River restoration. Community and social justice groups collaborated with environmental organizations, as both sets of actors wanted former railyards near downtown to be converted into parks and greenspace. Because they were able to successfully leverage the argument of urban greenspace as conferring multiple benefits, this coalition defeated a proposal for warehouse development in a site surrounded by lower-income and nonwhite residents. Despite this community victory, I argue that the planning process since has been has been a failure to adequately include community groups into participatory procedures, resulting in feelings of exclusion and disempowerment. Conflicts over what urban greenspace should be used for, by whom, and how that should come about illuminate the critical role that procedural justice plays in achieving EJ objectives.

The second case study focuses on the neighborhood of Pacoima and how a community-based environmental justice organization attempts to improve the environmental conditions of this highly polluted and historically marginalized neighborhood. I present one way in which the community works to bring sustainability to the neighborhood, which is creating a greenway along the channelized Pacoima Wash, a tributary of the L.A. River. While revitalizing the Wash carries the promise of multiple ecological and social benefits, the project is rooted in an environmental justice framework that emphasizes public health, education, and community development. Though the Pacoima Wash greening effort was community generated and included strong community participation, the project has stalled due to the lack of strong political infrastructure, resulting in the community's exclusion from the opportunities and networks for restoration that exist for the mainstem river itself. For both of these cases, I examine the complex politics of identity, race, and history that are embedded within these places and how they continue to inform the process by which environmental justice is both promoted and constrained. Rather than serving as a supplementary or secondary factor in how environmental justice and river restoration facilitate one another, these racial dynamics should be central to pushing for an urban sustainability around watershed restoration that advances goals of equity, inclusion, and justice. I now turn to a brief discussion of the literature on critical race and space studies, in order to highlight the complexities and meanings embedded within the racial dynamics of place.

LITERATURE REVIEW: A BRIEF HISTORY OF RACIALIZED SPATIALIZATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE IN LOS ANGELES

The arguments presented in this chapter draw from the position that race plays a major role in the spatialization of social relations. In particular, I draw from scholarship within the fields of critical geography, anthropology, and urban studies which operate from the premise that the processes by which space is produced and reproduced are deeply racialized (Anderson 1988;

Brahinsky et. al. 2014; Kobayashi and Peake 2000; Lipsitz 2007; Moore 2005, 2008; Neely and Samura 2011; Pulido 2000, 2002). Examining the "racialization of space and spatialization of race" (Lipsitz 2007) involves acknowledging how the racial projects underlying the socio-historical process of racial formation operate not only upon essentialized bodies but also upon differentiated spaces (Omi and Winant 1994). Though these racial projects continue to work upon the site of the body (as well as the biological markers associated with differently-classified bodies), they also function through the formation of places, landscapes, and territories, both material and imagined.[149] As Kobayashi (2004, 82-83) argues, "the process of racialization is fundamentally spatialized", thus requiring an understanding of "spatiality as the form of human relationship, established through the construction of distance as difference."[150] Distance—whether as physical distance between segregated communities or symbolic distance manifest through varying conditions/meanings/associations—is therefore integral to the construction of social difference, the marking of the "Other" as that which is essentially foreign, unknowable, and less than (Goldberg 1993). And the construction of racial difference, naturalized through signifying markers and manifest through spatial relationships, is fundamentally tied to the preservation and justification of inequality among groups sorted into hierarchies. Therefore, racial Othering invokes and preserves systems of unequal power and privilege, expressed through specific spatial configurations; according to Moore et. al., "racial logic sustains vast landscapes of inclusion and exclusion" (2003, 28).

The history of U.S. cities provides countless examples of how this racial logic operates in producing uneven spaces, illustrating again and again how tightly geographies, cultural ideologies, and systems of power are bound together. Of course, "a race-space construct operates in many other contexts" (Ford 1992, 117), both geographically and historically; however, urbanization unfolds in particular ways that contribute to racial formations specific to the U.S. Though varying in its specific trajectories of growth and development, we see in the formation of these diverse conurbations the broadly cohesive patterns of urban development (such as housing, transportation, resource distribution, industrialization) which create racialized identities partly through the spatial organization of differently categorized populations (Avila and Rose 2009; Freund 2003; Goldberg 1993; Gotham 2000; Hurley 1995; Massey and Denton 1993). For example, the changes in urban housing, especially after the second World War, reflect, and in turn give rise to, the preservation and protection of a white identity through the distancing of suburban communities from the inner city; therefore, whiteness as a constructed racial category—and one that enjoyed the privileged status—was demarcated not only through the physical *separation* of places but also the *type* of place inhabited (Avila 2004; Barraclough 2011). This racialized spatial order of U.S. cities, in the last several decades, has undergone significant shifts with widespread gentrification of the urban core, thus demonstrating that race-

[149] The role of biological markers and scientific explanations, of course, are no longer the dominant modes by which racial categories are identified and maintained (Omi and Winant 1994). Ford (1992, 130) states that, "as racial demarcation has become increasingly difficult to maintain and justify through means such as science and biology, the maintaining technologies of race have become primarily economic and spatial." However, the practice of locating racial difference, or essence, upon biological indicators, continues to persist, albeit through subtler and more sophisticated tools, languages, and practices.

[150] Kobayashi draws from analyses of space by Jean Paul Satre and Edward Said to determine that the process of "Othering" immediately takes on a spatial dimension, and that "by understanding spatiality as the form of human relationship, one that depends upon distance as a relative indicator of power and the capacity to dehumanize the Other, we understand that it is only through such distance that the violation of and violence upon the body of the Other is possible" (2004, 87). Her discussion of Satre's and Said's writings, and those who were influenced by them, directly applies to the racial ideologies behind the imperial and colonial conquest of non-European nations, but the issue of difference, distance, and the Other apply to the U.S. context as well.

space configurations of cities are not static or permanently fixed, but rather ever changing (Smith 1996).

Los Angeles, like other U.S. cities, was shaped through patterns of urbanization that was both racist and racialized, resulting in uneven development and egregious environmental injustices. According to urban historian Greg Hise, inspecting the "topography of place" of Los Angeles, or the "literal and figural annotation of the material city" reveals how it also "appears to have been a topography of race" (2004, 550). The period of metropolitan growth after U.S. annexation saw the loss of land of *Californios* through legal and financial mechanisms of dispossession (McWilliams 1946; Pitt 1966). With the construction of railroads, and the subsequent influx of Anglo-American immigrants, the once vast tracts of the ranchos were subdivided and transformed into agricultural fields, industrial facilities, and residential tracts (Almaguer 1994; Fogelson 1967). During these decades of intensified industrialization, residential development, and urbanization throughout the L.A. County area, housing policies and institutions executed racist practices that segregated neighborhoods by race, nationality, and class. Through measures such as racially restrictive covenants, discriminatory banking and home loan policies, blockbusting, and even enforcement of zoning laws, nonwhite residents encountered limitations as to which neighborhoods they could move into and reside within (Barraclough 2011; Davis 1990; Sides 2003). Once mechanisms for *de jure* segregation were prohibited (such as racial zoning, restrictive covenants, and race-based home loan programs), new urban policies under the guise of reducing "blight"—such as housing redevelopment and freeway construction—combined with existing policy that obfuscated its racial agendas (such as redlining and zoning), produced and perpetuated race- and class-based segregation among neighborhoods (Avila 2004; Avila and Rose 2009; Dymski and Veitch 1996; Parson 1982). Racist and racialized urban policies and programs, therefore, produced landscapes of segregation, with a broad pattern (by the 1980s) of African Americans living in southern portions of the city, Anglo Americans in the San Fernando Valley and the western areas, and Latinos living in the central and eastern portions of the city, as well as in southeastern areas of L.A. County (Acuña 1984; Hise 2007; Modarres 1998; Sanchez 1993; Sides 2003; Wild 2005). This spatial segregation and economic marginalization is, of course, connected to cultural dispossession, political disempowerment, and environmental degradation as well, with segregated communities facing poverty/lower employment opportunities, urban services, and access to environmental amenities (Massey and Denton 1993; Valle and Torres 2000). Therefore, racist and racialized urban development was—and continues to be—an integral spatial component in the formation of L.A. as a modern metropolitan area; as a result, its legacy continues to exert its presence in contemporary settings and situations (Charles 2006).

One of the most powerful outcomes and lasting legacies of segregation and racialized spatialization in Los Angeles is the production of environmental racism and environmental injustice throughout the region. The city, county, and metropolitan region of Los Angeles all strongly exhibit the inequitable distribution of harmful land uses, facilities, and sources of environmental contamination, which disproportionately exposes low-income communities of color to hazardous pollutants. As histories of the urbanization in L.A. reveal, these patterns of industrialization, transportation infrastructure, and residential segregation concentrated sources of industrial pollution within specific areas, thus producing landscapes of greater contaminant exposure, or "riskscapes", for poorer communities of color (Boone and Modarres 1999; Morello-Frosch and Lopez 2006; Pulido et. al. 1996; Pulido 2000). These produced riskscapes are marked by the concentrated presence of facilities and infrastructures produce air pollution, water

pollution, exposure to hazardous materials, and are often compounded by the lack of access to environmental and urban amenities. Quantitative and ethnographic analyses of environmental injustice in L.A. alike show how communities of lower-income and nonwhite residents live with disproportionate exposure to air pollution (Boer et. al.. 1997; Lejano and Iseki 2001; Morello-Frosch et. al. 2001, 2002; Pastor et. al. 2005; Pulido et. al. 1996; Sadd et. al. 1999). Communities composed of lower-income residents of color also tend to live closer to hazardous facilities, such as incinerators, waste facilities, railyards, and other polluting industrial land uses (Morello-Frosch et. al. 2002; Pulido 2000, Pulido et. al. 1996). They also, as discussed in the previous chapter, have less access to environmental benefits and resources, such as greenspace, (uncongested) parks, recreational facilities, and even funding for the maintenance/upkeep of these beneficial spaces (Sister et. al. 2010; Wolch et. al. 2005). As a cumulative outcome of these inequitable environmental conditions, poorer, lower-income, and nonwhite residents in Los Angeles bear the burden of exposure to these spatial injustices while being less likely to gain economic opportunities to move to healthier, more livable neighborhoods.

Examining the racialization of space in the context of cities, and exploring how it contributes to urban environmental injustices, also require examining these produced environments as landscapes imbricated with social and symbolic meaning. The field of critical cultural geography, in particular, produces insightful analyses of social-spatial articulations that position landscapes as objects of geographic inquiry, not only as historically- and geographically-specific configurations of physical objects, but also as cultural artifacts that signify and generate meaning (Barnes and Duncan 2013; Cosgrove 1993; Mitchell 1996). Approaching landscapes in this manner, of acknowledging their materiality as well as their "symbolic qualities" that "produce and sustain social meaning", is useful in elucidating the entangled socio-spatial processes that produce environments (Cosgrove and Jackson 1987, 96). Landscapes are, therefore, "ineluctably dialectic" in that they "do not just reflect but also incorporate and reify social processes working at a range of scales", and furthermore are not only the "*representation* of social relations, but also a *result* of them" (Mitchell 2002, 383, 385). As racialized social relations are reinforced, resisted, and transformed through the production urban space, viewing these spaces through the lens of landscape-as-text provides insight into the social practices and cultural meanings embedded in the racialization process. Because "cultural landscapes are not innocent" since "racial processes take place and racial categories get made, in part, through cultural landscapes", the need to unpack the racialized urban landscape of U.S. cities allows for the exhumation of the values, ideas, and narratives concerning race that become reflected and reified through the formation of urban places (Schein 2006, 5,6).

Furthermore, deconstructing cultural landscapes as products of socio-spatial processes and generators of cultural meaning reveal how interrelated ideas of race and nature play out in the formation of different urban environments. Increasingly, critical race and critical nature studies elucidate how powerful narratives and symbols of race and nature combine in complex ways to shape landscapes that are lived, perceived, and represented in particular ways (Elder et. al. 1998; Outka 2008; Schein 2006). For example, in the U.S., deep-rooted ideologies of undisturbed nature and racial difference come together in the landscape of wilderness to represent purity of both a White, "native" population and untrammeled Nature (Baldwin 2009; Braun 2003; Cosgrove 1995; DeLuca and Demo 2001; Finney 2014; Hickcox 2007; Kosek 2003). These racially pure and wholly natural landscapes are constructed in contrast to that which is impure, contaminated, and chaotic, often embodied as inner city landscapes that not only represent a lost or fallen nature, but also racial pollution through the concentration of

nonwhite bodies (Braun 2003; Linke 2014; Smith 1990). Based on these persisting and powerful ideologies that give meaning to natural versus unnatural landscapes, urban space is scripted and represented as sites of man-made artifice (which is dirty, polluted, unhealthy) as well as re-naturalized as a new type of "frontier" (or the "urban jungle") teeming with savagery and uncivilized populations in need of taming (Safransky 2014). Therefore, the urban landscape possesses not only physical components that characterize its urban-ness, but also a host of meanings related to racial and ecological difference; in particular, the urban landscape which is perceived to be and represented as primarily inhabited by nonwhite bodies becomes laden with racialized ideas of unruliness, impurity, and less-than-human inhabitants.

In Los Angeles, the racialization of urban space included imparting cultural meanings upon the city's landscapes. While processes of uneven development produced urban spaces marked by blatant inequality, ideas of racial purity and natural landscapes shaped those processes and, in turn, became reinforced by them. Ideologies of Manifest Destiny and the conquest of Nature largely drove the remaking of landscape in Los Angeles, as the settlement of the region by Anglo-American occupants was guided by notions of the "frontier", whereupon white American identity was forged through the white settlers' taming of a rugged natural wilderness; white supremacy ensured that savagery found in Nature succumbed to the fiat of Western civilization (Krieger 1986). Then, as industrialization and urbanization transformed the landscape of the Southland, and as the state subsidization of suburbanization grew, whiteness once again became associated with nature and natural landscapes, this time in the form of greener suburban enclaves. As suburbs became bastions of whiteness, they were discursively and symbolically constructed as closer to an unsullied Nature unlike the urban jungle that was the (post)industrial core (Barraclough 2011; Duncan and Duncan 2003; McClung 2000). Whiteness and (a somewhat tamed, digestible) wilderness were conflated once more through the preservation of both in the suburbs; meanwhile the inner city landscape served as the embodiment of the Other, through its perceived racial pollution, economic decline, and environmental degradation. These white urban spaces, or "landscapes of desire" (McClung 2000) reinforced the conflating of white identity and preservation of nature, as discourses of conservation/environmental protection were even utilized in particular instances to preserve racially exclusionary spaces. Interrelated meanings behind race and nature continue to be useful in the spatialization of racialized social relations, as for certain communities, "environmentalism is a congenial discourse to the extent that it is congruent with a vision of eternally rising property values in secure bastions of white privilege" (Davis 1990, 159).

Moreover, the L.A. River itself played a role in the racialization of urban space, whether it was through the early association with deviant, unsanitary, and Othered inhabitants or a manifestation of segregation as it its concrete channels physically separated communities marked by different racial and socioeconomic makeup. To put it more simply, the Los Angeles River is also racialized space. At one level, the L.A. River is an informal geographic marker that separates west and central L.A. with the ambiguously territorialized area known as East Los Angeles; the latter has historically been considered a *barrio*, an enclave for Latinos faced with limited economic and residential opportunities (Deverell 2004; Hise 2007; Pulido et. al. 1996).[151]

[151] The label of "East Los Angeles" is a complicated one. There is, officially, an unincorporated area within Los Angeles County formally called "East L.A.". However, areas east of the L.A. River are also commonly referred to as "East L.A.", such as the neighborhood of Boyle Heights. This geographic label can be used to signify different areas at different times, and among different subpopulations. Where exactly "East L.A." is, and what areas fall under that title, therefore, is apt to change and is often contested. For one discussion on the contested nature of the title of "East L.A.", see Bermudez 2009.

West and East Los Angeles, therefore, despite the actual demographics, are relationally-constructed, partially-imagined racialized urban places, as the former is considered a bastion of white residents, and the latter a once-slum populated by Chicanos and other Latino residents. According to Hise (2004), early officials of L.A.:

> drew distinctions between the west and east sides of the river…and this dichotomy has been foundational for thinking about space, for the experience of place, for identity and meaning from that time forward. *In Los Angles, east and west have been markers of race-ethnicity, class, status, and prospect*. West and east served then and serve now as a putative divide separating landscapes of leisure from landscapes of production… (550, emphasis added).

Not only does the river demarcate the "conceptual and actual divide" between differently raced and classed people, but also between the different forms and functions of urban land, both historically and in present times (Hise 2007, 48).[152] The Los Angeles River was—and remains—a spatial marker that serves to construct the East-West spatial binary rooted in geographic imaginaries and racialized place-based identities, a binary which constructs places and peoples of varying worth and value partly through its spatial relationships to one another (Avila 2004).

Aside from the socio-spatial significance of the L.A. River, the history of its role as water supply, wastewater, and flood control infrastructure further reveal the racial politics embedded within the physical landscapes and symbolic meanings of the river. As discussed in Chapter Two, the decision to switch the water supply infrastructure of the river from open-faced *zanja* ditches to enclosed metal pipes involved matters beyond simple water distribution. The debate and ultimate decision of *what* to distribute the water *with* also involved conflicts over ideologies of resource management, public health, and even bodily cleanliness, as the new Anglo-American regime attempted to consolidate political power partly through its control over the water resources of the city (Torres-Rouff 2006, 2013). Arguments for privatization of water supply and new forms of infrastructure utilized racialized discourses, as the "conviction that the waterworks would prevent epidemics and sickness carried a negative assessment of Mexican Californian water as dirty and dangerous" that ultimately "characterized a water system built on Mexican and intercultural principles as epidemiologically dangerous and economically disadvantageous" (Torres-Rouff 2013, 176-177).

In addition, the intermingling of ideas of race, cleanliness, danger, and disease continued to be mapped onto the waters and landscapes of the L.A. River, as the river was oftentimes regarded as a place of pollution, disease, and occupation by nonwhite or indigent bodies (Deverell 2004; Hise 2004, 2007). Hise concludes that:

> [L]and east of the Plaza [or, the central square in the city], below the bluff, on the bottomland along the river, has been associated with base needs and uses. The river, like the *zanjas*…provided residents a basic necessity. At the same time, the river and the *zanjas* served a second basic need; both carried off refuse and waste (2004, 551).

The designated use of the L.A. River as a place for drinking, washing, and disposing of wastes imbued upon it associations of both bodily and racial contamination, as "visitors as well as residents equated the river and *zanjas* with *Californios* and particularly women", along with industrial waste and sewage (Hise 2007, 49). Likewise, historian William Deverell notes that

[152] Likewise, historian William Deverell also argues that "[the river] has been a critical dividing line, not only between east and west, north and south, but between races, classes, neighborhoods" (2004, 93). Interestingly, author D.J. Waldie (1999) also describes the spatial separation marked by the Los Angeles River, but in terms of north and south, claiming that: "The break between the upper and lower L.A. River…inadvertently preserves another aspect of the L.A. River: its historic role as a separator of races, classes and communities of shared interest."

"the river became known as a place of bad smells and bad people, a place where, Anglos expected and insisted, crooks, Mexicans, Indians, and Chinese congregated" (2004, 108). These intermingling ideas of waste, refuse, and Othered bodies—seen clearly in how river landscapes were perceived—fed into and reinforced racialized discourses of disease that associated notions of purity and pollution with different groups of residents, and eventually became powerful policy tools responsible for the spatial separation of places of residence thought to be 'clean' or 'contaminated' (Molina 2006). Lastly, it cannot be ignored that the politics of flood control, centered largely on the taming of the Los Angeles River, carried racialized elements, with the memories of Mexican residents incorporated into formalized, legitimate scientific knowledge, a process based on expropriation of embodied knowledge and cultural erasure (Deverell 2004).

Therefore, the landscapes through which the Los Angeles River flows are racialized, as racial Othering, spatial segregation, environmental injustice, and urban development intersected in significant ways throughout the watershed. The highly racialized meanings imbued upon river landscapes shaped and were shaped by the workings of state and capitalist urbanization to build a city based on vastly different environments for populations based on race and class. Far from being removed from these environmental injustices and racial politics, the histories and landscapes of the Los Angeles River are intertwined in these politics and patterns. Given the symbolic and discursive rendering of the river, as a place of racialized criminality, a relic of an pre-modern past, a repository for waste, a boundary marker for the separation of whites and nonwhites (or West and East L.A.), and finally, as manifestation of modern technological might, the L.A. River is laden with ideologies of race, ethnicity, modernity, and nature. The landscape of concrete and water is not an innocent, nor a neutral one. It is a material-discursive product of a city formed under a racist capitalist agenda that commodified water, land, and racially-Othered people in order to build an empire intended to be ruled by whites.

Given the role that the Los Angeles River played in the racialization of urban space in the L.A. region, and given the racial meanings embedded in the landscape of the watershed, the environmental politics of restoration by necessity involve a racial component. The widespread efforts to restore streams, revitalize surrounding neighborhoods, and sustainably manage watershed function that are currently constitutive of the L.A. River agenda require acknowledgement of the racialized histories and legacies embedded within and along the river itself. Particularly, given the claims of river advocates that urban greening and sustainable management will advance environmental justice efforts in L.A., the restoration initiatives of the L.A. River cannot be executed without substantial consideration and engagement of racial aspects of urban environmental transformation. The case studies presented in the next section discuss in detail how the measures to restore the river intersect with the racial and environmental justice politics central to two specific urban places, and how legacies of racialized landscape formation complicate the environmental politics of restoring the L.A. River watershed.

THE CHINATOWN YARD ALLIANCE AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS OF THE CORNFIELD

Background on Site Conflict and Outcome of Political Activism

In 1999, a forty-seven-acre plot of land near downtown Los Angeles known as the Cornfields (or the Chinatown Yards) became a proposed site for a large industrial development project. The site, a former railyard owned by Union Pacific Railroad, became the target of a redevelopment project that convened local and federal government interest toward reinvigorating

a low-income, inner-city neighborhood. Considered a "blighted" urban landscape and part of a wider citywide redevelopment program called "Genesis LA", the Chinatown Yards represented the mayor's agenda of converting brownfields into more economically productive properties by offering tax credits and other financial incentives to attract businesses. Concurrently, the federal government identified the site as a federal empowerment zone, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) promised $11.75M in subsidies for its remediation and redevelopment (Blume 1999). As a result, Majestic Realty, a real estate development corporation offered to purchase the abandoned railyard. The company, one of the most powerful developers in Southern California that was well-known as the developer responsible for the massive Staples Center, proposed to convert the site into an industrial park made up of a complex of warehouses, processing centers, and garment factories. Titled the Riverside Station project, the complex would take up thirty-two acres of the Cornfield site and construct over a million square feet of industrial space; project supporters promised 1,000 new jobs to residents and additional economic rejuvenation for the stagnating sections of downtown.

Though the Riverside Station project garnered strong support from the mayor, city council (including the councilmember for the district), and planning agencies, residents living in the nearby neighborhoods of Chinatown, Lincoln Heights, Elysian Valley, and the William Mead public housing complex, as well as a bevy of other environmental and community organizations, opposed the industrial park plan. These opposing actors demanded that the site instead be used to build local amenities for the residents, including schools, a cultural center, and a park. As municipal support for the project continued in the form of a "fast-track" approval process by the city, opponents responded in 2000 by forming a multi-ethnic, multi-class coalition, consisting of over thirty organizations and calling themselves the Chinatown Yard Alliance (CYA) (Kibel 2004; Orsi 2004). As part of the political mobilization against the proposed Riverside Station project, the CYA wrote and publicly released a declaration of intent, filed an administrative complaint to the Secretaries of both HUD and the Commerce Department as well as the head of the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, and then filed a petition for writ of mandate against the City of Los Angeles and Majestic Realty. These legal actions not only gained public support (fed by sympathetic media coverage), but also led to both state- and federal-level regulatory agencies requiring the full environmental reviews of the project. Faced with legal complications, environmental mandates, and the suspension of HUD's subsidies funds, Majestic Realty entered into a settlement agreement with the CYA, which ultimately led to the purchasing of the site by California State Parks in 2001.

The Chinatown Cornfield, now formally titled the Los Angeles State Historic Park, due to its historical significance as a site of the *Zanja Madre* as well as regionally important railyards, is now one of the largest urban parks in the city of Los Angeles. During the sixteen years between its purchase and its official grand opening in 2017, the park served as a popular event venue and recreational space for nearby residents, as well as a significant symbol of sustainable urban development, an emerald gem in the heart of dense urbanization (Cavanaugh 2003; Sagahun 2017). For environmentalists and activists, the symbolic significance of the park could not be overstated. According to one former CYA activist, the outcome of the conflict "was a huge, huge victory…a major urban park victory in Los Angeles…Where it was said, 'we don't want warehouse jobs. We want quality jobs and parks'" (Interview #60, 2012).

From an urban political economy standpoint, the case of the Cornfields is just one more manifestation of the continued urbanization of capital, whereby cities are the socio-spatial outcomes of processes in which land becomes, in Polanyi's term, a "fictitious commodity"

through the assigning of exchange values and the circulating of those values through increasingly speculative markets. The plan for this forty-seven-acre parcel of land exemplifies urban governance in the postindustrial period, where government subsidies are provided to revalorize derelict and unproductive urban land, in order to facilitate the conditions of new rounds of accumulation; it is the urban growth machine's privileging of land's exchange value (Logan and Molotch 1987). However important this political-economic dimension, there is also at play in the Cornfield conflict the politics of racialization of urban space, which is related to, but not reducible to, the political economy of urban spatialization. Race and class were both at play in the politics of developing this site, as:

> The community within a five mile radius of the Cornfield is 68% Latino, 14% Asian, 11% non-Hispanic white, and 4% African-American. Thirty percent of the population lives in poverty, compared to 14% for the State of California as a whole, and 18% for Los Angeles County. The median household income is $28,908 – just 60% of the $47,493 median household income for the State. Today four freeways eviscerate the Cornfield communities, but fully 29% of households have no access to a car – an astonishing figure in Los Angeles, the car capital of the world (Garcia et. al. 2004, 5).

The struggle over the Cornfield, and by extension, the landscape of this formerly industrialized site, was an explicitly racialized one, as the CYA activists deployed legal and moral arguments couched in discourses of environmental racism and civil rights, as well as invoking place-based identities marked by legacies of racist spatialization. This political strategy capitalized on the strength of EJ as an established movement in Los Angeles and the U.S., as well as the region's sensitivity to racial politics, given the civil unrest of 1992; the rise of regional, multi-racial coalitions for economic improvements (such as LAANE and the Bus Riders Union); and in the wake of mobilization against the racially-targeted state propositions which sought to limit immigrant rights (Prop 187), eliminate affirmative action (Prop 209), and dismantle bilingual education (Prop 227).

In all of their arguments against the Riverside Station project, through legal documents and comments at formal meetings, the CYA drew from civil rights and environmental justice discourses that brought to the forefront issues of inequitable spatialities, exposure to undesirable and unhealthy urban spaces, diminishment of residents' quality of life, and patterns of intentional discrimination (Barnett 2001; Kibel 2004). With its strong emphasis on race/ethnicity, class, gender categories and their intersections, an EJ framework is innately concerned with the politics of difference and identity; the material and discursive relations of power; and the means by which groups gain representation in both politically formal and informal arenas. These components formed the framework within which the CYA structured its arguments against the warehouse project. In their sixty-five-page administrative complaint to the federal departments, the CYA declared that the affected local communities:

> Would further be impacted by the Warehouse Project, they would not *receive an equitable share of the benefits* of the Project, and they have been *excluded from the decision-making processes that affect their lives* and the future of the Cornfield (quoted in Kibel 2004, 315, emphasis added).

In another report, the coalition also mentioned the probability that the warehouse complex would provide the community with "low-wage, dead-end jobs", drawing emphasis to the racialized labor divisions in Los Angeles since its shifts toward deindustrialization and reindustrialization, creating an immigrant and Latino labor force that works on low-wage, low-skill jobs in a bifurcated regional economy (Catanzarite 2000; Sassen 1987; Valle and Torres 2000).

Additionally, in a letter to planning officials, organizations within the CYA declared their grounds for opposing Majestic's development proposal on the environmental conditions and demographic makeup of the neighborhoods around the site. The letter states that:

> There are no parks in Chinatown and no middle schools or high schools. […] The children of the community are disproportionately low income people of color. They do not have adequate access to cars or to a decent transit system to reach parks in other neighborhoods (Garcia and Chatten-Brown 2000).

Constructing a warehouse complex in the Cornfield property would, according to these environmental justice arguments, do several things: first, it would not provide good economic benefits, such as jobs, for the surrounding community; second, it would continue to bar residents from equitable access to environmental and urban goods, such as parks and schools; and third, it exemplified a continuation of exclusion of these communities from planning processes that impacted their spaces of everyday life.

In promulgating these positions, both through legal and political channels, the CYA deployed arguments rooted in the environmental justice discourse. Moreover, a key component of their arguments and activism was the strategic construction and deployment of the impacted community's identity. The language of the CYA referred to the disproportionately-impacted neighborhoods around the proposed development site as "communities of color in the Cornfield community" who faced "a history of intentional discrimination" that operated at both the neighborhood and citywide scale (quoted in Kibel 2004). There is no mistake that the impacted populations—"communities of color"—was presented discursively as explicitly racialized. DeChiro states that there is "political utility" in the "construction of the unifying identity 'people of color' to fight the damaging consequences of environmental racism in local communities" (2003, 216). In constructing an entity categorized as the "community of color in the Cornfields", the CYA employed this political utility by constructing a racialized identity that was unifying in its disproportionate exposure to inequality and unjust conditions, but not totalizing. Residents living around the site constituted a multi-ethnic group composed of Chinese, Vietnamese, Mexican, Central American, African American backgrounds (among others); therefore a unifying but not homogenizing racial identity was needed. This political strategy, according to Pulido, is adopted by activists, who, by "explicitly privileging racism…have created a situational racial identity that both serves to unite a diversity of people and allows for individual racial group identification" (1996b, 149). Presenting themselves as the *people of color* of the Cornfield neighborhoods allowed CYA activists to enact a politics of difference that constructed a unified identity—that of a community racially categorized and historically oppressed—which still avoided racial, ethnic, and cultural homogenization.

In addition and related to constructing this racial identity, the CYA also invoked place history by contextualizing their opposition to the Riverside Station within the broader struggle of racial minorities against unfair patterns of urban development and historical legacies of racist planning practices. In planning documents, statements of intent, and the lawsuit filed against Majestic Realty, the CYA not only condemned the discriminatory impacts they would bear from redevelopment (air pollution from trucks, decreased public space, isolation of neighborhoods, short-term and low paying jobs, lack of housing)[153] but also highlighted the landscapes around the Cornfield as material-symbolic outcomes of past racist urban planning. Both Chinatown and

[153] As one river advocate told me: "I did not support these giant warehouses. Because I knew they were mechanized and I know that they were not going to have as many jobs as they said, and for the amount of space that they take up, we were not going to get the return in jobs because of the mechanization of the technology" (Interview #21, 2013).

the predominantly Latino *barrios* in Northeast/East Los Angeles were the result of formal and informal segregation practices in Los Angeles. Moreover, according to the CYA's arguments, both areas embodied past instances of dispossession and displacement of Chinese and Mexican residents at the hands of the city government.

For example, historic Old Chinatown, already having relocated due to a fire in the late 1880s, was demolished in 1933 to build Union Station, the terminal downtown rail station. The CYA invoked this discriminatory history by arguing that:

> There is a history and a pattern of discriminatory treatment against the Chinese community in Los Angeles and in Chinatown by the City, by Union Pacific and by other railroads. […]In the post-war era, the Chinese are on the one hand held up as a "model minority" while on the other hand they continue to confront a legacy of discrimination" (Garcia and Chatten-Brown 2000).

This legacy of discrimination is what Chi Mui, a Chinatown community leader heading the CYA, referred to when he declared that "history has taught the leaders of Chinatown that huge projects like this will basically kill Chinatown" (quoted in Orsi 2004, 160). Meanwhile, the Mexican American community of Chavez Ravine was razed to the ground in the 1950s in order to construct Dodgers Stadium; this egregious event was exacerbated by the city's unfulfilled promise to provide displaced residents with replacement homes. Then, urban renewal policies led to the construction of freeways that bisected and isolated these neighborhoods, while institutional neglect manifested in rundown streetscapes, lack of schools, and proximity to railyards and a county prison. One city official explained why the warehouse proposal was disadvantageous to historically marginalized Latino communities in central L.A. by bringing up legacies of marginalization and dispossession:

> [T]he whole struggle arises in the context of what happened in Chavez Ravine, what happened with the freeways, where others were dictating to the community what it was going to do for them, or *to* them. […] Back at the turn of the century, up to the 30s, 40s, even to the 50s, some places you had clauses, covenants, and titles that kept certain people of color in certain places, from moving *into* certain places. In modern days, they are not so over, now it's done through these legislative [means] and policies that maintain this separation in the city (Interview #21, 2013).

Therefore, the significance of place and racial identity played an interrelated role in the Chinatown Cornfield conflict, as the coalition explicitly identified themselves as discriminated communities living in places that had been shaped by racist urban development patterns controlled by the local state and powerful economic interests. By drawing from these discourses and presenting place-based histories of racist urban formation, the CYA sought to portray themselves as a united, yet not homogenous, political body as a way to legitimize their opposition to a development project that, contrary to proponents' advertisements, would continue a pattern of environmental and spatial injustice against them.

These racially-rooted, environmentally grounded arguments take on additional meaning when considering how these particular urban landscapes were racialized and de-naturalized in particular ways. The Cornfield is located near the historic Plaza—the *pueblo* and the early city's civic center—which was also adjacent to the ethnic enclaves of Chinatown and Sonoratown. These neighborhoods were not only areas associated with the "foreign" Chinese and Mexican residents of downtown Los Angeles, but were also regarded as a source of physical disease and moral corruption that stained the salubrious and modern image touted by the fledgling city (Molina 2006; Quintana 2010). To the city's early public health officials, political elites, and urban planners, Chinatown was understood as a "rotten" place for much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Molina 2006). These cultural meanings associated with racialized

landscapes produced material consequences as well. The discursive construction of Chinatown as a place of disease and decay was fueled by and continued to fuel anti-Chinese sentiment, which led to violence committed against Chinese residents. Ideas of impurity and unclean landscapes became a self-fulfilling construction in which its makers saw only the squalid conditions that the Chinese *appeared* to be content to live in, when in fact those conditions were partly due to inadequate housing and infrastructural neglect (Molina 2006).

Similar associations of backwardness, degeneracy, and (racial and bodily) contamination existed with Mexican neighborhoods, such as the historic Sonoratown (Quintana 2015; Torres-Rouff 2006). White elites, boosters, and city-builders who came into Los Angeles with their belief in their manifest destiny, developed "ethnocentric patterns of belief that characterized Mexicans as primitive, close to nature" (Deverell 2004, 93). In order to build, what Bedolla describes as an "American Los Angeles on top of a city and a society that was already there" (2005, 35), white elites activated a campaign of land dispossession, political disenfranchisement, economic marginalization, and racial construction of Mexicans (versus the elite *Californios*), which included discursively relegating Mexican culture to a primitive—albeit romanticized—past that effectively shut them out of the formation of a modern, Anglo-ruled city. These racializing projects externally created and imposed an essentialized racial identity on both Chinese and Mexican communities that relied upon those identities' relation to nature (in contrast to that of whites). It is upon a landscape shaped materially and ideationally by these racialized ideologies of purity, belonging, and nature that the mayor and Majestic sought to build a redevelopment project to undo a "blighted" place, evoking not only the rationale for urban renewal but also the deep-rooted "understandings of the city that conjoin race, place, and degeneracy" (Braun 2003, 198). By invoking histories of discrimination and deploying racial identities, CYA activists sought to counter these longstanding interpretations of race, space, and nature as well.

The conflict at the Chinatown Cornfield and the activism of the Chinatown Yard Alliance demonstrate how a coalition comprised of social justice, environmental, and community organizations utilized both environmental and social justice/civil rights frameworks and arguments in order to win a contentious land use conflict. Because of the presence of diverse and multi-ethnic entities, distinctly separate political agendas—such as environmental justice concerns of Cornfield communities and river restoration advocacy among environmental groups—that began independently of each other could be combined within a multi-pronged agenda. As discussed in Chapter Four, from the onset, the site was an area of interest among river restoration advocates, as evidenced through workshops and publications sponsored by these groups during the mid-90s, which called for the postindustrial conversion of a contaminated brownfield into a green oasis within the urban core (Burnett-Stuart 1996). However, because these environmental actors formed working partnerships with community leaders, they were able to gain trust from residents. As one activist explained it to me, by partnering with Chi Mui, "we were able to say we weren't outsiders" (Interview #43, 2010). During the course of political mobilization against the Riverside Station project, the environmental organizations involved played a critical role in the outcome of the land use conflict, leveraging the involvement of nationally established organizations (such as the NRDC) and the legal strategy of pushing Majestic Realty to carry out a full environmental impact assessment (Kibel 2004). According to one community advocate involved in the lawsuits against Majestic and the city, the reliance on environmental law was key to the victory at the Cornfields: "The legal strategies and legal components are absolutely essential. …We could not be where we are in greening the L.A. River

but for the lawsuits on environmental and civil rights grounds that we filed and won" (Interview #60, 2012).

Meanwhile, an NRDC representative explained that the organization joined the alliance against the warehouse proposal because of their mission toward "creating new urban parks for park poor communities and protecting existing parks" while "trying to thwart industrial development and industrial reuse of those railyards [along the river], which are no longer in use, and converting them to parkland" (Interview #16, 2012). The CYA's success lay in its ability to strategically utilize the different discourses, legal tools, and political alliances that its diverse members possessed and relied upon. As a result of its multi-pronged strategy, activists were able to secure one of the largest parcels of future greenspace, a monumental achievement that was lauded as "a turning point in the revitalization of downtown, the L.A. River, and therefore, Los Angeles" (Price 2005).

Of Corn-Fields and Soccer Fields: Procedural Injustice in Park Planning

The creation of the Los Angeles State Historic Park, instead of the Riverside Station warehouse complex, is regarded by many environmentalists, community groups, and even city officials as one of the most important victories for the river movement—and Los Angeles. The park and the struggle for its creation represent the triumph of citizens' defense of their use values of land over the exchange values of powerful real estate. More than just an environmental win, the Cornfield conflict is heralded as an enormous environmental *justice* victory as well, exemplifying a definitive step towards benefiting disadvantaged communities through the greening the Los Angeles River. Yet the aftermath of the CYA's victory reveals the complications and challenges of maintaining an environmental justice objective throughout the formalized process of planning and developing urban land—even something as seemingly benign as urban greenspace. In 2001, the Cornfield property was purchased by the California Department of Parks and Recreation (referred to as California State Parks, or CSP) through the use of Prop 12 funds (which earmarked millions of bond monies for park acquisition). With the site now secure, the considerable task of designing, planning, and constructing an urban park now fell upon a state agency more familiar with preserving large tracts of 'wilderness' in rural areas than creating greenspace in one of the most ethnically diverse and densely urbanized sections of the city.

To the CSP's credit, the agency strove to generate participation of local and diverse stakeholders by forming a Cornfields Advisory Committee, a thirty-six member body comprised of representatives from sixty-three involved organizations. The Advisory Committee met for a year and produced a vision statement for the Cornfield park in 2003 that identified four "essential themes"—Connectivity, Cultural/Historical, Recreation, Transportation—with which to guide the overall design of the park (Cornfields State Park Advisory Committee 2003). With the vision (and the formal name) of the park established, the CSP continued to conduct regular outreach meetings with stakeholder groups, produced additional reports—including a 2005 General Plan for the park—that detailed guiding principles and design elements, and held a competition for the park's design plan (Interview #62, 2013). Throughout the next decade, plans for the park (including the winning Hargraves and Associates design that came with a $150M price tag) continued to be hampered by the difficulty the CSP faced in securing funding, particularly with the state budget crisis and the 2009 bond freeze on environmental projects (Rau 2009). During this time, several amenities were built on the site, including a walking trail, some visitor signs, and various vegetative plantings (*Figure 5.1*), and the CSP attempted to remain in

contact with local communities and invested stakeholders by holding, in total, sixty-five public meetings to provide updates (Interview #62, 2013).

Figure 5.1. The transitioning landscape of the Los Angeles State Historic Park. (Source: Photo taken by author.)

Despite the best intentions of the state park agency to remain inclusive and transparent, the post-acquisition process of designing, planning, and maintaining the Cornfields park was a contentious one. No longer joined together by a common opponent, conflicts arose, particularly in two specific occasions, when stakeholders were confronted with deciding what the park should look like, how planning was to proceed, and who was included in making decisions regarding design and use of the hard-won space.[154] The first conflict involved a proposed art installation at the temporarily dormant site, where a small minority of organizations opposed the state's approval for the park to be lent towards hosting the artwork. While the land had been secured by California State Parks, the funding for progressing with park design and construction stalled, so that:

> By 2005, park construction was at a standstill, deadlocked by lack of funding and momentum. Many of the Alliance's activist members, who did not live in the area, freely moved onto other causes, such as securing more parkland in other park-poor areas, or revitalizing the L.A. River. This vacuum created opportunities for individuals and institutions to use the land for private purposes (Cheng, 2013, 48).

[154]A representative of a nationally established environmental organization explained to me how the discussion process became riddled with so many disagreements and difficulties: "It's easier to focus people's energy and attention when you have a common enemy or you're opposing something in a joint effort. …It's not easy, but it's sort of less complicated. People understand that we need to keep this out of our neighborhood. When you're trying to build something together—yeah, it's harder! …You still get grumbling from the community about, what is going to be the vision for this park? Because it's just messy" (Interview #16, 2012).

One such private purpose was a public art installation project, created by artist Lauren Bon and funded by the Annenberg Foundation, which CSP allowed to set up in mid-2005. The $3M art project, titled *Not a Cornfield*, involved planting approximately one million seeds of corn throughout eighteen-acres of the site (among other smaller features), which would grow and be harvested throughout the one year allocated for the installation. The use of corn was intended to pay homage not only to the site's etymologically-mysterious name of 'the Cornfields', but also to the crop's significance to the indigenous peoples and Spanish settlers who lived and settled in Los Angeles (Lipton 2007; Price 2005). Immersive, culturally sensitive, open to the public, and environmentally conscientious (the planted corn would draw out some of the contaminants in the soil of the brownfield), *Not a Cornfield* was conceived as a "vast conceptual art piece" that would "serve both as a point of celebration for the multiethnic history of Los Angeles' old core and a beacon for downtown's gradual revitalization" (Hernandez 2005). Approved by the elected officials, and supported by many CYA member organizations, the public art piece was regarded as a beneficial event that would—and did—keep the site "exciting and alive" (Interview #62, 2013).

According to most accounts of the Los Angeles State Historic Park, the *Not a Cornfield* art piece sustained "public awareness" of the site, marking it as a positive chapter in the history of the Cornfield (Jao 2017). However, not everyone agreed with the CSP's decision to allow the Annenberg Foundation to use the site for an art installation. A small contingent of organizations—some previous members of the Chinatown Yard Alliance and some that later joined park planning processes—expressed disapproval with the agency's decision to turn over the park to a private entity for various reasons: first, giving control to a private, wealthy foundation sent an unsettling message about the prioritization of park control; second, Bon's design did not seem amenable to all members of the public and, in some cases, took too lightly the cultural/historical significance of the site; and third, installing the art piece would delay the construction of the actual park (George 2006; Hernandez 2005; Pool 2005; Interview #32, 2012). One community activist described his reasons for opposing the project in terms of who exactly the art installation was intended for:

> The Cornfield is a disaster. Because they put too much money into it and they still didn't make it attractive to the community. …It's not a park for the people. […] We fought for the site, and we won. But when we got it, State Parks said, 'thank you, but we're going to give it to Annenberg Foundation for one million for a year.' And they did what they wanted to do. But it was not a space for the public. No. Only a selected public (Interview #57, 2013). [155]

These claims made against Bon, the Annenberg Foundation, and the artwork itself—that the installation was intended for and served only "a selected public" can easily be countered by the fact that Bon worked with mediators in order to gain the approval of community groups, and that through the series of workshops, tours, and other public events connected to *Not a Cornfield*, thousands of visitors came to the park (Dinerstein 2008). However, regardless of whether the artwork was truly open to all members of the public or if it was a fundraising opportunity for California State Parks, the central and commonly held reason for organizations to oppose it was the perceived exclusion they felt in making the decision to bring in the project. The problem lay

[155] The sense that there was less community ownership and enjoyment of the L.A. State Historic Park was also expressed by other community activists and environmentalists. One river advocate told me: "I love what State Parks is doing, I think they've been really courageous, taking on urban parks, which they've never done before. But I fail to understand what they're doing at the Cornfield. … *You don't see a lot of people in it, and I think the reason is because people don't feel like it's their park*. It's really frustrating…" (Interview #33, 2012, emphasis added).

not so much in the actual nature of Bon's artwork, but in the fact that the state agency appeared to unilaterally decide upon bringing in the art project, as well as the rushed and contentious process by which approval for the project was acquired from community groups and organizations (Interview #32, 2012; #5, 2013). This decision-making process, which was described as "hastily called and poor publicized", was acknowledged as poorly executed; as the *Los Angeles Times* reported, "even state Assemblywoman Jackie Goldberg (D-Los Angeles), an early supporter, said in an interview this week that *the process for approving the project was flawed*" (Hernandez 2005, emphasis added). Because it was decided by a few entities—a park agency, a private foundation—and not the collective community which had fought for the park, the *Not a Cornfield* was considered to be "not a space for the public". Participation was what made the space public to these opponents.

The second conflict over the L.A. State Historic Park involved the broader issue of what designated uses the park's design would accommodate. As with the conflict over the creation of the public art installation, several community organizations championed for the integration of active recreational elements in the park's final design. These organizations, claiming to represent the interests of the numerous Latino residents living in Cornfields-adjacent areas, argued that their communities wanted spaces for active recreation, particularly to meet the needs of their children and youths. In part, this conflict came about due to the variegated nature of the stakeholders who had mobilized—and carried specific visions—for a park; one public agency representative explained that:

> The coalition was put together by promising everyone everything. They put together a checkerboard and said, 'okay, you guys want soccer fields, you get a Shaolin temple, you get a middle school'—and that's how they got everybody on board. …So [planning] was all about …getting people to let go of entrenched notions of what the park should be and coming up with a consensus plan that pretty much could try to achieve as many objectives as possible (Interview #62, 2013).

A series of public meetings and discussions among the Advisory Committee were held in order to reach this "consensus plan" among the various wants and needs of the diverse stakeholders.

The Committee's 2003 vision statement identified, as one of the core components of park design, the need for spaces and facilities that could support recreation of various sorts. Their recommendations urged California State Parks the importance of designs that support recreation, concluding that:

> High-quality recreational facilities in the future State Park should be designed so that relaxation and reflection coexist with team sports and individual exercise. Trails should be interspersed with multiple large, flat, open grassy spaces that can be used by community groups for organized activities. Space should be flexible and able to respond to the changing needs of future generations. Planners should consider the significance of recreation as a cultural activity and expression (Cornfield State Park Advisory Committee 2003, 13).

Despite the recommendations from the Advisory Committee—and numerous community members—to plan a park that considered recreation as "a cultural activity and expression", the ultimate design chosen by the ten-person jury appointed by the CSP was mostly comprised of passive greenspace such as lawns and wetlands (Cheng 2013).[156] Even after this design was

[156] Cheng describes the jury that decided upon the park design as lacking in community representation. She states that: "Although the committee gave recommendations, real decision-making lay with a ten-person jury organized by the State Parks Foundation and the California Department of Parks and Recreation. This ten-person jury had the authority to select the park architect, essentially cementing the park design. The only individual identified as a 'community activist' on the jury was Clare Marter

largely abandoned due to the state budget crisis, the newer, $20M park design (funded by Prop 40, another state bond) remained dedicated to building greenspace, wetlands, and passive recreational spaces (Interview #62, 2013).

California State Park's decision to build a Cornfield park that lacked spaces and facilities for active recreational purposes sent a clear signal to those who had advocated for such recreational spaces. A central argument against the Majestic Realty warehouse complex had been the lack of spaces for the children and youth living in the surrounding neighborhoods to play in; constructing a park dedicated to open space, wetland habitat, and walking trails appeared to disregard the specific needs of this population. This disregard came as a surprise to some, given the unified opposition waged by the coalition; as one former CYA activist, who was a central player in the legal fight against Majestic Realty, told me:

> The so-called Chinatown Yard Alliance that came together in support of stopping the warehouses and creating a park there was broad and diverse. …But it took us by surprise because [the aftermath] highlighted the tension between [us] and the allies we work with…who didn't even know there was a term called 'active recreation' versus 'passive recreation' (Interview #60, 2012).

For some of these organizations, the designation of a park plan that privileged open space, passive forms of recreation, and restored habitat signified the continuation of an anti-urban bias of a park agency that still predominantly worked in rural or habitat landscapes.[157] Despite claims that it was evolving to meet the park needs of diverse and urban communities, the agency's actions reflected a lack of commitment to actually upholding those needs. One community NGO representative explained the episode of the Cornfield park in this way:

> We're not particularly happy with how [the Los Angeles State Historic Park] came out. It sort of expresses what's wrong with the process, with [CA] State Parks. State parks has a rural, wildlands vision of itself, but now it's working in the urban, and it hasn't evolved its mission. So you have this 30 acre park being built now, with no active recreation whatsoever. Not only soccer field, not one little league field, not one basketball court—nothing. And they fought us off like a junkyard dog. They see their urban constituencies like Sequoia [preservationists] fighting loggers (Interview #5, 2013).

This condemnation of the state park agency was echoed by another park and community activist who had been involved in the Cornfields conflict:

> We wanted multiple activities for the park. We know that the state parks' mission statement doesn't recognize active recreation. [But] we know we can make amendments to gain some portion of the park to make space for activities. …Have passive and active recreation, in the same place. It was a sobering moment to hear, 'no, we're going to do it this way' (Interview #57, 2013).

For these activists, the failure to include any sports fields or active recreation facilities indicated the continued dominance of an environmental ethic that prioritized open space, habitat restoration, and passive use of parkspace over human needs and cultural differences. Even as California State Parks was praised for expanding beyond their comfort zone of working in dense inner-city areas, their focus and framework of protecting "wildlands" remained largely intact.

Kenyon, a white resident of Mt. Washington with a track record of supporting green space and preservation. […]All proposals are a far cry from the housing, recreation, and education that residents had proposed, despite independent research establishing the feasibility and affordability of all those options" (2013, 47-48).

[157] The issue over how "active" versus "passive" greenspace should be is a prevalent one throughout Los Angeles County. In other municipalities, such as Pasadena's Hahamongna Watershed area, there is ongoing discussion between different communities over what types of uses are most appropriate or beneficial. In my fieldwork, I observed racial undertones in many of these discussions.

This conflict over passive versus active recreation in urban parks was perhaps exacerbated by what was unfolding in another park near the Los Angeles River. As discussed in Chapter Four, just northwest of the Cornfield site, a parcel of Union Pacific's Taylor Yards complex had undergone a similar battle of community resistance to a proposed industrial warehouse complex at an abandoned brownfield. Due to intense activist mobilization by a multi-racial/ethnic coalition, and lawsuits against the developer, the Taylor Yard parcel was also purchased by the California State Parks and converted into a park known as the Rio de Los Angeles State Park. However, unlike the Cornfield park, the lawsuit was adjudicated in court—not settled outside of it—and so the property was acquired for a much smaller price; additionally, due to issues over park design, both CSP and the city's parks department reached an arrangement of shared responsibility and funding for maintenance (Lejano and Wessells 2006; Interview #48, 2012). This co-ownership arrangement led to inclusion of both active and passive park elements, as the Rio de Los Angeles State Park hosts both soccer fields and an area dedicated to wetlands, walking trails, and restored habitat.

Despite the different circumstances that surrounded the creation of both parks, some community groups and activists took the incorporation of active recreational facilities in the Rio de Los Angeles Park as an indicator that the same could be done at the Cornfield. Both parks were located in park-poor, underserved, predominantly Latino neighborhoods, therefore both should and could meet the needs of residents by accommodating a variety of uses. Interestingly, the developments at the Taylor Yards park were interpreted differently, especially among certain environmental organizations and river activists, who believed that because one park was dedicated to soccer fields and active recreation, the other should be left aside for habitat, open space, and passive use. According to one river advocate:

> The Cornfields and the Taylor Yard weren't really the same battle; they didn't really have the same goal or the same outcome. The Taylor Yard was much more about playing fields and soccer, and younger communities like Cypress Park, where there's a worse lack of sports facilities… *And the Cornfields was more about passive recreation, more about learning, more about history. …My idea of a park is rocks and trees and grass.* It was sort of a tacit decision…that the Taylor Yard would be about playing fields and the Cornfield would be about more passive recreation (Interview #43, 2010, emphasis added).

These quotes from several different CYA member organizations demonstrate the contrasting perspectives regarding what parks should look like, who they should serve, and who gets to decide what uses are supported. For the environmentalist who wanted a park with "rocks and trees and grass", there was the implicit contrast between a park with these more natural elements and one that hosted sports facilities such as soccer fields. Furthermore, for him, there was a distributional logic to the designated designs and uses of the park—since one was outfitted for active recreation, the other should be dedicated towards trees and grass and passive use.

However, the contentious politics of park-making at the Cornfields included issues beyond design and distribution. In the case of both the Annenberg Foundation's *Not a Cornfield* installation and the omission of active recreational space in the park's design, a critical issue was the community participation, or the real and perceived absence of it. For these community members, who had rallied around an industrial development project because it stripped them of their right to decide *how* their spaces of everyday life would be shaped, to then encounter similar patterns of exclusion of decision-making processes and disregard for their concerns/interests in a park development project, the Cornfields planning process signified continued procedural injustice. In their arguments for environmental justice, these communities did not conceive of

justice as a simple substitution of an environmentally harmful land use (i.e. a warehouse) with an environmentally beneficial one (i.e. a park), but also the substantive inclusion of their voices in the formal procedures and informal processes that would decide how their everyday environments would be materially and symbolically transformed to improve their lives.

This demand for participatory inclusion and the recognition of their interests and concerns in decision-making processes can be seen in a conclusion drawn by a UCLA report on the Cornfield conflict. The report, produced in the midst of the legal and political battle against Majestic Realty, analyzed the complex political, economic, and cultural circumstances surrounding the conflict, noting that:

> Among the competing visions for the site's redevelopment which have emerged are Friends of the Los Angeles River's (FoLAR) plan for a mixed-use riverfront park providing housing, commercial and open space for the community and Majestic's plan for an industrial park of warehouses and manufacturers, providing jobs (Aeschbacher et. al. 2000, 10).

Given the widely differing plans for the former railyard proposed by FoLAR and Majestic Realty, it could be assumed that the residents living around the Cornfield site would support the former's. However, the report concludes otherwise, stating that:

> One of the reasons that the Cornfield is embroiled in so much controversy is that the community feels that plans for its future are being made for them. […] *Opposition to the current plans, both FoLAR and Majestic, comes to a large degree from the lack of community inclusion in the plan-making process, rather than from the substance of the plans themselves*. The community has been involved to a certain degree, although somewhat after the fact (14, emphasis added).

While the community certainly did care about the "substance of the plans" for how the site would be redeveloped, another central concern they carried and expressed was the lack of participatory opportunities and avenues for themselves. To them, being able to participate in the planning process was as significant as the outcome of that process.

Inclusion, Participation, and Environmental Decision-Making: Forming the Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio

Therefore, the racial politics of environmental justice at the Cornfields illuminated activists' recognition that land use, distribution of environmental harms and amenities, and inclusion in decision-making processes are inextricably interconnected. Activism from the Cornfield and Taylor Yard parks conflicts shifted focus onto the Los Angeles River. Several of the community groups dissatisfied with the outcome of the Cornfields planning episode came together to form a coalition intended to proactively insert themselves in current and future environmental projects, particularly the restoration of the L.A. River. Composed of local nonprofit organizations committed to community development and advocacy work with and for L.A.'s Latino population, the coalition's mission was to increase Latino representation, especially those living along the river, in the city's efforts to green thirty-two miles of it.[158] Calling themselves the *Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio* ("Alliance of the People of the River" or

[158] The organizations participating in the Alianza were: 1) The City Project, an environmental justice organization working primarily through policy advocacy and legal action; 2) Mujeres de la Tierra (Mothers of the Earth), a nonprofit focused on environmental and economic equity, and empowering Latino women through professional and political development; 3) Anahuak Youth Soccer Association, a soccer organization working with Latino youth and community development in Northeast Los Angeles; 4) William C. Velazquez Institute, an organization focused on policy advocacy, research, and collaboration geared towards increasing Latino voting and other forms of political involvement; and 5) Re-Mapping LA, a subset of UCLA's Center for Research in Engineering, Media, and Performance at the Schools of Engineering and Film.

"Alliance of the River Communities"), the group's central concern and objective centered on access to participatory opportunities, as described in their mission statement:

> The Alianza formed in 2005 when its leaders decided that the development of the L.A. River was a symbolic and literal convergence of a myriad of issues confronting L.A.'s Latino population. To be left out of the discussion was to be left high and dry, as the river shifts directions into the future (Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio, 2006).

For the leaders of the Alianza, the decision to form the coalition stemmed directly from having learned hard lessons in the Cornfields park planning process, where they had seen certain community interests—particularly among the lower-income and predominantly Latino neighborhoods they worked directly with—disregarded or subsumed under the consensus-oriented planning negotiations of public agencies with inflexible mandates and influential environmental organizations pushing their own political agendas.[159] One former coalition member declared that the Alianza "was a rebellion against [CA] State Parks", where organizations felt that "community was being excluded" and therefore "wanted to go to war with the city and the state over the park" (Interview #5, 2013). Another Alianza representative spoke more broadly about the issue of community exclusion in environmental projects, stating that: "We came together because we were not at the table, we were not part of the mainstream and we felt that if you're talking about the L.A. River, it should be everybody's river" (Interview #32, 2012). In this way, the *Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio* was an effort to empower Latino communities, which stemmed from both a reaction to the challenges and perceived defeats originating from the Cornfield discussions, as well as a proactive desire to prevent repeated experiences of exclusion and disregard within the much larger and ongoing process of restoring the L.A. River.

The Alianza's concerns around constrained access to participation were well-founded. As described in Chapter Three, the city of Los Angeles began, in 2005, to develop a master plan for the Los Angeles River. With several million dollars of funding from the Department of Water and Power, overseen by the city council's Ad Hoc River Committee, and with several city departments working collaboratively, the process was an ambitious undertaking that took eighteen months. During this time, the city rolled out an extensive outreach component of plan development that included hiring outside consultants to conduct outreach activities among a wide array of neighborhoods, stakeholder groups, and community organizations; hosting numerous public meetings and design charettes in which updates and new information were disseminated and feedback gathered (Interview #11, 2010; #15, 2012); and requesting input from a host of nonprofit organizations, neighborhood councils, community groups, and design/engineering professionals through an advisory committee.

Despite these efforts, however, the city's outreach efforts, for a number of institutional, linguistic, and cultural reasons, were not effectively connecting with many Latino and immigrant communities. As one community activist noted:

> In the initial stages of [forming the master plan], you would go to all of these various focus groups and meetings, and it didn't matter where you were—whether it was the Valley part of the river or here in Northeast L.A. or downtown, didn't matter where you were—the same group of people

[159] George (2006) also attributes the events around the Cornfields park planning to the formation of the Alianza, stating that "the victory [at the Cornfields] did not come without in-fighting over what the park should look like, and whether the Annenberg Foundation-funded art project by Lauren Bon should be allowed without community input. The dispute — and Latinos' concern that growing corn did not represent the needs of the community — became the direct catalyst for forming the Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio."

> were coming to all of the meetings. […] The real people who live near and around the river, and also who work near and around the river, were not being asked what their opinions were… (Interview #32, 2012).

Limited participation was observed by another activist, who recollected that, "the city of L.A. was doing community outreach and receiving virtually no notice and no attendance in its hearings" (Interview #60, 2012). Another activist noted that he encountered a "lack of interest" among the Latino community groups he worked with, concluding that "the lack of interest in the community was because they [the city] never informed the people what was happening" (Interview #57, 2013). The Alianza's website summarized these disconcerting patterns (regardless of cause), declaring that:

> At the end of the consultations and assessments…we concluded that within Los Angeles River Master Plan, there was an immediate need, which was to include the Latino community, which is currently estimated at approximately in 1.8 million living around the river and along the 32 miles… [T]hese families would be most affected by the absence of their participation in the consultations... (Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio 2006).

Though by no means a comprehensive account of the degree to which Latino communities throughout the city were involved in the master plan creation process, these observations, made by leaders of organizations working extensively with Latino communities around various issues revealed the challenges of reaching constituencies who were constrained by language barriers, challenges to time commitment, distrust of government agencies, and lack of access to avenues of information (such as the internet, connections with environmental organizations, etc.).

In response to the limited participation and general lack of awareness among Latino communities within the L.A. River restoration planning process, the Alianza employed multiple forms of outreach designed to "brin[g] attention to the revitalization plans" as well as "educating and empowering people who lived along the river to take part" in the envisioning and planning process (Interview #60, 2012). Member organizations, assigned to different Latino neighborhoods along the river, worked among various subsets of the population to gather input and share information (i.e. passing out fliers, conducting door-to-door surveys, holding meetings); the organizations then met regularly to share results, recommendations, and strategies. Three community hearings were held in August 2006; these meetings were held in Spanish and provided vital information as well as gathered feedback from attendees (Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio 2006; George 2006). Additionally, a telephone survey to 400 households in neighborhoods adjoining the river was conducted, as well as a series of demographic analyses and GIS mapping studies, all to ascertain who lived along the river and what their thoughts were about its current state and possible revitalized future (WCVI 2007). Finally, the coalition submitted a thirteen-page list of comments responding to the draft of the revitalization master plan, which highlighted their concerns for the plan based on the extensive feedback gathered by the Latino communities they had reached out to. Elected officials, environmental organizations, and activists praised the efforts of the Alianza, made modifications to the master plan based on their comments, and now look upon the incorporation of this group's work as a testament to the democratic and environmentally just process by which the LARRMP was formed (Interview #11, 2010).

The conflicts embedded in the creation of the Los Angeles State Historic Park, and the subsequent formation of the *Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio*, are more than separate and short-lived events within the broader movement of restoring the L.A. River. These episodes of community contestation reveal the intersecting politics of urban environmentalism, racial and

social justice, and place history that underlie the implementation of an ostensibly beneficial agenda of urban greening and river restoration. What the environmental politics of the Cornfields and the Alianza reflect, I argue, are the challenges of an urban sustainability project such as restoration of the L.A. River to substantively promote environmental justice objectives. This is demonstrated in several ways within the Cornfields case study: first, there was the failure of agencies to uphold community participation and inclusion in planning and decision-making processes; second, the issues raised by the community highlighted the deeply-ingrained ideas of who gets to implement what kind of environmental work; and finally, these limitations of inclusion and recognition of racial/cultural diversity and history illustrate how environmental actors in Los Angeles operated under an incomplete conceptualization of environmental justice that focuses too much on discrete sites and/or distribution of land uses without addressing the underlying urban processes that produce these distributive injustices.

As I have already discussed, much of the discontent over the handling of the Cornfields park—which led to the formation of the *Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio*—stemmed from the community's sense that they were not fully included in the procedures determining what would get built and how.[160] For these organizations, which worked among and represented lower income and immigrant Latino communities, exclusion from environmental planning and decision-making was a continuation of the procedural injustices Latinos in Los Angeles had experienced. It also led to the perpetuation of inequitable environmental conditions these communities disproportionately faced. Thus, the Alianza attempted to resist this pattern of exclusion by actively inserting the voices/concerns of a specifically raced and classed subset of Los Angeles' population into the revitalization of the L.A. River. This insertion was critically needed, according to the Alianza activists. One NGO representative explained that among river proponents, there is a contingent of environmentalists who behave territorially over the L.A. River, though most of them, being white and middle-class, do not live in the polluted neighborhoods along it. She frankly explained that:

> You have this core group of folks…who feel they *own* the river. This is *their* river. They don't live near the river, they don't work near the river in many cases, but because they have been talking about the river for so long, it's theirs. […] This became everybody's L.A. River as a consequence of [the Alianza's work], I believe (Interview #32, 2012, original emphasis).

Another emphasized the race and class aspect of the coalition's work, contrasting it with that of traditional environmental interests; he concluded that, "the Alianza was hugely important in making this a democratic grassroots movement and not just a mainstream, non-Hispanic White, disproportionately wealthy movement" (Interview #60 2012). Inclusion of lower-income and Latino communities into these procedural spaces was particularly important when considering who lived and worked near the L.A. River; demographic analysis by the Alianza, based on the 2000 census, revealed that of the almost 3 million people living within a three mile radius of the river, 54% were Hispanic, 22% lived in poverty, and 56% had a high school degree or less

[160] Many environmental organization representatives acknowledged how difficult it is to provide ample opportunities for participation among populations not long associated with supporting environmental causes. One representative expressed the challenges his organization faced when attempting to provide spaces for participatory engagement among lower-income communities in the east side of the L.A. River. He stated that, ""It's difficult. …You're talking about areas where families often have both parents working long hours. Sometimes you have language barriers. Sometimes these are just areas where it's hard to get people out either on a weeknight or on a weekend. If you set a meeting or a conference call during the day, you're not going to get a lot of people who work during the day….And it's even harder in neighborhoods like this [NELA] because people are always working and to take people away from prime hours they could be spending time with their families or at home having dinner" (Interview #16, 2012).

(WCVI 2006).[161] By demanding that river restoration/revitalization include the interests of immigrants, the less affluent, and the majority Spanish-speaking population residing within the city, the Alianza both stressed as well as operated from the understanding that access to participation was crucial to improving the environmental conditions in which these historically marginalized populations lived, worked, and played.

Moreover, for the organizations involved in the Cornfields and Alianza, inclusion in planning processes and access to other forms of participation was a crucial step towards positioning Latinos as environmental subjects (Carter 2016). Among those I spoke with, participating in the restoration of the Los Angeles River was also about increasing the political presence of Latinos in a mainstream environmental initiative, thereby challenging the long-held and erroneous assumption that Latinos did not care about—or worse, lacked the capacity to engage in—environmental issues. By representing and re-positioning themselves as environmental activists (or, even, activists who did environmental work), members of the Alianza sought to expand the arena of environmentalism, to move it towards wider inclusion of difference—different perspectives and desires gained from different experiences.[162] Throughout the city's process of creating the river master plan, members of the Alianza sought to increase the representations of Latino participants in this process, thereby providing a counter-narrative to the dominant thinking that urban communities of color were not committed to environmental protection.

According to the leader of one Alianza organization, "the only time [the Latino community] is quoted is when it comes to immigration" resulting in the community becoming "stereotyped as only caring about a single issue"; however, to him, "this whole notion of the Los Angeles River, and its greening" was regarded as a way towards:

> creating a new narrative, one in which it's not separate environmental themes and causes, and working-class community themes and causes, but one seamless narrative in which these interests are mutually interrelated and beneficial (Gonzalez, quoted in George 2006).

Constructing and propagating this narrative, according to another Latino environmental activist, was crucial towards wider recognition of how differently raced and classed communities understood and responded to environmental matters. He shared with me the complexity of the issue, stating that:

> I'll speak for the communities that I work with, and I'll speak for myself as an immigrant to this country and maybe for some who are new residents to this country from neighboring places. It's not that we don't get it. We get it. We come from places where we live off aboveground water storage tank, four days out of the week because we only have water coming to our homes for three. …We live next to rivers that have not been paved. […] But then…you have the compounded issues of unemployment or crime or a parent working three jobs… It's not that we don't get it… [But] do we feed our children, or do we take the weekend off to go to the mountains? (Interview #51, 2010)

[161] The Alianza, based on these riverside demographics, also called out the images used through the draft master plan. According to the coalition, illustrations and renderings of public spaces, depicted throughout the draft plan, did not accurately reflect the many diverse communities that lived along the L.A. River: "The draft Plan's images send a message as to who will be served by river revitalization. The images do not reflect the demographics of Los Angeles or the river corridor. The images contain few people of color, show no team sport activities, and no large families. The images should be revised to reflect the diversity of river communities" (Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio 2007, 9).

[162] It is worth noting that most of the groups that participated in the Alianza would not be categorized as "environmental" organizations, though they do work on environmental projects.

For the members of the Alianza, and the communities they represented, positioning Latinos as environmental subjects meant expanding and diversifying definitions of 'the environment' and 'environmentalist'.[163] More than an exercise in bringing nature back to the city by greening riverfront landscapes, the alliance saw the master plan as way to redefine urban environmentalism to include issues such as sustainable economic development, affordable housing, better schools and health care, racial justice, and more democratic planning processes.

Representing and re-positioning Latinos as environmental advocates/activists become especially important when considering the underlying tensions that exist around political and community leadership concerning river restoration. This tension, as several key river activists informed me, had emerged as the demand for local representation within the L.A. River restoration leadership had grown, especially in the majority Latino neighborhoods located next to key target areas of the river. One environmentalist and river advocate explained that certain departmental hires charged with overseeing watershed policy raised some dissatisfaction among "the environmental community" and "there was a racial dimension to it" (Interview #34, 2012). Specific hires were, according to her, made in response to "a real desire [in Northeast L.A. along the river] to have leadership reflect the population" and in meeting this demand, "some of the environmental community [was] a little resentful when a Latino who isn't obviously from the sciences or ecologies is elevated to be responsible for issues that pertain to the environment."[164] Though she later conceded that environmental organizations were beginning to balance social concerns with environmental projects, the racial tension between environmental leadership in Los Angeles and communities who are affected by these environmental agendas still plays out politically. Another Latino river advocate spoke of the tension between where river revitalization was unfolding and who was being charged to lead it:

> [W]hen you have this transition [with the river] occurring and those who feel entitled—because of their education or their economic status or because they come from one of the well-to-do places—come and dictate to the local people, there is a sense of concern and mistrust when you see this change occurring. Because now the folks who are taking these leading roles don't look like the majority of the people who are living there. So therein lies the tension (Interview #21, 2013).

As the greening of the L.A. River is set to accelerate within the next decade, the need to address this tension and ensure that environmental decision-making is led by those who represent the communities along the river becomes increasingly urgent. Participants of the Alianza expressed the satisfaction that their efforts were a starting point for representing Latino environmentalism—what Carter (2016) calls "environmental justice 2.0"—in Los Angeles.

Perhaps most importantly, the case study of the Cornfields illustrates the difficulty of sustainability projects to uphold the goals of environmental justice, given the limited ways in which public agencies, mainstream environmental organizations, and even community groups conceive of what justice *is*. For environmental justice coalitions, such as the Chinatown Yard

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[163] Based on multiple interviews with activists, there was also an argument made that many Latinos already carried a strong environmental ethic, instilled in them through conservation-oriented practices of past generations. Some community activists claimed that water conservation and reuse of certain household items were already everyday practices of their parents or grandparents, who grew up in hometowns and villages with resource scarcity. One Latino policymaker succinctly stated that many immigrant communities knew that ecological and social concerns were intertwined, that "it's gotta be fought together", and "that's something that I think as people of color we do on the natural anyways. We listen to our grandparents on how to deal with [health and wellbeing]… If we listen to that culture, we'd be amazed at how much of it has nothing to do with chemicals" (Interview #21, 2013).

[164] She further explained that: "Long story short, I think a lot of environmental activists who are not Latino keep a certain amount of expectation on the Latinos who are in the power structure, and are rising. And I think a lot of them are really growing in their awareness…" (Interview #34, 2012).

Alliance and the *Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio*, the significance of the struggle for the Los Angeles State Historic Park involved more than constructing viable green connectivity between the urban core and the L.A. River. The park, made possible through both environmental and social justice activism, indicated the community's resistance to urban policies that privileged the exchange value of land over the use value, as well as attempted reversal of the continued pattern of spatial injustices against lower-income, majority nonwhite communities. For many of the environmental justice activists, the end goal was not necessarily to create a park, but to allow a community to determine how its environment would be materially and symbolically altered. It was also about understanding that land use distributions were not static or ahistorical, and resisting urban policies and development processes that produced these inequitable environmental conditions. This longer-termed, broader understanding was summarized by one Alianza member:

> [The Alianza's work] wasn't about a park here and park there. It was about the fundamental difference between the way Latinos and other people of color view power and view the environment, via social change. …It's about a long-term campaign. It's not just one park or two parks; it's about equal access to public resources, including greenspace and river revitalization in the L.A. River (Interview #60, 2012).

For these activists and environmentalists, justice was a long-term campaign to gain equal access, to become empowered, to remain at the table of decision-making.

Moreover, activism around the river was about confronting the reality of uneven development and environmental racism based on the histories of how that development shaped unjust landscapes within Los Angeles. Environmental justice, again, was understood as more than just distributions of parks and greenspace, but about recognizing the wider processes that produced inequitable distributions and how far back into the city's history those processes operated (and would continue to operate):

> [There is in LA] the fundamental reality that children of color are living in poverty with no access to a car have the worst access to parks, the worst access to schools with five acres or more of playing fields, they have the highest levels of childhood obesity, and they are the most at risk for gangs, crimes, drugs, and violence. *...And those aren't accidents of unplanned growth or efficient free-market allocation of goods. That's the legacy, the continuing pattern of discrimination in housing, land use, education, and economic benefits. ...Mainstream environmental organizations, they won't say those things. They will just say, 'oh, we need more parks.'* We look at history to understand how things came to be the way they are and how they could be better (Interview #60, 2012, emphasis added).

The battle over what the Cornfields—or the Los Angeles River, for that matter—would be used for, by whom, and decided upon by who, targeted the larger problems of racially-unjust urban policies and the continued legacy of development; the parks and the river, rather than being the ultimate objective of environmental justice activism, stand in as the signifier of these larger issues.

To expect a single park, like the L.A. State Historic Park, to alleviate the wider set of injustices borne by poorer communities of color, would be simplistic and ineffective. This was even acknowledged by one park agency representative, who shared that "the one thing we came to realize with this park…is that you can't cure all the societal ills with one piece of open space. L.A. is one of the most park poor cities in the nation, and we have a lot of catching up to do"

(Interview #62, 2013).[165] For some, who viewed the resistance to the final Cornfield park design as controversial or too political (or, as one activist described it, "confrontational"), the central message of community organizations and the Alianza was misinterpreted or misunderstood. In one newspaper article covering the Alianza's comments to the city's draft LARRMP, one planner and artist is described as "tak[ing] issue with the complaints of those who are upset with the master plan", and is quoted as stating: "Some of the funnier critiques I've heard is that it's not going to solve gang violence. That's not the river's problem, or a design problem, that's a much larger social problem…It's not going to solve world hunger" (Rojas quoted in George 2007).

What Rojas, and others who have similarly expressed that the master plan is a greenway design that cannot possibly address the root of many social problems, perhaps miss in their commentary is that these organizations are not expecting a river master plan to address "gang violence" or "world hunger" or any other problem with structural causes. What these groups advocated for was for the plan—and those who would implement it—to acknowledge the connectivity among the issues located at the river (i.e. public safety of parks) and those that lie beyond (i.e. lack of educational and youth development opportunities, gang violence, and problems of homelessness). The Alianza's members, by raising the issue of affordable housing in their comments to the draft master plan, did not demand that projects for the river address the widespread problem of gentrification throughout the city; they did, however, intend to argue that unless river policies along the river acknowledged the connection between urban greening and gentrification, and made room in the future implementation of those plans to address those connections, those very projects which were advertised to benefit low-income communities could possibly do the opposite. For these communities, the single-issue focus of greenspace access as fulfilling environmental justice needs was not particularly useful if that focus did not or could not recognize the multiple socio-ecological issues that communities faced. Environmental justice would be not be achieved if a limited approach to how injustice originates, and the wider network of processes that produce those injustices remained unidentified and unaddressed.

What's more, as the narrative surrounding the Cornfields site became less of a community and social justice conflict, and more of an urban environmental project, the emphasis on historical injustice and racial discrimination became overshadowed by the technical considerations of site remediation and environmental design, as well as de-politicized by the process of building consensus around a multi-use, multi-benefit greenspace. What began as a largely political struggle over environmental injustice in an area marked with historical patterns of racially-based discriminatory urban development gradually became a sustainability project aimed at providing habitat, watershed connectivity, and symbolizing the city's commitment to a revitalized Los Angeles River. Designs for the park, which paid lip service to the cultural significance of the historical Plaza and the Cornfields site (as a West Coast "Ellis Island"), called for monuments that would recognize the diversity and political struggle characterizing this landscape, while the processes of planning the park itself glossed over the continued struggle of

[165] Another community activist expressed similar sentiments regarding conflicting visions for how parks along the river should be designed. He stated that the problem was not about which use was more beneficial or more appropriate for the site, but rather about the lack of these spaces to being with: "Well, I think the problem of why there is conflict…is that there obviously is not enough space for active recreation. …If you have communities that like basketball and soccer, then you're going to have communities advocating that places that are underdeveloped and underutilized be used for that. If you have enough of those places, then people won't have a problem with all greenspace along the LA River for it to be natural! So that needs to be addressed. That there needs to be more" (Interview #51, 2010).

disempowered communities to gain access to participatory opportunities and have their voices recognized, regarded.

The de-politicization of the landscape of the Cornfield and the L.A. River raises concerns as future development could threaten the surrounding communities. The California High Speed Rail, though a largely dormant project at the moment, has revealed plans to transect this area; though previous protests against laying tracks through the park were largely successful, the issue could reemerge once more as the project planning moves forward. Additionally, both due to the deindustrialization of the area and the creation of the park, the surrounding neighborhoods are becoming increasingly gentrified (see Chapter Four). According to one state agency representative, the Chinatown area has recently undergone noticeable changes:

> L.A. is a very fluid place. I mean, there's gentrification taking place here in this community. Downtown, in the last ten years, has five thousand new residents that moved into the area, who weren't part of this original discussion and dialogue [regarding the Cornfield]. …So people are coming to use the park, this new downtown creative class demographic. And you have the oldtimers still here (Interview #62, 2013).

Other environmentalists and even city bureaucrats working on environmental projects confirm that the area around the Cornfields has gentrified during the last ten years (Interview #33, 2012; #15, 2012). Residential development arose quickly in industrially zoned land, ushering in concerns among city planners and existing residents alike (City of Los Angeles DCP 2007, 2011; Interview #57, 2013). With the threat of both physical disturbance via the High Speed Rail and displacement via redevelopment/gentrification looming in the near future for surrounding communities, it is imperative that the previous environmental and racial justice focus of the Cornfields landscape be maintained by river advocates and community activists. Yet framing the matter of "environmental justice" to only to the issue of having a park built in a densely populated, low-income, and majority nonwhite urban area is a simplistic and reductionist understanding of environmental justice. Increasing efforts to expand participation for local communities, whether it is through sharing information or receiving feedback, as well as approaching environmental projects with a comprehensive understanding of how communities are impacted—and taking steps to adopt measures that can mitigate or offset some of these impacts—carries out the more complex and challenging work of environmental justice. These steps are crucial to ensuring that river revitalization continues to promote community empowerment and improvement of everyday environmental conditions.

MAKING PACOIMA BEAUTIFUL: GREENING THE WASH WHILE CLEANING UP STREETS

My second case study focuses on the neighborhood of Pacoima, particularly at the ongoing community efforts toward environmental improvement. Located in northeast San Fernando Valley, Pacoima occupies a quintessential Southern California geography, as it is nestled in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains and bisected by the channelized Pacoima Wash, a tributary of the Los Angeles River. Likewise, the history of this neighborhood boasts a unique social and cultural set of conditions, as it was long deemed the "minority" enclave of the otherwise predominantly white San Fernando Valley. Its distinction as one of the few suburban neighborhoods allowing nonwhite home ownership in postwar years carries on in its distinct demographic makeup today. In addition, the postwar industrialization of the Valley shaped the landscapes of Pacoima, and the residents contend with the remnants of industrial activity through

the environmental impacts they bear. Amidst these geographic, physical, and socio-cultural conditions, the community of Pacoima, led by local organization Pacoima Beautiful, attempts to address their neighborhood livability through environmental improvement projects. These projects include increasing parkspace within the neighborhood, greening the Pacoima Wash, and participating in a multi-stakeholder initiative aimed at reducing industrial pollution while promoting green economic development. Rather than define their work as strictly environmental or environmental justice, the residents and stakeholders of Pacoima approach neighborhood improvement as a multi-pronged initiative targeting the interconnected socio-ecological processes shaping their everyday environments.

Unlike the case of the Chinatown Cornfields and the Alianza, my examination of Pacoima does not include a single event or effort, but rather analyzes the environmental activism taking place in this densely urbanized neighborhood. I focus on the community's recent efforts to green the Pacoima Wash, but situate this work within the broader assemblage of actors, agendas, and opportunities/challenges that shape the political and physical landscape of Pacoima. In doing so, I illustrate how one neighborhood strives to interweave social justice, environmental, and public health concerns into a framework of place-improvement that includes producing sustainable, livable environments and building community capacity for environmental self-determination. Leading the efforts for a livable neighborhood is a grassroots, community-based organization known as Pacoima Beautiful; I present this organization's practicing of a multidimensional and hybridized form of environmental activism that successfully integrates ecological, economic, public health, and community development aspects. In this way, the efforts of Pacoima residents can be classified into the rare "middle ground" that Egan (2002) asserts lies between the mainstream environmentalist movement and that of the "subaltern environmentalisms" practiced by environmental justice activists. Pacoima Beautiful's efforts to green the concrete Pacoima Wash tributary provides an example of how a community-driven watershed enhancement project can promote environmental justice objectives, both in remaking a polluted, underserved neighborhood into a livable one and in remaining rooted in community participation and inclusion. I trace how local projects striving to make Pacoima "beautiful" reveal the complex workings of identity, place politics, and community empowerment through engagement, and how upholding environmental justice through urban sustainability requires dealing with these interrelated components. The achievements and shortcomings of Pacoima Beautiful reveal how the urban sustainability movement of restoring the L.A. River could better facilitate and incorporate social and environmental justice issues within its broader agenda.

Background, History, and Geographical Context of Pacoima

The neighborhood of Pacoima is located in the northeast portion of the San Fernando Valley, situated against the western foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains and adjacent to the communities of Arleta, Sylmar, Sun Valley, and the City of San Fernando (an independent municipality). The Pacoima Wash (historically known as Pacoima Creek), a stream fed by runoff from the San Gabriel Mountains, runs through the Angeles National Forest before passing through several neighborhoods within Northeast San Fernando Valley; this sub-watershed consists of a land area of approximately sixty-one square miles, 38% of which is urbanized (The River Project 2006).[166] Just downstream of the Hansen Dam, this creek flows into the Tujunga

[166] There is also the Pacoima Diversion Channel, which is a conduit that runs separate from the channel of the Pacoima Wash. It is mainly underground, and eventually joins the Tujunga Wash at a different point than the main wash channel.

Wash, which is itself one of the major tributaries of the Los Angeles River. Together, the Pacoima and Tujunga Wash drain over 200 square miles of mountainous as well as urbanized floodplain land, constituting the largest sub-watershed of the entire Los Angeles River drainage basin (The River Project 2008).

As discussed in Chapter 2, the geologically volatile nature of the San Gabriel Mountains combined with the climatic unpredictability of Southern California produced streams that were (and still are) hydrologically and geomorphologically unstable; as a result, the Pacoima Wash had its share of severe flooding events (Zierer 1934). Through the flood control infrastructure projects constructed during the first half of the twentieth century, much of this instability is controlled through structures managed by the LA County Flood Control District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. For the Pacoima Wash, four major structures serve flood control and water conservation purposes: the Pacoima Dam, sitting within Pacoima Canyon, regulates the flow of mountain runoff; the Lopez Debris Basin, located in the foothills, catches the massive flows of debris which run down the San Gabriels; just below the debris basin, a three-sided concrete channel encases the Pacoima Wash flow; and the Lopez Spreading Grounds, which sits near the confluence with the Tujunga Wash, is a water infiltration facility that recharges the underground aquifer (Creel et. al. 2004). Both the Pacoima and Tujunga Wash are critical to the city of L.A.'s water supply, as they feed into the San Fernando and Sylmar Groundwater Basins; together, these two groundwater basins carry a 3.5 million acre-feet capacity for use by the L.A. Department of Water and Power (The River Project 2008).

Aside from its physical geography, the demographics and social-cultural makeup of Pacoima reflect the area's somewhat unique history. The San Fernando Valley was for decades, after its 1915 annexation, a bastion of whiteness and ruralism compared to the racial diversity, industrialization, and urban densification unfolding in central and eastern portions of the city. Pacoima itself, first settled in the 1880s, was originally a settlement for migrant laborers contracted for construction work on the Southern Pacific Railroad, as well as agricultural workers (Bender 1962; Invisible 5; Survey LA 2014). As many of these laborers were Mexican or of Mexican descent, the settled area served, from the beginning, as an ethnic enclave that spatially reflected the racialized labor so integral to the L.A. region's burgeoning pre-war economy (Garcia 2010; Modarres 1998; Zierer 1934). As suburbanization and industrial development expanded significantly in the San Fernando Valley in the post-World War II period, much of the Valley's agricultural land was subdivided into tracts for single-unit residential as well as industrial development.

Because of the postwar suburban and military-industrial boom, the San Fernando Valley gained economic strength as well as population growth. The influx of homeowners, eager to purchase houses in the newly constructed suburbs of the Valley, however, were majority white, largely due to the mix of racist planning policies and practices implemented by both government agencies and private corporations. *De jure* policies of racial segregation—restrictive covenants and deeds, discriminatory lending practices—as well as *de facto* planning/real estate practices—zoning, redlining, homeowner loan distributions—operated prevalently throughout L.A. County. As a result, most of the Valley suburbs, by the 1970s, were made up of white, middle-class residents occupying the predominantly single-family houses developed throughout multiple neighborhoods. This active preservation of whiteness, expressed both as spatial segregation as well as constructed cultural identity, testifies to the ongoing project of instituting white supremacy in Southern California (Alguamer 2008; Lipsitz 2006).

Pacoima, however, remained an anomaly amid the ongoing spatialization of whiteness in the San Fernando Valley, as homes were available for purchase by nonwhite residents. Throughout the suburbanization of the Valley, Pacoima remained the "unofficial minority district", a place where Japanese American, Mexican Americans, and African American residents could find residential and other real estate opportunities. For Japanese Americans (who had first settled in Pacoima as a farming community), displaced and dispossessed through their forced internment during World War II, Pacoima and San Fernando remained places where they could find opportunities for commercial development (Barraclough 2011; Survey LA 2014). There were also public housing projects (such as the Basilone Homes and San Fernando Gardens) that were racially integrated; meanwhile, real estate agents took advantage of a growing Black middle class looking to move out of the urban core and sold them homes contained within this minority district (Barraclough 2011; Invisible 5; Kurashige 2008). These residential opportunities were also extended to Mexican and Mexican American residents, also barred from settling in many other Valley suburbs due to racially restrictive covenants and overt hostility from white residents (Modarres 1998). Though white, working-class residents in Pacoima attempted to institute racial covenants, this attempt was largely "unsuccessful", and:

> As the 1960s and 1970s wore on, the neighborhoods immediately adjacent to Pacoima and San Fernando—the communities of Sylmar, Arleta, Lakeview Terrace, and Sun Valley—began to transition from resolutely white and working class or middle class to majority black and Latino. Whites fled these neighborhoods during this period, moving to places where the rural landscape was legally protected (Barraclough 2011, 132).

Spatial segregation predicates material inequality, and this economic and political inequality was also sedimented in the formation of Pacoima as a minority district in the Valley. In a 1962 report, the Welfare Planning Council described the neighborhood of Pacoima as "the Valley's only mixed-population area" (2), where:

> minority-group residents have found it difficult to purchase homes or rent apartments in the predominantly white neighborhoods west of San Fernando Road. Housing segregation is reflected in the ethnic and racial composition of public school enrollment and the use of public leisure-time and recreational facilities (Bender 1962, 7-8).

Pacoima, therefore, represented the outcome of racial segregation in Los Angeles during the postwar period, as well as a place of opportunity and advancement for those who came to reside there. The neighborhood, "despite [its] poverty", nevertheless "constituted a unique, multiethnic place…amid [the] Valley's intentionally structured white supremacy" (Barraclough 2011, 29, 55).

In addition to the demographic changes that the Northeast Valley neighborhood underwent, the postwar period also saw patterns of urban and industrial development that significantly altered the area. While the majority of the neighborhood, much like its surrounding San Fernando Valley communities, experienced suburban development through the construction of single-family homes, clusters of industrial activity were also formed. As other historical accounts have documented, both the city and county of Los Angeles underwent massive industrialization between the 1940s-1960s, especially with the growth of the aerospace and aviation industrial sectors (much of it subsidized and supported by defense spending of the federal government) and the expansion of automobile manufacturing (Hise 1993; Roderick 2001). A considerable number of research institutions and manufacturing centers connected to aerospace and aircraft production settled in areas such as Pasadena, Burbank, and the San Fernando Valley, including corporations such as Lockheed Martin and academic centers such as

Cal Tech and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (Soja and Scott 1986). These industrial clusters contributed to the suburban boom in the Valley, as workers in these sectors moved into the newly constructed tract housing of these "satellite cities" (Hise 1993). Moreover, the growth of automobile availability to middle-class families and the government-sponsored construction of freeway systems throughout the region transformed the economy and environment of the Valley as well. The rise of automobile use was fueled by the Fordist production of these vehicles, and contributed to the economic success of the industry; meanwhile, the expansion of the interstate freeway network resulted in the construction of freeways that traversed multiple communities (Avila 2004).

Postwar industrialization, therefore, dramatically transformed the environment of this once-rural neighborhood. In addition to the suburbanization of the landscape, the neighborhood experienced proximity to industrial facilities which supported the aerospace and automobile sectors rampantly expanding during this time. Heavy manufacturers such as the Price-Pfister Faucet Manufacturing Plant and Holchem Inc. operated next to residentially-zoned areas (SurveyLA 2014). Transportation infrastructure affected the landscape as well, with several airports operating in or near the neighborhood (Whiteman and Bob Hope Airports), Southern Pacific's railroad tracks running through the area, while three freeways—the Interstates 5 and 210, California Freeway 118—were constructed during the 1950s and 60s, laying down routes running through or along the neighborhood. Even with the economic restructuring of the 1980s and 90s, that saw the emergence of post-Fordist shifts in industrial activity—with smaller clusters of light manufacturing spread out over a wider geographic footprint—there remained in Pacoima pockets of industrial activity in the form of concentrated smaller-scaled facilities that are oftentimes largely unmonitored by regulatory agencies (LA Collaborative for Environmental Health and Justice 2010; Maida 2013; Sagahun 2011). Though industrial facilities have resettled and/or closed in Pacoima since postwar development, they have left behind highly polluted sites that, among other things, have contaminated water resources, including the San Fernando Groundwater Basin. On top of the air pollution from the nearby freeways, airports, and remaining industrial clusters, the neighborhood:

> is home to five Superfund sites; American Etching and Manufacturing, D & M Steel, Holchem, Inc., HR Textron-Glenoaks, and Price Pfister, Inc. The former Price-Pfister Faucet Plant Superfund site was recently redesignated as a Brownfield for redevelopment (Invisible 5).

The clustered nature of these pollutant sources has led to the designation of Pacoima as a "toxic hot spot" within the city where the total number of hazardous sites create devastating cumulative harms upon the residing community ("Businesses support" 2012; Sagahun 2011).[167]

The history of urban development in the San Fernando Valley—its particular processes of racial segregation, industrialization, and suburbanization—reveals how environmental injustices were produced for communities such as Pacoima. As racialized spatialization of Los Angeles unfolded, these processes worked within the specific historical and geographical contexts of the Valley to produce unevenly developed and environmentally inequitable landscapes (Lipsitz 2007). Through implementation of exclusionary planning processes and policies, particularly during periods of mass suburbanization, whiteness as a racial category affixed onto bodies of L.A.'s residents was also expressed, re-formulated, and protected not only through spatial

[167] The problem of these accumulated pollutants is compounded by the geography of the neighborhood, where the specific weather patterns of the area push airborne materials against the San Gabriel and Verdugo Mountains, trapping the contamination in place as a layer over the Northeast Valley area (Invisible 5).

separation of the city but also through in the healthful/harmful environmental conditions of these urban spaces (Pulido 2000). Aside from spatial segregation through racially restrictive policies and practices, the preservation of whiteness occurred through the construction of a cultural identity that relied upon a rural landscape and a romanticized 'way of living' steeped in gentleman farming and equestrian practices (Barraclough 2008; 2011).

This constructed and fiercely guarded identity borrowed from the longstanding ideologies and meta-narratives of race and nature, of which racial purity (whiteness) was conflated with purity of nature; it also formed in relation to places rendered as opposite, or, the dense, polluted, 'unnatural' inner city spaces inhabited by nonwhite bodies (Braun 2003; Duncan and Duncan 2003; Kosek 2006; Millington 2012). In contrast to the greener neighborhoods of Woodland Hills, Sherman Oaks, and Encino, there are those such as Pacoima, where the concentration of nonwhite bodies as well as polluting land uses coincided with one another. Therefore, the current social and environmental conditions of Pacoima cannot be understood outside of the broader histories of the city and the region, in which inequitable socio-ecological spatialities were and are produced via the preservation of white supremacy and privilege during a period of immense urban change (Avila 2004; Davis 1990; Pulido 1996, 2000, 2015). Pacoima is not the outcome of apolitical or aberrant urban policies. The landscape is dotted with brownfields, industrial clusters, and Superfund sites and is also home to a population of roughly 8,0000 residents that is 85% Latino and 8% African American, with an average household income of $25K, and had, by 1990 a 10% unemployment rate and near 18% of households in poverty (Dowall 1996; Pacoima Beautiful; Toker and Pontikis 2011).[168]

Greening the Pacoima Wash: Planning a Healthier Community and Watershed

The history of Pacoima reveals how racial segregation and urban development produced environmental injustices within one neighborhood. However, Pacoima is not only defined by the inequitable conditions its residents face on a daily basis, but also by a strong sense of community and place (Maida 2009; Toker and Pontikis 2011). Both of these aspects inform the ways in which the residents of Pacoima engage in an environmental politics to improve their neighborhood. This section describes in detail the process that went into developing a plan for enhancing the Pacoima Wash. Projects such as greening an urban waterway are created within the context of the community's greatest concerns, which include living with disproportionately high amounts of environmental pollutants and dealing with harmful yet necessary industrial clusters within the neighborhood. The efforts of the residents and stakeholders of this neighborhood, therefore, highlight advocacy work that advances a variegated agenda that straddles the frameworks of environmentalist, environmental justice, and sustainable development movements.

A central player in Pacoima's environmental politics is the community-based organization Pacoima Beautiful. Formed in 1996 by a small group of women who organized neighborhood beautification events, Pacoima Beautiful eventually grew into an environmental justice organization that focuses on improving neighborhood conditions and empowering its residents through policy advocacy and community development programs (Interview #70, 2012). Describing themselves as the "only environmental justice organization in the Northeast San Fernando Valley", this nonprofit group engages in a series of programs and collaborative

[168] According to U.S. Census data as of 2008, Pacoima has one of the highest concentrations of Latino and African-American residents and lowest education rates in the entire Valley. The neighborhood also has an average income that is less than half of that found in the affluent western Valley (US Census Bureau 2008).

projects that they hope will ultimately "increas[e] the quality of life of the residents of the Northeast San Fernando Valley while addressing issues of equity in a community that has long suffered from negative environmental impacts" (Pacoima Beautiful Website).

True to its mission statement and vision, the various projects that Pacoima Beautiful has undertaken focus on issues of public health, neighborhood improvement, and capacity building, while involving collaborative partnerships with diverse academic, governmental, and NGO entities. Their major campaigns have sought to address the host of environmental and social problems residents face, including: the air, water, and soil pollution emitted from industrial land uses; the deficit of neighborhood parks and greenspace, as well as the restricted spatial connectivity and poor circulation of streets and public space; and the political and economic constraints placed upon the heavily lower-income, Latino, immigrant community living and working in Pacoima. Among the specific initiatives carried out by the organization are: pushing for remediation of the former Price-Pfister Manufacturing Plant that was once a designated Superfund site (Maida 2009; Mikulan 2005); partnering with UCLA's Department of Nursing and the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services to implement a community-based health outreach program (Kim et. al. 2005); collaborating with the urban studies department at the California State University Northridge in various sustainable design/development initiatives (Toker and Pontikis 2011); and participating in a multi-community initiative for green economic development in contaminated areas, known as the Clean Up Green Up Initiative (discussed in the next section). In addition to these longer-term initiatives, the organization participates in tree-planting events with local youth, hold education and training workshops for residents, and hosting communitywide events focused on healthy food exchange. Together, these projects demonstrate Pacoima Beautiful's multifaceted approach to community health and environmental sustainability.

A major and ongoing project for Pacoima Beautiful has been the greening of the Pacoima Wash. A trapezoidal concrete channel largely fenced off in the areas within Pacoima, the wash was initially not recognized as an opportunity site for expanding parkspace and mobility corridors within the neighborhood.[169] As the visibility and political support for the restoration of the Los Angeles River increased during the last twenty to thirty years, it appears that focus also shifted (albeit to a lesser extent) to the tributaries of the river. As federal, state, and local agencies with jurisdictional authority over some aspect of the L.A. River watershed invested in plans, policies, and projects for river restoration and sustainable water management, organizations increasingly realized the ecological, economic, and social benefits of enhancing/improving the extensive network of waterways flowing through the county.

And while the Pacoima Wash, unlike the mainstem L.A. River or even the Tujunga Wash tributary, has received less attention, it has become a target of restoration efforts by environmental and community stakeholders. In 2004, the Mountains and Recreation Conservation Authority (MRCA), working with the City of San Fernando, developed the Pacoima Wash Greenway Master Plan, an improvement plan for the portions of the stream running within the borders of the small municipality (Creel et. al. 2004). Several years later, a local nonprofit, The River Project, produced the Tujunga-Pacoima Wash Watershed Plan, which,

[169] The City of Los Angeles, in the Pacoima-Arleta Community Plan, does not recognize the Pacoima Wash as a potential target site for building parks or greenways, or improving pathways for neighborhood circulation (as bikeways or pedestrian pathways). Though the community plan identifies the future need for increasing these types of land uses and transportation corridors within the community plan area, it does not identify the wash as a possible site for meeting those goals. As this document was last updated in 1996, the awareness of enhancing the flood control channels had not yet reached the level where this identification would be readily made (City of Los Angeles DCP 1996).

with funding from the California Department of Water Resources, explored the potential for stormwater capture and groundwater replenishment of this sub-watershed (The River Project 2008). In addition to these plans, Pacoima Beautiful was awarded a three-year, $300,000 grant in 2008 from the Los Angeles County of Public Health, after proposing to develop a greenway plan for the Pacoima Wash portions within city of Los Angeles. The grant was given through the county's Policies for Livable, Active Communities and Environments Program (PLACE), a pilot funding program intended to encourage urban design projects that would promote physical activity in disadvantaged urban communities in order to combat obesity and other health issues.

Through the PLACE grant, Pacoima Beautiful partnered with the MRCA and hired a project coordinator, and three years later produced their Pacoima Wash Vision Plan (Pacoima Beautiful 2011). Similar to the 2007 Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan, the Pacoima Wash plan adopted a multi-objective approach that explored the range of ecological and social benefits imparted by enhancing the long-neglected yet spatially promising flood control corridors. Therefore, instead of focusing entirely on a single or even a main issue—as the 2008 Tujunga-Pacoima Wash Watershed Plan had done by emphasizing hydrologic improvements—the Vision Plan positioned itself as a multi-benefit endeavor, declaring that its mission is:

> To revitalize the Pacoima Wash as a vital community asset that will provide wildlife habitat, provide access to new recreational amenities and create a healthier, more sustainable community (Pacoima Beautiful 2011, 1).

The plan identified five major goals—promoting physical activity, increasing greenspace, protecting natural areas, improving water quality, maintaining flood protection—that accommodated the specific and unique characteristics of this sub-watershed. Because the plan covered the stretches of the wash that flowed through the city of Los Angeles (in the neighborhoods of Sylmar and Pacoima), it looked at improvement opportunities in both the un-channelized, upstream portions within less-developed foothill community of Sylmar as well as the concrete-enclosed portions flowing through heavily urbanized Pacoima. Therefore, the location and geographic conditions of the wash itself lent to the multi-objective approach of the vision plan, as improving the upper watershed could increase stormwater impoundment and groundwater capture while enhancing the lower watershed brought open space amenities to the densely urbanized populations surrounding the wash. Furthermore, transforming the "highly-engineered utilitarian device" into a "recreational and natural amenity" would serve to connect the existing educational and recreational facilities throughout the Northeast Valley, allowing for those living in the highly urbanized Pacoima areas to use the wash as an access corridor to the open space of the Angeles National Forest (Pacoima Beautiful 2011, 3).

Unlike many other urban stream restoration plans, Pacoima Wash Vision Plan is distinctly community generated and driven (*Figure 5.2*). Members of Pacoima Beautiful received substantial assistance from a wide range of public agencies, planning/design firms, and environmental organizations, many of which were also involved in the formation of other stream restoration plans.[170] Yet the initial idea for converting the Pacoima Wash into a neighborhood greenway and transportation corridor originated with a group of local youth participating in

[170] Agencies with jurisdictional authority, such as the Los Angeles County Flood Control District and the Army Corps of Engineers, were involved in meetings and providing input to the organization. Various city departments were also participants in the vision plan's creation, especially the Department of City Planning. Environmental organizations such as Tree People as well as design firms such as Mia Lehrer, also provided technical support and feedback to the plan. Many of these entities met regularly with Pacoima Beautiful members through the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meetings; records for what was discussed in these meetings are included in the Appendices of the Pacoima Wash Vision Plan.

Pacoima Beautiful's summer youth institute (Interview #70, 2012). Once the idea was proposed by the summer institute students, the organization went about acquiring the funding, gathering the input from residents and stakeholders, securing the proper permits for installing an improvement project, and producing the final plan document. This aspect of the plan, that it was conceived of and completely driven by the Pacoima residents, allowed for the community to maintain control over how the greenway project was framed, what it would focus on, and who would determine that focus. Being a community-driven environmental initiative therefore translated into multiple opportunities for the community to participate in the conception of the project, ensuring that the final plan reflected the needs, interests, and concerns of those who would be most impacted by the plan (or, who the plan purported to benefit).

Figure 5.2. The Pacoima Wash Vision Plan. (Source: Pacoima Beautiful.)

Extensive outreach was central to the creation of the vision plan, as a total of twenty-two outreach meetings were held from 2008 to 2011, with nine meetings held in Sylmar and thirteen in Pacoima. The project organizers not only went directly to numerous stakeholder group meetings to conduct focus groups, but also invited them to workshops, design charettes, and site visits in order to collect input from those who lived and worked in both Sylmar and Pacoima (see Appendices F-I of Pacoima Wash Vision Plan). As one project participant observed, Pacoima Beautiful's vision plan was "distinct" from other urban stream restoration plans in the amount of community input it incorporated:

> This [plan] came out of the community. Whereas a lot of the other plans were very science-driven or politically-driven. … So when you're looking at the city's revitalization master plan, it's really flashy looking, just the graphics and it's well written. Whereas this was synthesizing community input (Interview #40, 2012).

Prioritizing the needs and interests of the community, and being able to provide opportunities for the community to participate in visioning and planning processes, to him, set apart the 2011 Vision Plan from other, perhaps more well-funded or technically sophisticated restoration plans.

Though the Vision Plan was presented as a multi-objective one, for the Pacoima community, the plan's central concern would be to address public health. In other words, for residents of Pacoima, including the staff members of Pacoima Beautiful, the Pacoima Wash Vision Plan was crafted within the central framework of targeting community health and wellbeing. This is reflected, in part, by the source of funding for the project, which came from the County Department of Public Health's Polices for Livable, Active Communities and Environments grant program. These PLACE grants, which were disbursed through the Center for Disease Control, directed recipients "to pursue built environment policies and projects that increase opportunities for physical activity" (LA County Department of Public Health 2008). According to one county representative, these grants reflected the growing awareness among health agencies of the interconnectedness of urban space and physical health; therefore, programs like PLACE were intended to:

> encourag[e] public health departments to get involved in urban land use issues as an evidence-based strategy for improving public health, for creating opportunities for people to walk and bike, and have access to food. So the public health department here wanted to create a special focus …And the PLACE grants in 2008 were the first initiatives that we launched (Interview #23, 2012).

More importantly, the public health framing of urban stream improvement was demonstrated through ample community feedback. Through numerous public meetings and focus groups with diverse stakeholder groups, Pacoima Beautiful learned that the community supported improvements to the Pacoima Wash with regards to improving opportunities for physical activity and mobility, enhancing livability through well-maintained public spaces, and enhancing neighborhood connectivity.[171] For a community faced with 29.5% childhood obesity rates (the fourth highest in the city), 20% asthma, 6% diabetes, and 17% overall obesity rates, increased open space and pathways were seen as ways to ameliorate the severe health problems among its community members (Pacoima Beautiful Caminos del Pueblo).[172] Therefore, placing bikeways, greenspace, and connective paths along the Pacoima Wash was identified by the vision plan as one design alternative that could remediate the disjointed space of the neighborhood:

> Obesity in the Pacoima Community Plan Area poses a serious health threat, as it puts people at risk for Type 2 Diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and some forms of cancer. In fact, heart disease, cancer, stroke, and chronic lower respiratory disease have been the top leading causes of death in this community for the past ten years. […] Creating opportunities for physical activity is essential to preventing obesity and the chronic diseases that result from it. The potential that exists for accessible, attractive open space along the Pacoima Wash make it an invaluable asset toward improving the health situation in Sylmar and Pacoima (Pacoima Beautiful 2011, 13).

[171] The Vision Plan includes well document notes on the outreach meetings carried out by Pacoima Beautiful staff. In these notes, participants largely appear supportive of plans to install bikeways and greenspace along the wash, and voice concerns about having more and better quality parks, bikeways, and pathways so that residents can walk safely through the neighborhoods. In addition, when asked to rank the types of public facilities residents wanted to see most along the Pacoima Wash, participants ranked Bikeways/Pathways and Small Neighborhood Parks in the top two positions; when also asked to rank the types of programs they would like to see, participants ranked "Adult Fitness and Wellness Programs" and "Family Programs" as the first and second choices, respectively (Pacoima Beautiful 2011, 48-49). Furthermore, during a mobile workshop that took participants on a tour of the potential sites of improvement along the wash, residents voiced their desire to see safe, natural, and accessible spaces for families to recreate, while also "a large number of participants suggested that greater and improved connectivity was necessary across the Wash" (87-88). The need for spatial connectivity is heightened in a place like Pacoima, which is transected by railroad tracks, freeway lanes, and the concrete flood control channel.

[172] These health statistics apply to those living in the Arleta-Pacoima Community Plan Area, and are not representative of only the Pacoima neighborhood.

Bridges, walkways, and green trails would improve the physical and social fabric of the neighborhood, as connected parks and more walkable streets could foster physical activity among residents and help combat the community's high rates of obesity, asthma, and diabetes. Because of this identified community concern, a physical project that resulted from the PLACE grant involved improving a pedestrian bridge spanning the wash, which is used heavily by students and pedestrians accessing neighborhood parks and schools.

The effort to improve the Pacoima Wash must be situated within the broader context of environmental conditions and community activism of the neighborhood. The Pacoima Wash Vision Plan, from conception to implementation, originated from and was controlled by the Pacoima community. Because the idea to even conceive of the channelized stream as a potential amenity came from the local youth, and because the plan put together by a neighborhood-based environmental justice organization that worked intensely to include the community's interests, concerns, and needs, there were minimal issues around lack of participation. Unlike environmental improvement/design projects that are generated by outside organizations/agencies and provide limited opportunities for the impacted communities to participate and take ownership of the project, work around the Pacoima Wash was largely driven by the community.

As a result, residents and other stakeholders responded positively to the project, even carried a sense of ownership of the project, especially the students and youth who became and continue to be involved with maintenance. Being a community-based, grassroots organization, Pacoima Beautiful was able to implement environmental planning efforts that provided adequate opportunities for participation and inclusion, thereby ensuring that once projects broke ground, there would be little opposition. One staff member made the connection between informing and including the community, and operating with support from them:

> We don't have too many NIMBYs [Not in My Back Yard], fortunately. …We have a really positive community who wants to see the change. …And I was just thinking that it's because people appreciate that they're being asked their opinion, and they didn't think they could express their opinion. They really are ready to see change, and if they can help create that, I think it's welcome (Interview #70, 2012).

This opinion was also voiced by a former Pacoima Beautiful staff member, who remarked that throughout the process of creating the plan, "we didn't have NIMBYism to deal with, which is kind of unique" (Interview #47, 2012). Moreover, this "lack of NIMBYism" in Pacoima was attributed to the fact that the neighborhood was a historically disadvantaged one that still carried a marginalized, underserved status. Greening a concrete waterway, as well as other environmental projects, was generated and driven by the community due to the absence of other organizations/agencies undertaking such efforts:

> I think a lot of stuff around here, it just sits. It doesn't improve. It gets built and that's the end of it, forever. You look at the quality of the parks—they are very poor. A lot of the parkspace is not accessible... *Everything that seems to be getting done is because of community clamoring to get something done*. …You talk about the L.A. River and the big planning effort; there's not a lot of that happening in government levels for Pacoima. And I think pretty much everything getting done is community driven (Interview #40, 2012, emphasis added).

These observations by those working among and with the community illustrate how Pacoima is a place where residents/stakeholders take it upon themselves to implement environmental improvements. In other words, projects to enhance and improve everyday environmental conditions are carried out *for* and *by* the community, rather than an outside entity.

Having the community identify environmental problems and mobilize to address them results in grassroots, neighborhood-based efforts that extend beyond the Pacoima Wash. While Pacoima Beautiful and the residents they serve do recognize the environmental benefits of greening the urban stream that bisects their neighborhood, these efforts developed alongside other initiatives intended to address the multiple environmental problems prevalent within the neighborhood. Embracing a multidimensional understanding of community health, the organization sought to encourage mobility through enhancement of the Pacoima Wash alongside efforts to combat the environmental pollutants which also degraded—even imperiled—the health of residents. This effort took form in Pacoima Beautiful's participation in the Green Zone Initiative. Better known as the Clean Up Green Up (CUGU) Initiative, this environmental justice and public health planning campaign pushed for the city of Los Angeles to adopt a policy that would create "Green Zones" in communities heavily burdened by environmental pollution.

Spearheading the initiative was the Los Angeles Collaborative for Environmental Health and Justice (the Collaborative), a coalition composed of environmental justice organizations from each of the three neighborhoods, researchers from academic institutions such as Occidental College and the University of Southern California, and Liberty Hill Foundation, an organization supporting social justice work in L.A. (Los Angeles Collaborative 2010).[173] Though the Collaborative had originally formed in 1996, the Green Zone District policy proposal emerged later, after years of academic and community-based participatory research determined that certain communities faced compounded environmental hazards. As a policy outgrowth of this research, the Collaborative proposed CUGU as a pilot program that would focus on three low-income, predominantly Latino neighborhoods—Pacoima, Boyle Heights, Wilmington—located in different locations throughout the city (the Valley, downtown, harbor). Though Pacoima, Boyle Heights, and Wilmington, are distinct from one another in geography and place history, they were all nevertheless found to be "toxic hot spots", or neighborhoods impacted by a concentration of harmful facilities and land uses, which, taken together, expose residents to cumulative health risks (LACEHJ 2010; Sagahun 2011). Acknowledging these disproportionately burdened areas, the Clean Up Green Up Initiative advocated for designating these three neighborhoods as "Green Zones", where a special combination of planning regulations and economic incentives would be enacted in order to push for cleaner industrial activities that would reduce pollutants without sacrificing local businesses (Sadd et. al. 2014).

The neighborhood of Pacoima (and partly the neighboring community of Sun Valley) was represented by Pacoima Beautiful in the development of the CUGU Initiative. The organization's participation in the campaign sprung from their desire to address both the economic challenges of the neighborhood (acutely heightened since the closure of many large manufacturing facilities in the area) and the accumulation of air, water, and soil contamination that negatively—and cumulatively—impacts residents' health. Regional deindustrialization, begun in the 1980s, economically and environmentally transformed Northeast San Fernando Valley, as large manufacturing facilities moved out, taking with them numerous jobs and leaving behind severely contaminated sites (Mikula 2005). The loss of jobs at these facilities was economically detrimental to Pacoima, prompting the city to enact measures such as forming

[173] The participating EJ organizations are: Pacoima Beautiful representing Pacoima, Communities for a Better Environment (CBE) and Coalition for a Safe Environment (CFASE) representing Wilmington, and Union de Vecinos representing Boyle Heights. Each of these organizations carries out environmental justice work within and around the communities they represented within the Collaborative.

Enterprise and Revitalization Zones in the area, in hopes that tax cuts and credits, along with other business incentives, would reinvigorate economic activity (City of LA DCP 1996).

Aside from the economic impacts, the changing patterns of industrialization led to environmental modifications as well. Though there is still industrial activity in the neighborhood, it consists of smaller-scaled, heavily clustered businesses. In particular, Pacoima hosts one such industrial cluster, a major boulevard lined with "metal recyclers, trucking yards, rock cutters, salvage yards and auto body shops" that is grimly named "Dismantler Row" (Sagahun 2011). Because of the smaller scale of these newer industries, they often remain unmonitored and/or unregulated by environmental agencies such as the EPA and the California Air Resources Board (Kimbrough 2016; Sagahun 2011).[174] However, the accumulated emissions from these clustered industries have been documented as equivalent to or even in excess of pollutants generated by a large facility (Sadd et. al. 2014). Other sources of pollution were not even identified as hazardous facilities due to their particular nature; for example, the thirteen landfills and asphalt recycling center in Pacoima was responsible for the constant presence of diesel-emitting trucks which would stand idling or pass through residential streets (Interview #40, 2012). However, as community activists pointed out, these businesses also provided employment for residents, with one organizer informing me: "We're happy we have the jobs, but I think [these businesses] just need to be better neighbors and clean up some of their practices to be able to make it better for the residents that are there" (Interview #70, 2012). For a neighborhood struggling environmentally and economically, the opportunity for businesses to "be better neighbors" was presented in Clean Up Green Up's programmatic model of combating pollution without sacrificing economic viability and growth.

After years of researching and campaigning from the Los Angeles Collaborative for Environmental Health and Justice, L.A.'s city council approved the Clean Up Green Up Ordinance in April 2016. Despite undergoing intense scrutiny and modification, the ordinance nevertheless establishes the pilot program first proposed in 2011, whereby three Green Zones, or "CUGU Districts", are designated, in which:

> The purpose…is to reduce cumulative health impacts resulting from land uses including, but not limited to, concentrated industrial land use, on-road vehicle travel, and heavily freight-dominated transportation corridors, which are incompatible with the sensitive uses to which they are in close proximity, such as homes, schools and other sensitive uses (City of LA Ordinance No. 184246, 2016, 5).

According to the ordinance, new development within these three CUGU districts are subject to more stringent building requirements, such as the inclusion of setbacks and buffer zones between facilities and surrounding properties (Barboza 2016).[175] Additionally, resources would be provided to local businesses to support adoption of cleaner practices and navigation of complicated regulatory requirements. While many elected officials, environmental justice activists, and university scholars celebrated the passing of policy that proactively dealt with

[174] For example, one Pacoima Beautiful staff member explained that there are numerous granite-cutting businesses along and near Dismantler Row; these businesses, which often contract workers from within the neighborhood, are nevertheless not regulated by the EPA, and their activities not only emit harmful particulate matter into the air, but these particulates mix with water and flow, unregulated and unmonitored, along the streets and into the storm sewers (Interview #40, 2012).

[175] Another ordinance, related to the CUGU program, was passed on the same day by the city council. This ordinance would "change the building code citywide to require enhanced air filters in all new homes within 1,000 feet of freeways" (Barboza 2016). This ordinance applies to new developments that are approved after the adoption of building code modifications, and is regarded as one way to address the documented respiratory problems associated with living in proximity to freeways (City of LA Ordinance No. 184245, 2016).

urban pollution in disadvantaged neighborhoods, resistance from oil and real estate industries not only deferred adoption of the policy, but lessened the building requirements outlined in earlier iterations of the ordinance. Though armed with less regulatory teeth than originally conceived, the Green Zone policy is nonetheless an important step for Los Angeles to protect the most marginalized communities from concentrated environmental contamination (Yanez 2016).

There are much more thorough accounts of the process involved in and significance of the CUGU ordinance, especially from those directly involved in the development of the pilot program (Carter 2016; Kimbrough 2017; Pastor and Morello-Frosch 2014; Sadd et. al. 2014). My focus, in this chapter, on the Clean Up Green Up campaign is to provide examples that attest to the multidimensional and comprehensive conceptualization of environmental justice that Pacoima Beautiful operates under. The organization's overarching approach to combating the environmental injustices prevalent within their neighborhood is through practicing a community-based, multi-agenda activism rooted in sophisticated understandings of health and the linkages between urban policy and urban space. One staff member explained that after the organization, and the community, learned the extent of the multiple environmental problems afflicting the neighborhood:

> We decided Pacoima Beautiful would be more policy-driven. …We think now that we know what the problems are, the next steps would be finding steps to address them. […]We know the problems, so now we're tasked with finding solutions to mitigate some of these problems. And also, we've learned of a lot of the resources that we have that we need to really bring out. Like the Pacoima Wash—make it into an amenity instead of just unutilized land (Interview #70, 2012).

These next steps or policy-driven solutions, of course, include the Pacoima Wash Vision Plan and the Clean Up Green Up Initiative, among others.

These efforts, then, illustrate how the Pacoima community seek to create more environmentally just conditions for themselves; they also contextualize the community's work to improve and enhance the Pacoima Wash. Enhancing this urban stream is not regarded as a standalone mitigation project, but rather represents one targeted action, among a host of others—all of which somehow aim to improve the social, ecological, and economic health of the neighborhood. Greening the wash was conceived as beneficial for water capture, but also because "it was a great way to bring open space to mitigate air pollution" as well as provide "a space where [residents] could do recreation" since "we have very high rates of obesity" (Interview #70, 2012). For residents and community leaders working in Pacoima, exemplified by the multi-pronged, policy-driven approach of Pacoima Beautiful, enhanced waterways or community benefit agreements or revitalized commercial corridors alone is insufficient to providing a livable, sustainable, and healthy environment for residents. Each of these initiatives, when combined to provide relief to those who face industrial contamination and socioeconomic hardship, in addition to reduced park access, contributes to a more healthy, just environment for those who live, work, and play in Pacoima.

Moreover, the organization views community development and empowerment as critical to environmental justice, as solutions to mitigating the environmental problems of Pacoima must ultimately be identified and guided by the community itself, through engagement and participation in the policymaking process. As numerous environmental justice scholars and advocates have argued, justice is achieved not only through measures that redistribute environmentally harmful sites, spatial patterns, and social conditions among communities, but also through the empowering of community, whether it is integrating them into the knowledge production or policymaking process (Corburn 2005; Kuhn 1998; Schlosberg 2007). Like the

development of the Pacoima Wash Vision Plan (and subsequent efforts around the tributary), the Clean Up Green Up campaign embodies the importance of increased participation, inclusion, and political engagement. Pastor and Morello-Frosch (2014) identify the CUGU initiative as an example of how the fields of public health and community development are converging once more, prompting policymakers and practitioners to not only examine the "broad patterns of income inequality, urban sprawl, and environmental justice that combine to keep certain communities…less healthy than others", but also urges the "nurturing" of "community power and political engagement" (1894).

Expanding political knowledge/capacity and developing capabilities were central to the work behind the CUGU ordinance, particularly through the "ground-truthing" process, wherein residents themselves identified and mapped the sources of environmental pollution. The reasoning behind ground-truthing, "that community residents observe the day-to-day activities of emission sources and may find hidden hazards that are not recorded in government databases" (Sadd et. al. 2014, 283), proved justified in Pacoima, where residents were able to utilize training and equipment, combine it with their daily lived experiences of their neighborhood, and identify almost fifty environmentally harmful sites and seven vulnerable community centers that had not been included in the databases of government regulatory agencies (Sadd et. al. 2014). Therefore, residents' active involvement in the CUGU policymaking process not only produced more robust and accurate data on the environmental conditions of impacted neighborhoods, but the Pacoima community gained knowledge on health sciences and conducting political engagement. From its inception, CUGU took seriously the argument that participation is not an add-on to the issue of distribution, ensuring that "communities and all types of stakeholders should be seen as equal partners in a dialogue on environmental justice issues and that interactions must encourage active community participation, institutionalize public participation, recognize community knowledge, and utilize cross-cultural formats and exchanges" (Kuhn 1998, 650).

Moreover, the environmental justice activism performed by Pacoima Beautiful involves recognition of place, the socio-spatial processes that shaped that place, and the ways in which uneven power relations worked within those processes (Holifield et. al. 2009). Environmental activism in Pacoima, whether it involves greening the Pacoima Wash or establishing Green Zones, or some other project altogether, is carried out with a heightened awareness of how community identity is tied into the racialized history of the neighborhood itself. Confronting the toxic landscapes which constitute their everyday environments requires the community to also recognize how race, class, and culture factored into the formation of these landscapes. Racialization and stigmatization of place are interrelated, as Pacoima's history of being the San Fernando Valley's "minority district" is woven together with the neighborhood's prevalent environmental pollution, poor spatial planning, and relative lack of economic and political capital.

Those who live in Pacoima and work to improve its environmental conditions are made aware of the racialized and stigmatized spaces that constitute their daily landscapes. In 1968, residents on the western side of the I-5 freeway in Northeast San Fernando Valley fought to distance and disassociate themselves from their poorer eastern neighbors, thus forming their own politically-recognized neighborhood, known as Arleta (Survey LA 2014). Arleta's continued desire to be politically separated from Pacoima, as one activist informed me, resurfaced when the city planning department decided to combine Pacoima and Arleta into one Community Planning Area and was then met with resistance from residents of the latter neighborhood (Interview #30 2010; #70, 2012). As one Pacoima Beautiful representative explained it, this resistance (though

ultimately futile) stemmed from the widespread perception that Pacoima was a rough, ugly, and blighted neighborhood. The perception that Pacoima was ugly and blighted was, according to another community stakeholder, due to the poor planning/layout of and lack of urban services in the neighborhood. As he explained it, the problems of neglect, pollution, and disarray were ultimately rooted in the fact that a neighborhood largely inhabited by African American and Latino residents was long dismissed as a "no man's land" where "people just didn't care" about proper development and maintenance (Interview #40, 2012). The longstanding association of nonwhite bodies, urban blight, and industrial pollution in Pacoima was summed up by one Pacoima Beautiful representative, who lamented that the neighborhood was perceived as ugly, dirty, and aesthetically unpleasing, a combination that "make[s] it seem like, we're just a bunch of *cholos* that just don't care—and it's so not like that" (Interview #70, 2010).

Recognizing the ways in which, historically and politically, the neighborhood became physically and symbolically degraded, the environmental activism in Pacoima seeks to counter both the environmental contamination and stigmatization of place. Residents, in beautifying their streets, greening their streams, and cleaning up their businesses, struggle to materially transform their environmental conditions while also promoting a different spatial imaginary of their neighborhood. Efforts that strive to "clean up" and "green" the area, to remake Pacoima into a "beautiful" place, encapsulate the community's desire to retain the awareness of place history and encourage the pride of community identity while deconstructing the detrimental associations of race, poverty, and pollution embedded within their landscapes (Interview #31, 2012). At a rally held before the city planning commission's vote on the CUGU ordinance, longtime Pacoima residents spoke out about the pride they carried for their neighborhood, and how they supported a policy that would finally transform it into a livable, healthy, and sustainable one. Moreover, Pacoima Beautiful's long-held efforts of providing employment opportunities and green economic revitalization demonstrate a desire to bring material benefits and also dismantle their image as a dirty, contaminated, and socioeconomically stagnant neighborhood. For example, the organization not only pushed for cleanup of contamination at the Price-Pfister site, but also negotiated for community benefit agreements with potential corporations interested in moving into the abandoned manufacturing site (Cavanaugh 2008). For a neighborhood whose landscapes are perceived and portrayed as largely abandoned, derelict, and industrially polluted, the commercial revitalization of Pacoima stands as an important step towards reclaiming neighborhood pride (Hsu 2014).

The case of Pacoima Beautiful and the creation of the Pacoima Wash Vision Plan demonstrate how river restoration can better incorporate environmental justice issues and advance its objectives. The enhancement/improvement of the Pacoima Wash was an effort spearheaded by the community, ensuring that residents were able to identify their concerns, incorporate their desires into formal plans, and be included and engaged in decision-making processes. As a result, environmental justice concerns—such as community health and mobility—were given primacy, while expanded community participation led to an inclusive, more democratic planning processes. Environmental activism, led by Pacoima Beautiful, operates within the framework of environmental justice that seeks to address equitable distributions of environmental harms and benefits, but also of recognizing the legacies of disempowerment and marginalization that have shaped Pacoima as a place, all in order to combat them in and through planning/decision-making processes. Greening the Pacoima Wash is embedded within a broader agenda that believes remaking a neighborhood so that it is livable for residents includes the absence of pollutants, the availability of amenities, and the presence of

economic opportunities. This model could be replicated in other neighborhoods within the L.A. River watershed, where a community-led effort to restore and revitalize a stretch of river or tributary could be supported by various agencies and entities, not just environmentally-related ones.

River advocacy and environmental groups could partner with community organizations working in specific areas throughout the watershed in order to advance that organization's goals but also to diversify the range of actors involved in river restoration. These partnerships are needed in order to continue expanding the potential for the L.A. River restoration movement to facilitate, rather than constrain, environmental justice efforts that are unfolding throughout the watershed. Communities like Pacoima gather inspiration for what they can do in their neighborhoods—like building bikeways and parks along a concrete flood control channel—but also their involvement in the L.A. River injects a much-needed social justice component that can ensure the urban sustainability agenda of the river promotes environmental justice rather than become an urban regeneration project. This is summarized by one former Pacoima Beautiful staff member, who observed that:

> I see the wash project very much in line with that whole movement to revitalize the [L.A. River]. […] You know, and I think it's all good, it's a really positive thing for the city and everything, but one thing I guess that I mentioned before is, I think that that movement was started by FoLAR in the 80s, by a particular demographic. It was more people not rooted in the environmental justice community (Interview #47, 2012).

The involvement of organizations like Pacoima Beautiful in projects to revitalize urban streams addresses this demographic difference, allowing those who are rooted in the environmental justice community to participate in the watershed sustainability initiatives throughout Los Angeles. Greater involvement of organizations like Pacoima Beautiful, through partnerships with environmental agencies and NGOs, and funded by diverse agencies, could further incorporate a social justice component into the L.A. River agenda.

Encouraging partnerships and collaborations with environmental and social justice oriented organizations/community groups can address the real and serious problem of not enough of these organizations involved in the L.A. River restoration effort. Focusing on single issues of greenspace distribution while discouraging community participation, as seen in the case of the Cornfield Park, prevents certain groups from being able or willing to join the political cause of the L.A. River. The presence of these social justice groups may also demonstrate to others that the revitalization of the L.A. River is—and should—not be a strictly environmental agenda. In the case of Pacoima Beautiful, other factors can foster a sense of exclusion among communities that are willing and able to improve watershed conditions. Though the Pacoima Wash Vision Plan was conceived of and largely developed by residents themselves, there remains within the community a sense of exclusion from the overall environmental movement centered on the Los Angeles River watershed. Activists and residents expressed repeatedly that they perceived the relative lack of attention paid to the tributaries of the Los Angeles River an inequity. Neglecting tributaries such as the Pacoima Wash (and to a lesser extent, Tujunga Wash) often meant that attention, resources, and manpower were not given in adequate amounts to other areas within and vital to the watershed.

One community organizer and planner who had worked on the Pacoima Wash Vision Plan voiced the logistical challenges that they faced, detailing how a simple task such as receiving a permit for a bridge modification became an enormous obstacle because of the lack of

institutional infrastructure built around plans for the tributaries. He compared that to the L.A. River projects, concluding that:

> But see, with the L.A. River master plan, they set up all these working groups, and that's kind of frustrating. They have MOUs between the city and the county to make those projects really easy [to implement]. And the Pacoima Wash…there's no significant difference between the Pacoima Wash and the L.A. River. The only difference is that it's not in their plan, so that's why it was frustrating [to get things done]. The process to do work on the L.A. River is much easier than the process for the Pacoima Wash. *There's much more built-in collaboration* (Interview #47, 2012, emphasis added).

Another Pacoima Beautiful representative voiced his concern over the lack of resources available to those working to improve the tributaries, and how this reflected a wider unevenness of political power among communities living in the watershed:

> In the planning, it seems to me that a lot of the Valley gets left out, because we're kind of way out there. And I think there are social justice issues that play out a little bit. Like, who's more vocal in government, who's more influential, and I think a lot of the Valley, and especially this part of the Valley probably is not as well connected as some of those things. … But the plan left out large sections of the city (Interview #40, 2012).

These observations show that, despite their achievements (gaining grants, groundbreaking projects, and mobilizing community support) with the wash, the Pacoima community perceive themselves as excluded from wider circles of planning, visioning, and decision-making, and this exclusion represents a form of injustice in itself.

The case of Pacoima Beautiful demonstrates the complex environmental politics behind a seemingly-straightforward urban greening process. The organization was able to capitalize on the current popularity of and political support for restoring urban waterways in Los Angeles, in order to create a community-driven greenway plan that ultimately served to improve the environmental conditions of their neighborhood. They were able to receive political support (from elected officials at the city and state level), funding, and technical assistance (through partnerships with environmental agencies such as the MRCA) in order to begin re-envisioning a former neighborhood barrier into a potential community resource. Although their efforts to realize that vision was somewhat constrained by bureaucracy and limited resources,[176] these challenges could be overcome in the future if entities within the L.A. River urban sustainability movement included this tiny community into the implementation of their agenda. Vocal support and political mobilization by organizations such as FoLAR, NRDC, and the River Revitalization Corporation could assist community groups like Pacoima Beautiful. It could also, in doing so, expand its scope to more fully integrate an environmental justice component into their own agenda, especially one that recognizes the multidimensional nature of environmental injustice that afflicts the communities along the watershed. This could place justice issues as front and center—including the explicitly politicized nature of racialized and racist urban environmental change—within the L.A. River agenda as it continues to materially-symbolically transform the landscapes of Los Angeles.

[176] For example, one of the required outcomes of the county's PLACE grants was a change in policy toward greater mobility in the grantee's communities. For Pacoima, the policy change was to incorporate design and plan guidelines from the Pacoima Wash Vision Plan into the neighborhood's upcoming updates to their Community Plan. However, due to the city's budget cuts in 2011 and 2012, the Arleta-Pacoima Community Plan updating process was put on indefinite hold, and the Vision Plan not incorporated into the planning guidelines laid out in the Community Plan. Pacoima's plan has not been updated since 1996, and the decision to shelve the community plan update process due to budget restrictions illustrates how the community's efforts are hindered by problems within local governance.

CONCLUSION

This chapter reveals the importance of recognizing the multiple dimensions involved in the promotion of urban environmental justice, and the need for understanding justice not as a single issue or static state that can be reached by redistributing facilities, but as a continual political process. The activism of the Chinatown Yard Alliance, the *Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio*, and Pacoima Beautiful all illustrate how communities faced with environmental injustices constantly engage in political efforts all aimed toward improving the conditions of their everyday environments. For community activists, constructing a park or designing a greenway plan is a means toward equitable environmental improvement, not the final product or a false signifier of neighborhood empowerment. Environmentalists and well-meaning representatives from agencies may view the successful construction of an urban amenity in a disadvantaged neighborhood as an environmental justice achievement; this is a justifiable conclusion. Yet, as shown through the actions and intentions of organizations such as the Alianza and Pacoima Beautiful, this achievement must not become an isolated effort, but rather one among many other measures that envision/conceptualize justice as the transformation of neighborhoods into healthy, sustainable, and livable places created through the community's own decision-making. For communities living along the waterways of the L.A. River watershed, achieving environmental justice is not only a matter of distributive concerns or centered on single issues; instead, the struggle for environmentally just conditions involves a multidimensional campaign of activism aimed at addressing the underlying forces that degrade their environmental conditions, stigmatize the landscapes of their neighborhoods, and prevent the full participation of residents in crucial decision-making processes.

Environmental justice takes on this multidimensional form in part due to communities' experience of and response to the histories and legacies of racialized spatialization in Los Angeles. This chapter situates its case studies within the theoretical position that urban environmental analysis must handle race/racialization "as a central force—not just as an unfortunate outcome" of "the relationship between people and places" (Brahinsky et. al. 2014, 1138). Because racial politics is a central factor, not just a side effect, of the formation of urban places in L.A., investigating how urban sustainability initiatives (such as restoring/revitalizing urban waterways) intersect and articulate with environmental justice efforts necessitates engaging in the racial politics of place. Given the history of racist urban development in Los Angeles, as well as the discursive ways in which the landscapes surrounding the river became a racialized—and racially demarcating—geographic feature, it would be naïve or simplistic to consider the L.A. River restoration agenda as unfolding upon politically neutral terrain. Legacies of racial Othering permeate the current representations and perceptions surrounding the river, especially as many residents have and continue to associate(d) it with crime, homelessness, and deviant behavior. Furthermore, the environmental conditions of neighborhoods abutting the river have been shaped by decades of racist housing policies, discriminatory patterns of industrial land use, and highly racialized labor practices during periods of widespread industrialization and its subsequent periods of post-Fordist restructuring. During these periods, ethnic enclaves formed as spaces imbricated by racially charged ideologies that drew upon environmental conditions, disease, foreign bodies, and moral depravity; these ideas continue to discursively and symbolically shape the landscape of neighborhoods such as Chinatown and Pacoima. As a result of these racialized histories of place, the politics of urban sustainability around the Los Angeles

River cannot be divorced from the politics of race and place that continue to characterize the urban spatialities of L.A.

The communities discussed in this chapter engage in a racialized politics of environmental justice, challenging the political economic forces that create or perpetuate harmful environmental conditions within their neighborhoods. Additionally, the communities around the Chinatown Cornfield and the Pacoima Wash challenge the continued stigmatization of their landscapes of everyday life and exclusionary decision-making processes that shape those landscapes by attempting to engage in environmental politics and present themselves as environmental subjects. Despite the decades of marginalization and disempowerment they have faced, these communities exercise agency by repositioning themselves as nontraditional environmentalists. In attempting to portray themselves as active participants of environmental conflict and struggle, these communities exemplify rupture and destabilization to the dominant narratives of racial "minorities" and environmentalism. This chapter presents the stories of predominantly Latino residents who challenge mainstream environmentalism's somewhat exclusionary agenda by seeking to engage in the political arena of environmental policy-making and sustainable urban development. Not only did members of the Chinatown Yard Alliance, Alianza and Pacoima Beautiful actively insert social justice concerns within the broader agenda of river restoration, but they also strove to insert themselves—their historically Othered and excluded bodies, places, and cultural practices—into the environmental activism of Los Angeles, which has largely remained white and middle-class. Thus, these residents intentionally bring attention to their racialized status (and concomitantly, the racialized urban spaces they occupy) in an effort to gain recognition as political subjects practicing an environmentalism based on different lived experiences. This challenges and expands upon the ways that lived environments and urban natures along the L.A. River watershed are conceived and improved.

For the movement of the L.A. River to advance forward with greater commitment to environmental justice objectives, its central advocates must embrace a conceptualization of environmental justice that addresses racialized places and multidimensional notions of justice. Expanding meaningful community participation is critical to moving forward for the river movement, as the impacted community's needs and concerns must drive what kinds of environmental changes should be enacted within the watershed. In doing so, the urban sustainability initiative that is the Los Angeles River can circumvent a decline into becoming a green redevelopment project that fails to uphold promises of social and environmental justice. That begins with ensuring that the L.A. River is allowed to be *everybody's* river.

CHAPTER SIX
WHEN "DOGTOWN" BECOMES FROGTOWN: THE POLITICS OF PLACE, POLLUTION, AND ENVIRONMENTAL GENTRIFICATION IN ELYSIAN VALLEY

INTRODUCTION AND MAIN ARGUMENTS

This chapter examines the environmental politics of river revitalization's impacts to neighborhoods by presenting the case of Elysian Valley, a small neighborhood in Northeast Los Angeles. Just one of the many riverside neighborhoods that stand to undergo change as restoration and redevelopment of the Los Angeles River unfolds, the case of Elysian Valley serves to illustrate just one example of how communities navigate the environmental opportunities and challenges brought about by such an immense urban sustainability agenda. It also provides, at the micro-scale of one locality, the points of articulation between urban greening and environmental justice by illuminating both the ways in which the restoration of river assists in one community's environmental justice struggles while also potentially exacerbating the conditions upon which new environmental injustices could emerge. Caught within macro-scale urban processes such as deindustrialization, redevelopment, and cultural aestheticization, the neighborhood now faces the socio-ecological transformations related to river restoration, which could accelerate the gentrification already underway. Therefore, this small neighborhood is undergoing—and will continue to undergo—socio-spatial reconfiguration of the environments in which they live, work, and play. Uncertainty of how these transformations will materialize upon the neighborhood landscape generates both anxiety and political action among Elysian Valley's community.

This story of Elysian Valley, though grounded in the particularities of place, parallels a broader pattern of urban restructuring and sustainable development, much of which was discussed in Chapter Four. As case studies from numerous other cities reveal, neighborhood revalorization, particularly along postindustrial waterfronts, threatens the existing community with gentrification, made all the more pernicious through the discourse of urban sustainability that obscures inequitable social impacts of this process. Gentrification is often discursively reframed as 'revitalization' or 'regeneration' of the inner-city, with the result of ignoring or obfuscating the very real ways in which vulnerable populations are displaced, marginalized, and/or rendered invisible (Slater 2006, 2011; Marcuse 2015). Meanwhile, the eco- or 'green' aspect of environmental gentrification relies upon the hegemonic status of 'sustainability' as an indisputably desirable objective for cities to pursue (Checker 2011; Dooling 2009). These discourses contribute to the depoliticization of the unjust socio-spatial processes and outcomes of gentrification. I show how these forces of urban sustainable development, enacted through river restoration agendas, generate potential new environmental injustices for riverside neighborhoods while simultaneously addressing site-specific injustices such as polluting industrial facilities.

The central argument I make in this chapter is that examining the politics of environmental justice in Elysian Valley cannot be divorced from *a politics of place*. The community faces—and resists—both environmental pollution and green gentrification in their neighborhood, and how they perceive and respond to these injustices is deeply informed by the history and collective memory associated with their place. Living in a neighborhood that has experienced a long history of spatial injustices in the form of state-sponsored planning projects, and faced with decades of disinvestment and infrastructural neglect, residents of Elysian Valley draw upon this place history to demand greater access to planning and policymaking processes and procedures. As the recent environmental changes of the neighborhood unfold, residents

demand to be allowed to actively and integrally participate in the reconfiguring of their everyday environments; this struggle is inextricably linked to their place-based identity as a historically marginalized community. For these residents, environmental justice is only achieved through equitable distributions of environmental resources/land uses, procedural involvement in determining those conditions, and recognition that their place and the community embedded within have been repeatedly disregarded, disrespected, and disadvantaged. Thus, the community's conception of environmental justice illustrates the recent theories of environmental justice that combines the multiple elements of distribution, participation, and recognition (Schlosberg 2004; Walker 2009a). Moreover, this multidimensional and socio-spatially dynamic framework of environmental justice—that justice cannot be centered solely on notions of distribution—allows for an expansion of what can be considered an environmental *in*justice. Like numerous other neighborhoods located along postindustrial waterfronts, Elysian Valley must contend with both environmental pollution *and* urban greening measures that could exacerbate gentrification and displacement. When a restored riverside park comes to be as much of a locally unwanted land use as a harmful facility—even though one is generally considered environmental detrimental and the other beneficial—focusing solely on what land uses are distributed where is insufficient towards understanding how unjust spatial relations are (re)produced (Anguelovski 2016b).

Therefore, for those who live, work, and play in Elysian Valley, environmental justice is conceived of as multidimensional, historically informed, and inextricably interconnected to notions of identity and place. Amidst the uncertainty and difficulty of experiencing environmental pollution, institutional neglect, and green gentrification, residents and stakeholders attempt to improve the landscapes of their everyday lives while navigating the cultural shifts brought about by demographic changes. For many, the changes they see unfolding within their neighborhood are not the natural outcomes of neutral urban policy or ecologically-sound scientific planning, and in response, they actively work to re-politicize the formation of place, *their* place. This chapter, then, also reveals how the political activism carried out by the Elysian Valley community not only involves mobilizing allies, appealing to policymakers, and increasing visibility, but also promulgating particular narratives of place that highlight previous injustices inflicted upon them. This politics of place is exemplified in the ways that residents have attempted to challenge harmful air and noise pollution from a nearby railyard, where they politicize their place by pointing to the patterns of injustice they have endured.

This same politics of place is, to a lesser extent, mobilized against the emerging environmental gentrification accelerated by river restoration. I argue that this politics of place is crucial in residents' resistance to gentrification. As discussed in previous chapters, urban greening projects—unlike toxic or polluting land uses—are not regarded as an environmental injustice and can become depoliticized, or at least, decoupled from critical examination. By revealing the processes by which places become shaped and reshaped—through the aggregate forces of real estate markets, state policies, and shifting cultural values of certain urban spaces—community activists can expose how underlying forces that brought polluting facilities can continue to produce new spatial relations that unjustly affect vulnerable communities. Though this form of explicitly re-politicizing place can serve as a strategy of community resistance, it has yet to be fully operationalized by the community of Elysian Valley. The challenge for this neighborhood, as the restoration of the L.A. River continues to unfold in the years to come, will be to develop and deploy strategies of resistance to depoliticization of urban transformation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This chapter, like others in this dissertation, draws from and contributes to the growing and interconnecting scholarship on urban political ecology (UPE), critical urban sustainability, and environmental justice. Specifically, it draws from the environmental/ecological gentrification literature, which is positioned at the intersection of these subjects. This literature builds from the theoretical underpinnings of UPE, that urban spatial formations are materially and discursively produced through multiple, dynamic, and contingent socio-ecological processes, in order to investigate how these processes drive the reconfiguration of socio-ecological landscapes that oppress and harm the economically vulnerable (Heynen et. al. 2003). As urban regions increasingly enroll ideas, discourses, and artefacts of 'nature' into growth schemes and management regimes, there a recognized need for critical scholarship to understand how the metabolism of material natures, the operationalizing of environmental discourses, and the cultural work of nature-as-signifier shape the gentrifying of urban places (Isenhour et. al. 2015). In other words, it is imperative to account for the socio-ecological dimensions present in processes behind gentrification, to recognize "the ways in which material relations and uneven resource consumption, concepts of nature, and the politics of environmental management are worked into or involve gentrification processes" (Quastel 2009, 679). Therefore, ecological/environmental gentrification, defined broadly as "the displacement of vulnerable human inhabitants resulting from the implementation of an environmental agenda," has emerged as an object of study within the relatively new yet rapidly growing body of research in geography and urban studies (Dooling 2008, 41).[177]

The emerging environmental/green gentrification literature is theoretically robust and empirically diverse. Much of it draws from key foundational works in gentrification studies produced by urban scholars such as Ruth Glass, Sharon Zukin, Neil Smith, Peter Marcuse, Loretta Lees, among others. These authors provide the critical theories exposing how and why gentrification—"the class transformation of urban space"—manifests as an ubiquitous urban phenomenon (Lees et. al. 2013, 39). Rather than handle gentrification as the inevitable outcome of rational urban policies, critical gentrification theory argues that this socio-spatial turnover is produced through the intersecting forces of capital accumulation through land development (Marcuse 1985; Smith 1979, 1987, 1996), the macro-level shifts in the social reproduction of urban workers (Rose 1984), and the changing cultural values and consumption practices of middle-class populations (Zukin 1987, 1989).

These theories of how production and consumption together gentrify locales are adopted and expanded upon in the quickly growing environmental gentrification literature. Like much of the UPE and EJ literature, many of the empirical case studies focus on the politics of urban greening, following the social impacts of brownfield remediation and park creation upon the urban core population throughout U.S. and European cities (Bryson 2012; Essoka 2010; Pearsall 2010; Sandberg 2014; Wolch et. al. 2014). Other analyses focus on the multiple manifestations of urban nature, whether they are community gardens, redeveloped water-/riverfronts, or even the commodified nexus of healthy foods-bodies (Anguelovski 2015, 2016a; Bunce 2009; Kearn 2015; Lim et. al. 2013). Aside from these case studies, scholars within the field also examine the

[177] I keep these terms separate but grouped together, as they have many similarities yet retain their own specific particularities. In a recent panel at the 2015 Annual Meeting for the Association of American Geographers in Chicago, scholars studying the environmental components of gentrification stressed the importance—at this point—of maintaining the analytic distinction between "environmental" and "ecological" gentrification. ("Just Green Enough" Sessions.)

ways that environmental agendas, policies, and discourses become enrolled in the political economy of urbanization, taking seriously the symbolic and discursive work involved in the translation of a (mostly middle-class) environmental ethos into regeneration or redevelopment strategies that threaten to displace the economically vulnerable (Bryson 2013; Checker 2011; Dooling 2009; Quastel 2009). The field of environmental gentrification, therefore, takes seriously the role of nature in the reconfiguration of socio-spatial relations within gentrifying neighborhoods, highlights the unevenness and contradictions embedded within this process, and ultimately remains critical of the environmental injustice of environmental gentrification (Anguelovski 2016b; Gould and Lewis 2012, 2016, 2017). As gentrification mutates and manifests in different forms and degrees (Hackworth and Smith 2001), as it grows in significance as a "global urban strategy" (Smith 2002), and as sustainability agendas increasingly intermesh with these urban growth strategies (Greenberg 2015; While et. al. 2004, 2010), the critical insights of this growing body of work on environmental gentrification become urgently needed to advance environmental and social justice.

Another body of work that I draw from to theoretically frame this chapter is the literature on place and place politics. These scholarly works theorize place as relational, multi-scalar, networked, and contested, instead of reifying place as a pre-given spatial unit that is unified, static, and composed of some essential character. Building off of the foundational spatial theories of Henri Lefebvre and influenced by the works of key geographers such as David Harvey, Doreen Massey, and Allen Pred, these studies present place as specific time-space moments within larger networks of production, consumption, and governance (Amin 2004; Merrifield 1993b; Jessop et. al. 2008; Pierce and Martin 2015). Pushing back against what they saw was the essentialization of place through presentation of "internal descriptions" (Massey 1994, 118) that further led to the "fetishism of the urban landscape" (Merrfield 1993a, 102), these authors argued that place is relationally formed by multiple and multi-scalar economic, political, and cultural processes. Space is neither an empty container nor the abstract counterpart to specific places, but is rather the "articulation of social relations which necessarily have a spatial form in their interactions with one another"; within this framework, place can be conceived "as particular moments in such intersecting social relations, nets of which have over time been constructed, laid down, interacted with one another, decayed, and renewed" (Massey 1994, 120).

Therefore, place becomes both a specific moment of the dynamic flows of social forces, which temporarily carries a cohesion and character to those who occupy that place-moment, as well as that which is relational, networked, and changing. Acknowledging place as embedded spatial iterations of broader, interconnected social relations, one focus within the place literature investigates the role that place-as-concept plays in mobilizing community resistance against unwanted environmental developments (Anguelovski 2014; Fraser 2004; Martin 2003; Merrifield 1993a; Pierce et. al. 2011; Pulido 1997). These authors subscribe to the relational formation of place, yet elucidate the ways in which place, conceived as territory, community identifier, and shared history, can be strategically utilized in community mobilization. Conflicts over the remaking of urban landscapes are outcomes of the tension existing between capital's constant need to transform urban space and a community's territorial guarding of the specific spatial form that is their place (Merrifield 1993a). Given the tension between a place's use and exchange value (Logan and Molotch 1987), it is important to understand how residents engage in a politics of place that challenges and resists the reordering of their everyday environments, and how the construction of place "provides an important mobilizing discourse and identity for collective action" (Martin 2003, 730). These theoretical insights into the relational formation of

place, while not exclusively applied to investigations of urban environmental politics or ecological gentrification, nevertheless are utilized by UPE's inquiries into the role of space within the production of urban natures and unequal environments.

By drawing from these literatures on environmental justice, green gentrification, and theories of place/place-based activism, I present Elysian Valley as a place shaped by broader forces at play on various scales. What unfolds within this tiny neighborhood is a particular spatial manifestation of forces operating upon and through Los Angeles, including regional economic restructuring, changes in environmental policymaking, and cultural shifts in urban spatial relations. This chapter, then, also serves to show how the urban environmental patterns discussed in previous chapters—the operating of urban sustainability discourses, state involvement in "green" urban development, articulating moments between environmental justice and sustainability agendas—manifest in and move through the neighborhood scale. Residents perceive infrastructural reconfiguration, environmental injustice (as both pollution and everyday neglect (Whitehead 2009)), and the emerging ecological/green gentrification of their place—which are produced by broader socioeconomic forces—through the lenses of place-based history, collective memories, and constructed and shared identity. As a result, their response to these urban environmental transformations, including their methods of political resistance, appears to be localized and grounded in the everyday spatial experiences they collectively hold. Nevertheless, this resistance (whether consciously performed or not) seeks to target and counteract the underlying and multiscalar processes that bring about the production of uneven urban environments.

The defense of their place may also appear to be dependent upon a notion of place informed by ideas of authenticity, in/compatibility, and a core 'essence'. This is not to claim that I or the residents regard their neighborhood as static or bounded; I am not essentializing a particular place or the "community" it hosts. However, as Massey affirms, "the real issue [is] the politics and social content of the changes under way, including their spatial form, rather than a fight over 'the true nature' of a [particular place]" (1994, 122). For many Elysian Valley residents and stakeholders, the framing of place, though it may appear as a fight over its "true nature", ultimately connects back to their resistance to the social-political content of the changes they are facing. They may posit that new, higher-density housing projects or a bicycle path along the river disrupts the "character" or "cultural feel" of their neighborhood. I recognize that these sentiments and arguments stem from residents' place-based experiences; they are also expressions of a community's retention of focus on the real issue of urban environmental changes that could potentially gentrify a historically disinvested neighborhood, displace low-income renters, and reinforce patterns of undemocratic planning practices in Los Angeles.

This chapter is based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork in Los Angeles, conducted primarily in 2012 and 2013. I attended over fifty public meetings, events, and community gatherings specifically related to and/or located within the neighborhood of Elysian Valley. At some of these events and meetings, I participated as a volunteer as well as a member of the audience. As an involved participant-observer, this allowed me to informally converse with a wide range of residents as well as listen in on informal conversations among community members, all in order to learn about their thoughts on the changes going on in their neighborhood. During these two years, I also conducted formal, semi-structured interviews with seven key residents, and carried out informal and unstructured interviews with around a dozen more. In addition to these, I also interviewed policymakers, environmental activists, and organization and agency representatives, all of whom were involved in the planning, decision-

making, and/or mobilizing for restoration/revitalization projects on the L.A. River. Furthermore, I analyzed dozens of policy reports, planning documents, media/news articles, surveys, design renderings, and other textual/representative materials relating to Elysian Valley, northeast Los Angeles, and the L.A. River. As a result, my chapter is a deeply ethnographic account of how green gentrification unfolds in—and shapes—one place.

Though the total number of residents I was able to formally conduct interviews with was small, these conversations were lengthy, in-depth, and covered a range of issues, and provided me with qualitative data that would not be available to me had I opted to conduct surveys or perform shorter interviews. These interviewees agreed to speak with me only after I became a regular participant in neighborhood events and meetings, when several months had already passed and they realized the reason for my presence in their neighborhood. The residents I spoke with are also a more active subset of the population. However, even though the small number of discussions I had with residents cannot speak for the thoughts/opinions of the entire neighborhood, I am confident that their interests are somewhat captured in my ethnography due to the fact that those I did speak with were representatives of community groups/organizations, including the neighborhood council, the neighborhood watch, the arts collective, senior citizen groups, local girl scout troop, school organizations, activist groups, etc. As such, those individuals I formally spoke with knew the major issues of the neighborhood, had reference/access to the thoughts/opinions of the groups they were a part of, and therefore could speak broadly about what different residents felt and were concerned about.

INTRODUCING FROGTOWN: DEMOGRAPHICS, LAND USE, AND SIGNIFICANCE OF NAME

The neighborhood of Elysian Valley occupies a less than one-square mile area of land located within the northeast portion of the city of Los Angeles, approximately five miles northwest of downtown. Its 2.5 mile length is bounded to the south by the Interstate 5 Freeway (Golden State Freeway), Elysian Park (location of Dodger Stadium) to the west, the 2 Freeway (the Glendale Freeway) to the east, and the Los Angeles River to the north. Made up of flat valley land, it lies adjacent to a stretch of the river known as the Glendale Narrows, an eight-mile long thickly-vegetated, soft-bottomed portion of the otherwise heavily channelized waterway. It is shaped peculiarly, resembling a slightly flattened bowtie, which combined with its boundedness on all four sides make it easy to locate on an aerial map or image. According to residents, the northern half of the neighborhood is referred to as the Park Side, while the southern half is called the Church Side. Surrounding neighborhoods include Atwater Village to the north, Silver Lake and Echo Park to the southwest and south, and Glassell Park and Cypress Park across the river on the east. All of these neighborhoods compose the general region known as Northeast Los Angeles (NELA). The city's planning department combines Silver Lake, Echo Park, and Elysian Valley together as a formal unit in its community plans.

According to the 2010 US Census, approximately 8,900 residents live in Elysian Valley (Social Explorer 2010). This population is racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse, with a high percentage of children, young adults, and intergenerational families. Residents of Mexican, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Filipino, and Eastern European ancestries reflect the diversity of many NELA neighborhoods. The mix of backgrounds comes from the patterns of settlement that have occurred within the area, with Mexican-American and Asian American farmers first inhabiting the Elysian Valley, then Anglo Americans moving into the houses built on subdivided parcels between 1920s and 1940s. After the city razed the Chavez Ravine

community in the 1950s, the number of Mexican and Mexican American inhabitants rose as many displaced from that community relocated into nearby Elysian Valley. By 1980, the census reported that the population could be broken down as 59% Latino, 22% Asian, 18% Anglo, and 1% Black (McMillan 1987). In the decades since, the number of Latino and Asian residents grew due to the neighborhood's popularity among Chinese residents who sought proximity to Chinatown at lower housing prices, and the general rise in number of Latino residents throughout the L.A. region. By the 2000 census, racial breakdown in Elysian Valley was reported as 61% Latino, 25.6% Asian, 9.7% White, 1.1% Black, and 2.6% as Other (*LA Times* Mapping LA 2000). Most recently, 2009 demographic data reports that the northern half of the neighborhood is 68% Latino and 7% White, with a much higher density but lower population numbers, while the southern half is 46% Latino, 12% White, and 34% Asian and with lower density and but higher population numbers (USACE 2013).[178]

While the neighborhood is frequently described as a "working class community", it is socioeconomically diverse, with a range of incomes, professions, and levels of education among the residents. According to the 2000 census data, the average yearly income is approximately $49,000, though income breakdown reveals that there are high percentages of both lower-income households (26% at $20 thousand or less; 29% at $20-40 thousand) and higher-income households (19% at $60-125 thousand) (*LA Times* Mapping LA 2000). Both middle-class professionals and those in the working-class reside in Elysian Valley, where artists, architects, designers, teachers, and blue-collar workers constitute the socioeconomic mix of the community. Meanwhile, there is also the reported presence of a sizable informal economy within the neighborhood working in areas of food and beverage service, carpentry, and automobile repair (Leung and Lamadrid 2015). Though these informal businesses are not quantified in any way, nor is there knowledge of whether they are the primary or supplemental income sources for households, their presence should be regarded as a crucial component to the socioeconomic features of Elysian Valley. In addition, there is a strong intergenerational presence in the neighborhood, where it is common to find households that have lived in the neighborhood for multiple generations, oftentimes residing next door to one another.

Geographically, Elysian Valley, along with surrounding neighborhoods, was once part of the vast tract of Rancho Los Feliz, established in 1795 (Historic Resources Group 2012). With the influx of Anglo Americans into L.A., and the subsequent fragmentation of the ranchos, the land of Rancho Los Feliz was subdivided into parcels and sold for residential and industrial development. The flat valley land of Elysian Valley, situated next to the L.A. River and wedged between the hills of Silver Lake and Elysian Park, was initially suitable for agriculture. Annexed by the city of Los Angeles in 1910, it was settled and used by Mexican, Chinese, and Japanese truck farmers who lived and farmed in the fertile land. Three years later, the area was subdivided and sold off in parcels for housing and manufacturing (Historic Resources Survey 2014). Due to continued subdivision and development, the land use of the neighborhood is completely filled in with an eclectic mix of residential buildings and industrial facilities, so much so that the city planning department described Elysian Valley as "most characterized by the decades-long co-existence of its equally viable and abutting residential and industrial uses" (City of LA DCP 2004, I4). The piecemeal planning and zoning of the area resulted in this particular land use pattern.

[178] A recent racial distribution map of the 2010 census confirms this distinct settlement pattern within the neighborhood, revealing the high percentage of Latinos with a significant Asian population residing in the southern half of the neighborhood (Almendrana 2013).

Currently, the majority of land in Elysian Valley is zoned residential, with the northern half composed of predominantly multiunit buildings and the southern half primarily characterized by single-family structures (*Figure 6.1*). These homes, many of which have remain unchanged since their original construction in the 1920s and 30s, are small, single-story structures that lend to the low density build of the neighborhood. Meanwhile, the majority of the industrially-zoned tracts—concentrated along the river in the northern half of the neighborhood—is designated for light manufacturing purposes. The industrial activity that developed in Northeast Los Angeles played a central role in the land use patterns of NELA and Elysian Valley. Since the late 1800s, when both Southern Pacific and Union Pacific laid down tracks along either side of the L.A. River, the area boasted a strong rail presence that provided efficient means of goods transport. In particular, Southern Pacific Railroad built a major railyard at a 200-acre property on the eastern side of the river which carried out train switching, maintenance, and other functions central to the operation of the rail network. Known as the Taylor Yards, this railyard served as the hub of all rail activity in central and northeast Los Angeles. Due to the extensive presence of rail infrastructure, the proximity of NELA to downtown and Hollywood, and the freeing up of floodplain land due to construction of flood control measures, the cheap, riverfront properties in NELA became increasingly attractive for industrial uses. Throughout neighborhoods such as Atwater Village, Glassell and Cypress Park, Eagle Rock, and Elysian Valley, industrial facilities settled on either side of the river. Productive activities such as "ceramic and pottery manufacturing, clothing manufacturing, furniture manufacture, food processing, wholesale baking, metal working, and engine repair" occurred at these facilities, while "construction yards, concrete production, sheet metal shops, and other services to the building trades were also well represented" (Historic Resources Group 2012, 27).

Figure 6.1. Land use map of Elysian Valley and surrounding area.
(Source: City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning.)

Another prominent industrial hub that formed in NELA was the wholesale bakeries. First settled in the 1920s, the area at one time housed over fifteen bakeries and was referred to as the city's "breadbasket" (Hamilton 1987). Responding to the rising demand for baked products in Los Angeles and enjoying relatively cheap land and convenient means of goods transport, these bakeries provided bread not only for grocery stores, hospitals, and restaurants, but also operated on-site stores selling breads to residents at discounted prices. By the late 1980s, five major bakeries continued to operate out of Atwater, Glassell Park, Cypress Park, and Elysian Valley, and despite closures of other bakeries were planning to expand facilities and the labor force. These bakeries, hiring from NELA neighborhoods, provided economic prosperity to the area. In Elysian Valley, the Four S bakery, settled in 1922 in the northern section of the neighborhood, employed 430 workers by 1987, most of whom lived in the neighborhood. Established in the neighborhood ten years after Four S, the Dolly Madison bakery (known today as Hostess Bakery) also operated from Elysian Valley with its 900 employees and enormous sales in snack products. Longtime residents nostalgically comment on the bakeries, noting the smell of baking bread that would suffuse the streets in the early morning; one resident recalled that Four S Bakery "had a lovely outlet store where you could get great bran muffins, and people came from outside the community to purchase at that store" (Interview #55, 2013). The prominence of bakeries in the neighborhood provided economic growth to the area while also contributing to the industrial landscape found in patches in the northern half of Elysian Valley.

A brief discussion of the neighborhood's name is necessary at this point. Though the neighborhood is formally named Elysian Valley, it is more commonly known and referred to as Frogtown.[179] This popular nickname comes from a notorious event in May 29, 1954, when thousands of frogs crawled out of the Los Angeles River and swarmed the neighborhood for several days (McMillan 1987). Those who remember the mysterious incident—the exact cause for this near-Biblical swarming is unknown—recall the sheer number of frogs that ran through the neighborhood, covering streets, crowding yards, and even entering houses.[180] The overtaking of the neighborhood by frogs imparted the particular moniker, and frogs continued to be a regular presence in Frogtown and the adjacent river until their disappearance in the 1990s. Today, the name Frogtown plays a significant role in the formation of neighborhood identity and character; the 1954 Frog Invasion is an indelible moment in the neighborhood's history that is constantly referenced. Meanwhile, residents agree that more Angelenos were likely to know where 'Frogtown' was than where 'Elysian Valley' was.[181]

The Frogtown name further carries significant—and complex—meaning to the neighborhood in its association with the local gang. Calling themselves the Frog Town Gang, gang members from Elysian Valley tagged their signature to mark their territory. Partly due to its affiliation with the gang, the nickname was once regarded negatively; one 1982 *Times* article reports that "the residents are not fond of the name", while another, written ten years later, states

[179] I will therefore be referring to the neighborhood as Elysian Valley and Frogtown interchangeably throughout the chapter.
[180] As one resident shared with me: "I was in the streets the day that the frogs flooded out of the river. They were *flooding* out of the river. You could not walk and not walk on a frog. …Nobody will ever say what happened [to cause it]. But something happened, where they would like, boom, flood. I remember them coming over the edge, just everywhere, frogs. … There were plenty of frogs that were smashed when the cars drove by. Yeah. That many frogs. And little, little tiny frogs. All kinds, all sizes. And then, shhhtttt! Gone" (Interview #55, 2013).
[181] One stakeholder told me: "If I say 'Elysian Valley' to some people, they don't know where it is. …But if I say 'Frogtown' to some younger people, then they understand where it is. …Those hipsters…they understand it as Frogtown because it's the cool place to be" (Interview #64, 2013).

that 'Frogtown' is "a moniker used—often disparagingly—to describe the neighborhoods surrounding the L.A. River" (Citron 1982; Florence 1991). Reportedly, some residents modified the nickname to the more pejorative "Dogtown" (McMillan 1987). Interestingly, some argue that despite the negative perceptions attached to it, the 'Frogtown' title nevertheless bestowed the neighborhood with a distinguishable identity, and credits gang members as those who first fostered pride in carrying that identity:

> Only the gang members personally embraced and organized around the designation of Frogtown as their home. In fact, in the 80s, it was Frogtown veteranos who organized several neighborhood beautification efforts. …As a result of these efforts, nobody knew where or what Elysian Valley was but everybody knew or learned what neighborhood was claimed by the notorious Frogtown gang…. […] It is [the members'] history that resulted in the 'essential' identity that so many find appealing today and the *varrio* that many of us will continue to represent and defend (Comment by *Proper Dos* on Meltzer 2014).

This statement reveals the complicated, even controversial, meanings embedded within Elysian Valley's informal name. Although attitudes toward the Frog Town Gang and its role within the neighborhood widely differ, it is undeniable that the nickname has, through the efforts of many, come to serve as an important geographic marker and place signifier for this small, enclosed riverside community.[182] Now, with newer residents' embracing of the name, as well as the increased visibility of the L.A. River, 'Frogtown' is no longer a title of derision but rather a designator of the neighborhood's creative, quirky character. And though the Frog Town Gang remains an active presence in the neighborhood, the nickname has become associated with other subsets of the community. The creative connotation of the name correlates with the belief by many that "the artist community has taken the name Frogtown and made it acceptable to many" (Interview #17, 2013).[183]

These past and current contestations are not insignificant quibbles over a simple name; they symbolize underlying tensions about place identity. I posit that the reclaiming, even embracing of the name 'Frogtown' in part illustrates residents' attempts to construct a place-based identity characterized by their close proximity to and long interaction with the Los Angeles River. In constructing such an identity, those who live and/or work in Frogtown lay a proprietary claim to the river, emphasizing the community's use and appreciation of the river, long before it was rediscovered by the city and transformed into a trendy environmental artifact. While this territorial claim of the river as integral to community history and place formation may not be explicitly realized in all residents, almost every river-related conversation I had with residents during my two years of fieldwork revealed how memory, place, and identity intertwined into strong sentiments of belonging and ownership with regards to the river.[184]

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[182] According to one longtime resident: "I don't want somebody to tell me this is Frogtown. This is Elysian Valley…Having grown up here with the Frogtown Gang…I was sprinting to get home so I wouldn't get my ass kicked. I have a problem with that name. And it's a name that if, at some time it had a positive connotation because of the frog experience and the abundance of frogs in the area, it's a name that is tarnished by the criminal element of the community" (Interview #17, 2013).

[183] For some, the artist reclamation of the name is not viewed as favorably. This is evidenced by one commenter's observation that, "The restraint that [gang members] have demonstrated while seeing their varrio name being co-opted by artists who would have never dared claim 'Frogtown' just a decade ago is commendable" (Simpson 2014).

[184] For example, while volunteering for Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR) at the 2012 Frogtown Artwalk, more than a dozen community members I spoke with shared some memories of the frogs and their excursions into the river. Several women recounted the times when frogs would swarm the yards, describing how rows of front lawns would be teeming and driving on the streets would be slow due to their blanketing by frogs. Other residents informed me that they began to notice the dramatic decline of frogs around twenty years ago and speculated that development had driven them away from the neighborhood. These recollections dovetailed with other memories, especially those of entering the river to boat, swim, or fish; others directly linked

Rather than simple tales of childhood escapades or a bizarre moment in L.A.'s environmental history, these recollections and stories combined as a whole reveal the entangled histories between Elysian Valley and the L.A. River. In embracing the name Frogtown, therefore, the community collectively adopts an identifier that signifies the river's significance to the formation of the neighborhood's place-based identity. This relationship between place, identity, and the river assumes greater meaning as the neighborhood undergoes social-spatial reordering in which the Los Angeles River is poised to play a crucial role.

DEINDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE RE-ORDERING OF URBAN LANDSCAPES IN FROGTOWN

Within the last thirty years, shifting economic, political, and cultural processes have been responsible for social-spatial changes in the neighborhood which raise concern among many. For Frogtown, the conditions upon which neighborhood change appears to be unfolding stem from the aggregation of several processes, which operate at varying scales while manifesting in particular ways within a particular place, over a set period of time (Massey 1994; Pierce and Martin 2015). For one, regional economic restructuring in a post-Fordist economy leads to decentralization of industrial production in Los Angeles, as manufacturing moves out of the country or crops up in smaller, flexible clusters throughout the Southern California region (Beauregard 1991; Soja et. al. 1983; Valle and Torres 2000). In Elysian Valley, restructuring manifests in continued deindustrialization, as manufacturing and rail move out of the area. The once bustling Taylor Yard complex began downsizing in the 1980s due to the combination of railyards relocating from the urban core to outer suburban counties and being outcompeted by newer truck transport systems (Gordon 1985). Likewise, manufacturing companies, once concentrated in river-adjacent properties, close down business or disperse throughout the growing Southern California metropolitan region; this de-concentration of industry in Elysian Valley is exacerbated by the 2008 financial and real estate crisis (Meltzer 2014).[185] The evacuation of industrial activity in Elysian Valley and within the NELA area results in disused, spacious facilities concentrated along the Los Angeles River. This gradual deindustrialization of Frogtown, particularly in its northern half, is clearly shown in an observation made by one resident, an artist, who, having moved into a former flooring warehouse in the early 1990s, noticed the continual departure of manufacturing on his street:

> There were businesses on the rest of the block and they have [gone]… See, here this was light manufacturing, and the light manufacturing moved out to where the work was—Orange County where things were going on—so now it's switching over (Interview #52, 2013).

Amidst ongoing deindustrialization, the local state intervenes through the enactment of land-use policies and zoning changes designed to encourage the conversion of these former industrial spaces into newly viable commercial and residential ones. In Los Angeles, several land-use policies were passed in order to reconvert and revalorize these obsolete postindustrial facilities. First, the city passed a 1981 Artist-in-Residency (AIR) ordinance that allowed live/work units to be installed in existing industrial/commercial buildings in areas zoned for

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the disappearance of the frogs with the degraded state of the river, surmising that restoration of the latter would possibly bring back the presence of the former.

[185] Meltzer (2014) states that: "By late 2009 or 2010, all of the buildings that had once housed heating and AC units and margin tabs, were spiffed up, painted, and landscaped. Enter onto the block fabricators, oversized sculptures and recent art school graduates. … Manufacturing businesses have given way to art studios."

manufacturing. In 1999, the city expanded upon the intent of the AIR ordinance by passing the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance, which "relaxed zoning code requirements for the conversion of pre-1974 existing commercial and industrial buildings into residential uses", first for downtown districts, and then later for the rest of the city (City of LA DCP 2009; City of LA Adaptive Reuse Handbook 2003). These zoning policies facilitated artist occupation of industrially-zoned areas through proliferation of live/work spaces. Then, a 2010 amendment ordinance re-classified the zoning of adaptive reuse spaces from commercial to residential (City of LA Ordinance No. 18113, 2010). In addition to these citywide policies, a land-use ordinance was adopted in August 2004 that explicitly targeted industrial zones in Elysian Valley. This ordinance reclassified certain heavy Manufacturing zones (*M1*, *M2*) into hybrid 'Commercial Manufacturing' zones (*CM*) with the objective of encouraging "joint live/work uses as a means to preserve industrial lands in Elysian Valley" in order to "meet evolving needs of modern manufacturers and reconceptualize traditional industrial uses" (City of LA DCP 2004, p.I-8). The language of the ordinance illustrates the city's intent to update "traditional industrial" land by repurposing them into "modern" zones composed of a mix of multifamily residential buildings, commercial properties, and clean industrial facilities, and in doing so, "allow the area to transition over time to a more residential and mixed-use community" (2004, A-4). Obsolete industrial landscapes, through local state intervention, become revalorized into residential/commercial zones in the postindustrial redevelopment/regeneration of the urban core.

These deindustrialized areas of the city are further impacted by the urban reordering/reconfiguration of other neighborhoods, thus revealing the relationality of places and the highly networked spatialities of urban processes. Though the "roll out" of neoliberal urbanization in Los Angeles takes on a broad array of policies and growth strategies, one major form it has taken is an intensified enrollment of cultural and artistic production in urban regeneration strategies in order to attract financial investments and spur redevelopment (Currid 2009; Hackworth 2007). In particular, public and private entities applied this strategy to downtown neighborhoods such as Bunker Hill and the Arts District, whereby fostering 'creative production' becomes an important economic agenda for the local state (Molotch 1996). Beginning in the late-1990s, downtown revitalization ushered in rounds of speculation, reinvestment, and redevelopment that successfully re-branded downtown districts as 'authentic', livable spaces of middle-class consumption (Carter 2014; Chaplin 2016; Marguardt and Fuller 2012; Vincent 2013).

While the revalorization of L.A.'s downtown districts depended upon the cultural value and physical conversion of artist spaces, these artist-in-residence (AIR) units, legitimized by the local state in 1982, are exempt from the city's Rent Stabilization Ordinance (RSO) and therefore do not guarantee rent control protection to its tenants, exposing these live/work lofts to the vagaries of the housing market (City of LA Dept. Housing and Community Investment). The exemption of AIRs from the RSO creates the problem of rising rents, a pattern identified as early as 1989 by one *Times* writer. With the enactment of policies to promote AIR housing in the 80s, even with measures established to ensure tenants in AIR units are artists, many of these units are still being rented to more affluent residents who are not necessarily in the arts profession (Pasternak 1989). This trend is not solely confined to the artist-in-residency housing situation in Los Angeles, as cities around the country experience similar increases in AIR rents, underscoring the problem of artists making live-work studios available and attractive, only to be priced out of their own designated spaces. Even with the protection of rent control, landlords' right to evoke the state's Ellis Act creates situations whereby tenants under rent control protections are still

susceptible to eviction (Kamel 2012).[186] Recently in Los Angeles, there has been a documented rise in the eviction of tenants from rent-controlled housing through use of the Ellis Act, leaving the city's low-income renting population in ever-urgent situations (Khouri 2014). The resulting gentrification of these neighborhoods leads to housing that is too costly for many artists, who were initially the targeted population to re-colonize the derelict warehouses and industrial facilities of the deindustrialized urban core (Gerber 2014). No longer able to afford the rents, these artists and other renters are displaced.

As these downtown neighborhoods, already undergoing demographic change from decades prior, become susceptible to new rounds of intensified gentrification, neighborhoods surrounding the urban core are increasingly impacted. These surrounding neighborhoods, having been historically divested during the post-war periods of suburbanization and freeway construction, maintain relatively lower housing costs and real estate values. Thus, the patterns of disinvestment and subsequent reinvestment throughout the urban core after the boom of suburban development, resulted in spatial configurations where NELA neighborhoods enjoy proximity to important industry clusters (Hollywood, Wilshire Corridor, downtown) but retain relatively affordable housing prices due (Lin 2015). Artists, designers, and other members of the creative class, displaced from the gentrification of artist districts, began moving into NELA neighborhoods due to their advantageous location, lower housing costs, and potential live/work space. One NELA real estate agent who conducted business in Elysian Valley explained to me the growing appeal of the neighborhood among artists, artisans, and other creative professionals. According to her, "a lot of artists were downtown" but relocated to NELA neighborhoods such as Glassell Park, Eagle Rock, and Elysian Valley "because this is one of the last little enclaves where artists can buy an industrial building for the price that you get... It's changed now, even in the last couple of years. But you can get it very [affordably]" (Interview #64, 2013). The attractiveness of available, affordable space and a central location is echoed by a recent newcomer, a brewery owner who moved into Elysian Valley, because "the area was also full of the kinds of creative spaces we like: old warehouses at affordable prices with room for dining rooms, fermenters, and loading docks" (quoted in Sagahan and Saillant 2014).

Together, these political, economic, and cultural processes, which operate at local, regional, and global scales, played out in particular ways in Elysian Valley. This transformation, of course, is not unique to Elysian Valley; however, they exemplify the restructuring processes working upon other cities at this particular conjuncture of urbanization. Patterns observed in other cities undergoing postindustrial revitalization proceed to reconfigure the urban landscape of Northeast Los Angeles. Deindustrialization of the historically industrial urban core prompts policies from entrepreneurial city regimes that attempt to recapture the value of postindustrial space by re-inserting or re-circulating the immobile capital sunk into these fixed structures into new rounds of accumulation (Harvey 1985, 1989a).[187] Obsolete industrial buildings are repurposed by artists in search of large workspaces at affordable prices, and the foray of these artist 'pioneers' into the 'urban frontier' of devalued neighborhoods are encouraged by the local

[186] According to Kamel (2012, 456): "The Ellis Act was adopted in 1985 (Government Code Section 7060 et seq.) and enabled landlords who wanted to get out of the rental business to evict all tenants and turn their units to other uses or convert them into condominiums."

[187] A good example of this objective is seen in a city planning report that cites the creation of the hybrid Commercial Manufacturing (CM) zone in Elysian Valley as an effective way to "make[] use of existing land that is underutilized for industrial purposes" and ensure putting "*to productive use a long vacant, poorly maintained site*" (City of LA DCP 2007, P-1, emphasis added).

state (Smith 1996). This can potentially drive further displacement of industrial buildings and land uses (Curran 2007; Zukin 1989).

As adaptive reuse measures are enacted to facilitate the conversion of warehouses into lofts, galleries, and live/work studios, the resulting revalorization of the neighborhood—perceived as more culturally vibrant and authentic—further appeal to a distinct subset of the urban labor force, namely service-sector professionals and other members of the 'creative class' (Makagon 2010). This labor force, often the forerunners of the gentrification process, economically and culturally reinvigorate inner-city spaces, pushing local government to implement land use changes, develop cultural amenities, and promote sustainable features in order to further accommodate and attract this demographic (Ley 2003; Lloyd 2010). These city policies and practices demonstrate how newer forms of gentrification require enhanced state intervention, that "during the more recent phase of gentrification, the process has become fully and more affirmatively incorporated into public policy" (Lees and Ley 2008, 2380). Indeed, the changing state of gentrification reveals the now necessary component of facilitation by entrepreneurial city regimes to extract value from turned-over land; gentrification comes to be a global urban strategy among competing localities (Hackworth and Smith 2000; Smith 2002). What is playing out upon these neighborhoods is, according to Zukin (1982, 258), "a macrolevel shift in accumulation strategy" that "is legitimized and enforced by new cultural norms, and a labour force in the expanding sectors is fixed in place by housing style."

Frogtown residents regard recent land use, zoning, housing, and demographic-shift patterns as harbingers of gentrification, though not all of them used the term explicitly to describe their observations of neighborhood change. The Community Plan update that created the new Commercial Manufacturing zone raised concern among residents during the process of creating and discussing the land use updates.[188] For example, city's planning department, in a 2007 report, stated that "residents of the area during the [2004] Plan Update process were initially *opposed to the CM Zone due to a fear of gentrification*" (City of LA DCP 2007, A-3, emphasis added). Others note that the postindustrial properties, many of them concentrated along the L.A. River, will continue to be repurposed by and for the creative class, thereby inflating in value. One community stakeholder, observing the real estate trends of the industrial strip in the northern part of the neighborhood, noted that "the range in price per square feet has gone up drastically in the last few years" and that the "people who can afford to come in to actually buy [are] a lot of architects looking for space along the river. They can afford it more than young artists" (Interview #64, 2013). As her observations on *who* is buying *what* kind of real estate in Elysian Valley demonstrate, changing land uses cannot be separated from demographic changes; the adaptive reuse of deindustrialized land goes hand in hand with the growing population of artists, signifying the commercialization of space and bourgeoisification of place.

Although artists occupied Frogtown since the mid-1980s, this recent influx of creative professionals, those who are more commercially established and profitable in particular, has revitalized the neighborhood's reputation as an artist neighborhood (Pasternak 1989; Lipton 2001). Sculptors, painters, and welders occupied the neighborhood for decades, several of them, such as Frank Romero, notable names in the local L.A. art scene. However, the newer artists moving into Frogtown—planners, architects, designers, writers, photographers—are

[188] The 2004 ordinance requires construction to follow a strict set of design and construction guidelines, known as the Q Conditions. These guidelines lay out the building size, maximum number of units per square feet, landscaping and open space, public access, parking, etc. design requirements for new or updated developments within the zoning areas applicable to the Q Conditions.

representative of the formalized "creative class" that are somewhat professionally distinct from the traditionally-conceived lone artist.[189] Although the attitudes of longtime/older residents to the renewed, ever-expanding presence of the creative class are diverse and complicated, there is nevertheless tension among the two subgroups. As artists are regarded as residents associated with higher social capital, their presence assigns greater economic value and cultural prestige to the neighborhood. There is acknowledgement today, from longtime residents, newcomers, and non-neighborhood residents that a significant artistic community resides in Elysian Valley, contributing substantially to its reputation among locals as a creative, funky, hip, and offbeat corner of Los Angeles. However, the creative class also symbolizes the neighborhood's demographic shift towards a whiter, higher-class, better educated population that is perhaps out of touch with the immediate needs and concerns of the neighborhood (such as improved urban services and preservation of affordable housing). This deepening divide between older and new residents is confirmed by a 2015 planning report which identified two major categories of Frogtown residents. The first, a "creative class" subset, "closely conforms to what…Richard Florida describes as a subset of the Super-Creative Core", while the second category of residents consisted of a "working class" contingent that "seemed to be synonymous with lower-income Latinos" (Leung and Lamadrid 2015, 24).[190]

This tension is exemplified by the annual Frogtown Artwalk hosted by the artist community in Elysian Valley. In 2008, several artists formed the Elysian Valley Arts Collective (EVAC), a social organization aimed at bringing together local artists into a formally identified artist community. The mission statement of the EVAC, which reflects many newer artists' desire to become integrated into the neighborhood, is "preserving and promoting *an inclusive community* along the Los Angeles River for creative production by artists, designers and artisans; in order to cultivate a sense of place, a vibrant local economy, and arts education for youth" (Elysian Valley Arts Collective, emphasis added). Along with hosting regular social events and actively cultivating a social media presence, the EVAC's organizes and sponsors neighborhood's annual art festival, known as the Frogtown Artwalk (*Figure 6.2*). Since its somewhat modest inception in 2007, the Frogtown Artwalk has grown in number of participants and attendants. Though the Artwalk has helped cement—and popularize—Frogtown's reputation as an artist neighborhood, there are questions regarding *who* the Artwalk is for, *who* benefits from its growing popularity, and how accurately it reflects the incorporation of artists among the existing resident population. According to one neighborhood artist, the art festival remains relatively unfamiliar or unimportant to the majority of Frogtown residents: "This is a neighborhood of a lot of immigrant working-class families, and the first thing on their minds is not going to be MOCA" (quoted in Lipton 2007). Another artist and longtime resident bluntly stated that, "The art walk came out of the part of self-promotion. Bottom line" (Interview #55, 2013).

Related to these questions is the deeper-rooted dissatisfaction among certain residents that only with the formation of formal organizations and events such as EVAC and the Artwalk,

[189] The term "creative class" was first formally coined and used by Richard Florida (2005) to classify a specific group of professions that entail a certain amount of artistic work. These professions typically involve higher educated, white collar, nonmanufacturing jobs that include: designers, architects, photographers, planners, writers, and media workers.

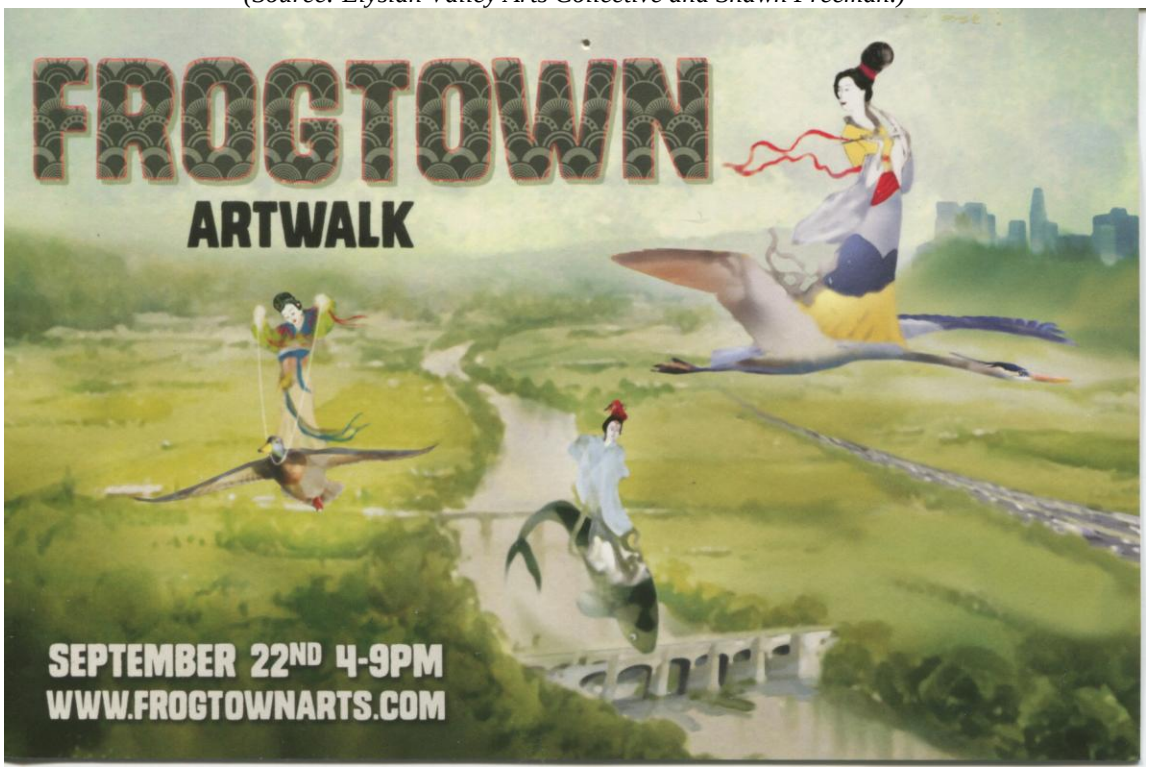
[190] Differences in primary concerns regarding neighborhood change was observed among these two groups as well. While the creative class "pushed for developing more adaptive reuse and live/work spaces", as befitting the spatial and housing interests of urban professionals in the creative sectors, "the adaptive reuse of buildings being used to create live/work spaces did not resonate with working class concerns for affordable housing…avoiding displacement, upgrading basic infrastructure, and ensuring that new businesses do not solely cater to high-end markets" (Leung and Lamadrid 2015, 24).

and the cropping up of design firms and studio compounds, has Frogtown enjoyed the title of being an artist neighborhood. One commenter bristles at this narrative, claiming that:

> There have always been artists, musicians, and urban culture in Frogtown that is rarely acknowledged. Many of the original murals have been whitewashed or destroyed. There was once a thriving lowrider culture that you can still catch a glimpse of on random Sunday afternoons (Commenter *dodgerdog213* in Simpson 2014).

This statement reveals the resentment that some carry in being confronted with declarations (much of it implicitly racialized) of the recent 'arting' of their neighborhood. This narrative renders invisible—both physically and discursively—the cultural and aesthetic practices, such as graffiti murals and lowrider activities, of those who had long shaped Frogtown with their artistic creations.[191]

Figure 6.2. Posters promoting the 2012 Frogtown Artwalk.
(Source: Elysian Valley Arts Collective and Shawn Freeman.)



Residents I spoke with shared their complicated, sometimes ambivalent sentiments regarding the changing population of Elysian Valley. They noted observing the influx of artists occupying available studio space during the last fifteen to twenty years, as well as the newer set of middle-class, white-collar young professionals coming in search of living and office space.

[191] Regarding this issue, a longtime resident and local artist herself told me, "Excuse me, artists have always lived here. We're not void of art, we just got artists that publish, that send out press releases, but it doesn't mean we didn't have artists here" (Interview #55, 2013). Meanwhile, the comments section of an *LA Weekly* article written by Simpson on the 'trendification' of Frogtown reveals commenters taking issue with the author's language that the NOMAD compound's owner was a founding artist of the community. One commenter (self-titled as *riversider*) scathingly states that "this article gets the cultural history of the area all wrong. Damian Robinson, original Frogtown artist? How about Frank Romero? He was one of the original 'Los Four.' What about the several serious artists who have been in the area long before?" (Simpson 2014).

Some identified the downside of this growing artist/creative class population, as this resident explained:

> Anytime there has been…an artist enclave[,] that's a death wish right there. Because that means your neighborhood is going to be flipped over, and prices are going to go up. …When they flipped downtown—where are those people going to go? They needed big spaces to work, we were a little rundown community. When the [industrial uses] had to leave…they moved out of the area, leaving big factories open and that's why the artists came here (Interview #55, 2013).

Another resident, one who had lived in the neighborhood his entire life, also noticed a racial and class-based distinction between those who he used to see moving in and those who were now moving in:

> I would have to say that there was a greater percentage of renters back some number of years ago…than there are today. And then, today's renters are a whole different group. It's no longer the Hispanic family or it's no longer the Asian family. It's the Anglo up-and-coming hipster… Artists, loft-living, downtown close-to-their-workplace [residents]. We're seeing a lot of that. …I think this is a more educated group who can afford to come in and pay greater rent than others might. (Interview #17, 2013).

These observations of demographic change are not limited to longtime residents. The racial and class-based differences between older and newer residents are echoed by one relative newcomer, who confessed that:

> Obviously [the neighborhood is] going to go through probably a big change, and I have mixed feelings about that. …The word 'gentrification' jumps in all the time, and I'm concerned about that and yet I'm part of that. *I'm this Caucasian guy that comes into this very mixed neighborhood.* I'm not sure what I should say about that" (Interview #27, 2013, emphasis added).

These noticeable racial and socioeconomic differences were likewise mentioned by numerous other residents I spoke to in meetings and informal conversations; most shared their belief and feelings of apprehension that gentrification was already underway.

Even among nonresidents, the changes are remarkable, as one environmentalist stated that riverfront desirability is rising "especially in places like Frogtown, [where it] used to be a very unknown, undesirable place to live, and now, hipsters want to live by the river, all the artists, bohemians, and everyone else. Which is cool, but the people that had been living there now have to contend with that" (Interview #1, 2013). These statements illustrate how newcomers are perceived and characterized, and connect them to particular forms of housing, employment, and former areas of occupancy that distinguish them from those who were originally from or previously moved into the neighborhood. Overall, residents' sentiments regarding neighborhood aestheticization, demographic change, rising land values, and displacement pressures cannot be dismissed as anecdotal evidence or simply the unfounded fears of a community unwilling to change. Rather, the concerns of those who are living here are generated in response to the material outcomes of urban forces acting upon and reshaping a lived landscape.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSIONS OF GENTRIFICATION: THE RESTORATION OF THE RIVER

"The Conservation Movement Comes to Frogtown": Changes along the Glendale Narrows

The presence of the Los Angeles River adds an ecological dimension to the housing and demographic changes already occurring in Elysian Valley. The stretch of the river that passes through several NELA neighborhoods is known as the Glendale Narrows. Running eight-miles

long from Griffith Park to just above downtown, the Narrows is a unique, soft-bottomed stretch where the river flow is fed by underground springs. Because of this hydrological characteristic, the riverbed of the Narrows is not concrete and therefore the entire stretch hosts a less-disturbed hydro-ecological system. As discussed in Chapter Three, due to the river's attractiveness at this location, much of the incipient work on greening and enhancing the L.A. River took place on the Glendale Narrows (Kennedy 1995). Elysian Valley, as one of the few residential areas situated next to the Narrows, became a symbolic gateway to the river's transformation, with one *Times* journalist declaring that "the conservation movement comes to Frogtown", where "the tree huggers have started their campaign for green space in L.A" (Ramos 1995). Thus, beginning in the mid-1990s, the "tree huggers" launched their green movement by installing a series of improvement projects such as parks, bike paths, and public artwork.

More importantly, the number of projects along the Glendale Narrows will likely multiply, as myriad water improvement, urban greening, transportation infrastructure, and community development projects for this area are laid out in various city, county, state, and federal plans. For example, in September 2013, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released its Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study, also known as the Alternative with Restoration Benefits and Opportunities for Revitalization (ARBOR Study). Begun in 2006 by joint partnership between the federal flood control agency and the city of Los Angeles' Bureau of Engineering, the nearly $10M ARBOR study investigated opportunities to restore riparian ecosystems along eleven miles of the L.A. River, particularly along the Glendale Narrows, which run from Griffith Park to downtown. In May 2014, L.A.'s mayor and Congress adopted Alternative 20 of the study, which is the most extensive restoration alternative laid out in the report (Sagahun 2014). If approved, this restoration program dedicates over $1Billion in federal and city funds to construct greening and development projects along the river.[192] Taken together, the existing enhancements of the river and the escalation of revitalization efforts upon it, combined with the greater aesthetic appeal and ecological health of the Glendale Narrows, position it as a highly desirable urban amenity.

Long regarded as an important neighborhood feature, the L.A. River's recently elevated status as a major urban sustainability initiative undertaken by a consortium of public agencies signals the intensified insertion of an ecological component to Elysian Valley's socio-spatial reconfiguration (Dooling 2009). No longer a blighted, graffiti-ridden concrete landscape, riverfront land is set to be flush with parks and pathways; this could further incentivize the (already occurring) conversion of industrial riverside properties into more lucrative commercial and residential uses. Planners, developers, and potential investors are acutely aware of the mutually benefiting impacts of continued ecological enhancement and adaptive reuse and reclamation of former industrial space. For example, a 2007 report to the city's Planning Commission claims that:

> land use changes in the Community Plan Update *were made in light of Los Angeles River revitalization efforts*, the limited circulation system supporting the industrial properties, and *the viability of housing* in Elysian Valley due to its central location and proximity to employment centers (City of LA DCP 2007, P-1, emphasis added).

[192] "Mayor Eric Garcetti and Los Angeles District Commander Col. Kim Colton announced that the plan to restore the Los Angeles River was unanimously approved today by the Civil Works Review Board of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Washington, D.C." This decision by the board is, "a significant milestone for L.A. River restoration" (City of LA Committee on the River, 2015).

Assessments such as this illustrate the city's position that urban planning measures are needed that would optimally facilitate the future development trajectory of Elysian Valley. Updated zoning and development guidelines are all the more necessary because they "reflec[t] the changes occurring in the community" that sees "the transition to a more multiple family, mixed-use community"; such a transition could be economically and socially valuable, given that:

> The area is a desirable central location not far from the Downtown Los Angeles and other regional employment centers such as the Wilshire Corridor and Hollywood. It abuts the Los Angeles River which is undergoing revitalization efforts aimed at developing the river with recreational amenities by incorporating a system of greenways and bike paths (2007, P-2).

Recommendations such as this demonstrate the public and private interests in encouraging further development of environmental amenities within a neighborhood so advantageously positioned for economic and cultural reinvigoration.

However, the greening of the Los Angeles River intensifies residents' concerns of gentrification.[193] Many, regardless of their housing status, longevity of residency, or personal views on gentrification itself, see environmental improvement as an accelerant to rising land values, development projects, and ultimately, the displacement of lower-income residents and renters. One homeowner starkly noted how increased investments in the river would drive increased housing prices: "I see that coming. I see the rents going up. And I see that at some point people will not be able to afford it. …I do see along the riverside, people preparing themselves for the flip, for the changeover" (Interview #55, 2013). Another resident similarly noted that gentrification was inarguably happening, and while he saw it as a mixed bag, he identified those who would be negatively impacted by it:

> You have gentrification in full force, and that has its good things and that has its bad things. […] The downside is you do lose a sense of the old community, because people are priced out, rent-wise and property value-wise. ...*We do see that we have lost people who have historically been here for many years, generations at times, because they simply could not afford to live here any longer.* And I think that's one of the tragedies of that (Interview #17, 2013, emphasis added).

Likewise, one resident who recently moved into the neighborhood specifically to be closer to the L.A. River predicted others like him would soon follow. He attributed future restoration projects to continued gentrification and displacement of the more vulnerable subset of the neighborhood population:

> It's just no question that [gentrification's] gonna happen here in this neighborhood. …*I think it mostly affects the rents, for the low income apartments here.* And as you go about the neighborhood, you realize how many apartments there really are here. … There are a lot. *And people are really concerned about gentrification pushing people out because of that.* And then there needs to be some type of rent control that happens, but quite frankly I don't see anybody talking about that at all (Interview #27, 2013, emphasis added).

Another stakeholder echoed the potential vulnerability of renters, and even explained how homeowners could exacerbate their tenuous status:

[193] It is important to note that despite concerns that residents have about gentrification, they are also largely supportive of the city and county's attempts to improve it. This is in contrast to several other riverside neighborhoods who display a more classic "Not in My Backyard" (NIMBY) attitude toward any sort of project taking place at the stretch of L.A. River they are adjacent or close to. As one city planner summarized it: "I think it's Frogtown, there are some single family properties in that area by the river on the west side… And that area has been more supportive of [the RIO project]. They've gotten the bicycle plan. It's also a less wealthy area. I think the Studio City area people tend to be much more wealthy, and again, the wealthier it is, the more entitled they feel and the more resistant to change they are" (Interview #15, 2012).

> If you're renting in the neighborhood and your property gets sold, and if you're one of the tenants… […] You have really long-term residents and new people coming in. …I'm sure it's a little uneasy for some residents, especially if they're renting. Because if the value goes up so high, a lot of the homeowners… in the area might be tempted to sell (Interview #64, 2013).

Nonresidents, environmentalists, and some city bureaucrats identified the potential gentrifying dangers of river improvement upon renters and low-income residents. Several I spoke with privately acknowledged that restoration could induce neighborhood gentrification and expressed concern that plans came with insufficient measures to combat displacement.

Gentrification concerns surrounding the river are openly acknowledged and discussed. In a recent article on the latest developments of river restoration, a former state senator who had once led the charge in forming a river management agency, declared that with the current trend of revitalization, "it's inevitable that pressures of displacement will fall on the working class and poor communities who have lived along the river for decades" (Hayden, 2014). A planning and economic development report focusing on Northeast Los Angeles neighborhoods, which was funded by HUD and EPA and released in 2014, declared that "similar to much of NELA and the artistic creativity that characterizes the neighborhoods, Elysian Valley is experiencing neighborhood change and gentrification because of its attractive physical geography and creative atmosphere" (NELA-RC 2014, 67). Even the Army Corps' ARBOR report recognized that restoration would benefit some while harming others:

> Minority and special interest group homeowners would benefit as property values would likely appreciate, *while minority renters would be negatively impacted due to rent increases, which could potentially displace minority and special interest group residents* (USACE 2013, 107-108, emphasis added).

These acknowledgements illuminate the tenuous status of low-income residents and renters. In 2000, the percentage of renters to homeowners in Frogtown was at 52.2% and 47.8% respectively (*LA Times* Mapping LA 2000). Based on 2010 census data, the percentages have shifted to 50.8% renters and 49.2% owners (Social Explorer 2010). Over half the neighborhood population, then, must contend with the threat of displacement if continually rising rents leave them unable to afford living in Elysian Valley.

Though quantitative documentation of gentrification was beyond the scope of my research, there are certain indicators confirming that residents' fears and perceptions of gentrification are not without foundation. Housing values, especially within the last five years, point to the gentrifying trend unfolding in Elysian Valley. In May 2014, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that according to real estate listings, the house prices increased by 21% over the past year alone, whereas the rest of the county averaged a 16% increase (Sagahun and Saillant 2014). Small, single-family residential units on average demand over $450,000, as compared to several decades ago, when homes cost less than a quarter of that price. *Bloomberg Businessweek* also reported on Elysian Valley's rising housing costs, where "the median price of a single-family home in the ZIP code was $699,000 in the first quarter, up 16 percent from a year earlier; for a condo it was $388,000, a 31 percent jump" (Gittelsohn and Ohnsman 2014). According to the real estate website Zillow, the average single family home listing price in 2015 was $467,000, an increase of 1.7% over the past year, and approaching the inflated boom price of homes seen in 2007, before the financial crisis of 2008 (zillow.com). The current listings for available houses in Frogtown run the range of $300K to $800K, with higher prices in the northern half of the neighborhood, and those being closer to the L.A. River.

Rising housing prices were considered remarkable even back in 2013; the upward trend was noted then by a real estate agent who sold properties in Elysian Valley, among other NELA neighborhoods:

> Here you still have a lot of homes for under $500K, which is hard to find now in this area. But they've gone up so now you have a lot of cash investors come in to flip. …When you walk into an open house, half of them are flippers, with their measuring tapes and their clipboards. And they'll beat out most first time buyers. … You are able to buy a rundown house for 250K, 300K, put it back on the market for 450K or 500K. Boom! Goes so fast (Interview #64, 2013).

Though home prices remained relatively affordable in Elysian Valley in 2013, land values were on the rise and capitalized by developers looking to make a quick profit off of the neighborhood's growing desirability among those who could afford a $500,000 house.[194] We see the continued rise of those prices in the next several years. The median sale price of homes in the two zip codes of Elysian Valley from 2012 thru 2016 show home prices almost doubling; this rise was higher than price increase rates for homes in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. According to housing price data from Redfin, the median sale price of homes in the 90039 zip code (which includes the northern half of Elysian Valley) rose from $511K to $910K during this four year period, Meanwhile, the price of homes in the 90031 zip code (which includes the southern half of Elysian Valley) rose from $269K to $464K (redfin.com). Though less meticulously documented, there are anecdotal reports that renting prices have increased dramatically over the past several years as well (Simpson 2014).

In addition to the rise of housing prices, perhaps the most noticeable indicator of Frogtown's gentrification is the land speculation along the riverfront. Since the release of the Army Corps of Engineers' ARBOR Study in 2013 and the announcement of the adoption of Alternative 20 in mid-2014, a flurry of riverside real estate transactions have transpired. The promise of over a billion dollars of public investment dedicated to restoring the Los Angeles River increases the rent gap of riverside real estate, prompting developers to buy up properties in order to capitalize on the future exchange value land (Smith 1987). Data from the Los Angeles County Office of the Assessor shows that "between October 2011 and December 2014, 39 commercial/industrial properties have changed ownership in Elysian Valley. Of these 39 properties, 10 are river adjacent. Five of those acquisitions of river-adjacent properties took place in 2014" (in Leung and Lamadrid 2015, 17). A neighborhood-based architecture firm reported that "15 out of 30 riverfront properties have been sold in [2013-2014]"; meanwhile, another real estate firm reports that "more properties along the river have changed hands than any since 2001" (Lubbell 2014). A real estate investment firm declared that:

> There are 57 industrial buildings totaling 670,000 s.f. in the Elysian Valley. Recent land comps indicate average price points ranging from $109 per s.f. to over $130 per s.f. Average cap rates for 2014 were 7.9 percent. Only six percent of the buyers are owner occupiers. On the capital markets

[194] Another recent homeowner explained to me the turning over of houses after the 2008 real estate crisis. Looking for a house in 2009, he described the extent of property exchange occurring in Elysian Valley: "I was competing with investors on the market and watching what they were doing, what they were buying and how they were fixing them up and how they were turning them around… Boy, there's *a lot* of that going on here! …Almost every house. It was also, a lot of people lost their houses because of bad loans and the market [going] down like it did, and investors were able to pick up a house for under $200, $220K, and they would stick about…$60-70K into it, and turn this whole thing around in 3 months and make a hundred grand or more on these houses. … If you talk to people who've been here for 20 years they'll tell you the difference [of the neighborhood]. When I moved in here 3 years ago, people were saying, oh man it's already changed so much in the last ten years" (Interview #27, 2013). Moreover, foreclosures in the neighborhood are still high; in 2015, the foreclosure rate in Elysian Valley was at 25.1%, compared to that of the city (2.2%) and the U.S. (3.1%) (data from zillow.com).

> front, Elysian Valley investment activity has increased by 37 percent from 2013 through 2014 (JLL 2015, 11).

Noting the uptick of real estate activities, concerned environmentalists and river activists describe the emerging and speculative transactions along the river as "a land grab", a "land boom", and "enormous speculation."[195]

Along with the real estate speculation, new development projects crop up in Frogtown with greater frequency. Several major projects are breaking ground while others join the approval process queue. In the northernmost corner of the neighborhood, construction for a 56 condominium complex—colloquially called "River House" by its developer, Anastasi Development Company—is already underway ("Riverside development taking" 2014). Another project, the Elysian Valley Riverfront Creative Campus, is under environmental review. Financed by the investment firm Terra River LLC (which is involved in the development of other riverside properties), the Creative Campus will reuse two industrial storage buildings and a former excavation equipment yard to build forty live-work units and 15,500 square feet of commercial space (Jao 2015). The project designers capitalize on the notion of the attractive riverfront feature through their claims that the design is "to create a sense of openness towards the river, and to create new connections and corridors to the existing river path and river" (Creative Campus). The project also claims to bring economic benefits and housing stability to the neighborhood by helping "to increase the supply of high-quality market rate and affordable housing and commercial space targeted toward the residents, artisans, entrepreneurs, and makers of Elysian Valley." Although the language of the development project addresses the need for renters' units, affordable housing, and the slowing of resident displacement, there are only eight live-work units being offered as affordable housing. Furthermore, by appealing to the "artisans, entrepreneurs, and makers" of Elysian Valley and creating live-work lofts, the residential portion of this creative campus is targeted toward members of the creative class and do not necessarily service the lower-income residents of the neighborhood. The proposed Creative Campus, characterized by one news outlet as "Frogtown's first big gentrification meteor", has raised concerns among wary residents and business owners (Barragan 2015; Jao 2015).

Meanwhile, both of Frogtown's former bakery facilities are under redevelopment as well. The wholesale bakeries, once thriving businesses throughout the NELA area, went bankrupt and left behind acres of empty warehouses. The Bimbo Bakery site, vacated in 2004, was recently purchased by Harris Development Group, a development company that is proposing to convert it into a multi-use complex outfitted with 117 residential units (City of LA DCP 2015).[196] As for the former site of the Hostess Bakery (once known as the Four S Bakery), which closed in 2012, its spacious facilities were put up for sale in mid-2013 (*Figure 6.3*). It was recently purchased by the owners of Modernica Furniture, a high-end interior design company that recently shuttered its headquarters in downtown L.A. to move five miles northwest into Elysian Valley (Meltzer 2014). Though specific plans for the former bakery are not yet exact, the owners, Jay and Frank Novak, intend to lease out spaces to businesses in efforts to promote commercial development in the immediate area. The Novaks' vision for the neighborhood, encapsulated in their expressed

[195] Robert Garcia, head of The City Project, stated that: "historically, the city treated its river as an industrial wasteland with low rents for homes and small businesses. Now, developers are urging commercial buyers to snatch up land along the river's shoulders. Sadly, a land grab is underway" (Quoted in Sagahun and Saillat. 2014). The other quotes are from: Lewis McAdams (Quoted in Gittelsohn and Ohnsman, 2014); Kevin Mulcahy, an Elysian Valley architect (Quoted in Zahniser 2015).

[196] As of July 2015, the neighborhood council recommended to the city planning department and planning commission that the Bimbo development proposal not be approved until specific construction conditions were met (EVRNC 2015).

desire that "what happens here [in Elysian Valley] will reflect Silver Lake, Atwater Village and the current essence that is Frogtown", along with the admittance of their first building tenant, a "local-organic food distribution business" known as Good Eggs, coincide with the middle-class conversion of Frogtown. That they compare Frogtown's future with that of Silver Lake and Atwater Village—two notoriously gentrified Los Angeles neighborhoods—should provide little assurance to those concerned over the postindustrial turnover of the neighborhood. What's more, given the well documented link between the organic, sustainable, healthy-foods market and environmentally-conscious, middle-class urban consumers, there is growing evidence that the incursion of these types of commercial businesses signal further gentrification (Anguelovski 2015, 2016a; Kern 2015; Zukin 2008).[197] As major industrial facilities like the Hostess and Bimbo bakeries become converted into spaces for higher-end commercial and residential purposes, the likelihood of unabated redevelopment along riverfront properties and the inflation of land values remain undiminished.

Taken together, the rising housing prices, real estate transactions, and new development projects along the restored Los Angeles River indicate Frogtown's gentrifying trend. Amidst the proposed development projects, real estate activity, and public acknowledgement of the need to address gentrification, Elysian Valley has turned into the poster child for restoration-induced neighborhood change.[198] While one can argue that restoration is a long-term process and is in too early a stage to contribute towards displacement just yet, it has nevertheless accelerated dramatic landscape and demographic change in the neighborhood. The redevelopment of previously industrial areas, influx of middle-class professionals, and the appearance of retail and commercial services appealing to a higher-income demographic together signal the oncoming threat of displacement, or what Peter Marcuse called the "pressure of displacement":

> [W]hen a family sees the neighborhood around it changing dramatically, when their friends are leaving the neighborhood, when the stores they patronize are liquidating and new stores for other clientele are taking their places, and when changes in public facilities, in transportation patterns, and in support services all clearly are making the area less and less livable, then the pressure of displacement is already severe. …One can distinguish the pressures of displacement from the subjective fear of a remote possibility of displacement by looking not only at the perception, but also at what actually occurs in a neighborhood (1985, 207-208).

Marcuse's characterization of the pressure of gentrification, a critical aspect of displacement that is often overlooked in popular discussions around gentrification (Slater 2009), applies to what has been transpiring in Frogtown for the past decade. Rather than preoccupied with "the remote possibility of displacement", the emerging patterns of deindustrialization, aestheticization, and

[197] Residents I spoke with in late 2013 were also concerned about a nearby Ralphs' supermarket (technically located in Silver Lake) being bought out and turned into a Whole Foods market. They repeatedly referenced this change in their food provision system as concrete signs of gentrification encroaching into their neighborhood.

[198] In recently published news articles that discuss both the Army Corp's Alternative 20 plan and the redevelopment it could trigger, Elysian Valley is brought up again and again as a salient case study of potential gentrification-via-restoration. For example, the *Los Angeles Times*' covering of the adoption of Alternative 20 discusses Elysian Valley several times throughout, pointing to the disproportionately rising home prices, influx of trendy businesses, and future river improvement projects as reasons for why residents' fears of gentrification are not unfounded. "With little fanfare, restaurants, professional offices, art studios and others have moved into communities along an 11-mile stretch of the river," reports the *Times*, adding that "speculators are buying up warehouses and vacant land" because they are "anticipating a grand future" for the river (Sagahun and Saillant 2014). Meanwhile, an article from *LA Weekly*, focused on Frogtown's new title as the "hottest neighborhood" in the city, attributing its revival to the renewed interest in the L.A. River and the burgeoning artistic community gathering in along the affordable spaces along the river. "However," the article laments, "the arrival of art and altruism…has become a reliable signal of bad news for poor communities", as Frogtown is seeing "the classic gentrification pattern, which has become predictable to the point of comedy" (Simpson 2014).

green gentrification shaping the neighborhood "are making the area less and less livable." The restoration of the Los Angeles River serves as a portent for full-scale ecological/environmental gentrification; it cannot be ignored that it produces "a worry that has long loomed over the riverside neighborhoods, particularly Elysian Valley, Elysian Park, and Cypress Park, which have been ground zero for many of the Los Angeles River revitalization projects" (Jao 2014a).

Figure 6.3. The former Hostess Bakery facility gets put on the market. (Source: Photo taken by author.)

Revitalization or Gentrification?: The Postpolitical Politics of Urban Sustainability

Despite community anxieties and signs of the growing "pressure of displacement" in Frogtown, restoring the L.A. River is touted as a win-win situation for Los Angeles. Studies, reports, and sound bites from elected officials draw upon and reinforce discourses of urban sustainability/urban sustainable development, with their claims of achieving ecological health, economic growth, and social equity through targeted measures and projects. Plans such as the Army Corps' ARBOR Study or the city's 2007 Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan elucidate how river restoration not only creates/restores valuable ecological habitat/function and promotes community development, but also creates thousands of jobs, appreciates property values, and stimulates other economic activities. For instance, the ARBOR Study's economic analysis reports that implementing restoration projects would not only bring back valuable ecological habitat and hydrological dynamics, but also:

> housing prices would likely appreciate under [the plans] due to the potential of restoration measures to act as a catalyst for the renewal and redevelopment/beautification of adjacent commercial, industrial, business, and residential properties, as discussed above (USACE 2013, 107-108).

In addition to rising land values, the report claims that the cumulative regional economic development (RED) benefits to implementing Alternative 20 included nearly 17,000 new jobs

and over $4.5 billion in labor income, and an average annual income from combined redevelopment as $1.38 billion in Net Present Value. Through economic analyses, the Army Corps concludes that the assertion that "the project would be a key environmental and recreational amenity that would positively impact development and property values" is "supported and informed by numerous examples and studies of property values and development projects nationwide" (USACE 2013, 92-93). These references to the documented success of restoration projects in other cities around the U.S. serve to legitimize the market rationale for public investment in such an enormous infrastructural undertaking. With such bountiful RED benefits and analytic assurance of increased property values, it appears to be an economic and ecological success scenario for the river, the city, and its inhabitants.

However, as critical examinations of sustainable urban development strategies reveal, the win-win-win claims of achieving ecological health, economic growth, and equitable conditions obfuscate or elide the uneven development produced through market-driven urbanization (Campbell 1996; Krueger and Gibbs 2007; While et. al. 2004; Whitehead 2003). Sustainability as an urban growth strategy is shown to be laden with contradictions, unable to address the environmental injustices perpetrated by capitalist urban development. Furthermore, it obscures these unjust socio-spatial relations by promulgating claims of producing an absolute good that is beyond contestation (Isenhour et. al. 2015). These environmental agendas rely upon the naturalization of urban processes that are, in actuality, imbricated with asymmetries of power, and make appeals to an ontologically fixed nature, a common sense logic of market-based growth, and governance through politically-neutral techno-scientific expertise (Swyngedouw 2009). The unjust outcomes of these market-based agendas—such as environmental gentrification—are therefore obscured through the pernicious depoliticization of urban processes carried out under the universally-beneficial banner of achieving sustainability. Environmental gentrification, therefore:

> operates through a discourse of sustainability which simultaneously describes a vision of ecologically and socially responsible urban planning, a 'green' lifestyle which appeals to affluent, eco-conscious residents, and a technocratic, politically neutral approach to solving environmental problems (Checker 2011, 212).

The operationalizing of urban sustainability discourses and strategies, and its negative impacts to vulnerable communities, is especially apparent in case studies of postindustrial waterfront transformation in cities around the world. The conversion of industrial landscapes into 'cleaner, greener' attraction points that appeal to middle-class ideas of livability have been shown to facilitate conditions which expose low-income residents and existing industrial uses to displacement (Curran 2007; Hagerman 2007; Hum 2015; Vormann 2015; Wong 2006).

In its current form, plans to revitalize the Los Angeles River are structured around environmental policymaking that relies upon on market-based logics and strategies, and also draw upon discourses of sustainability and livability that depoliticize urban processes (Browne and Keil 2000; Keil and Desfor 2003). This sanitizing and depoliticizing of green gentrification is succinctly captured in a statement by L.A.'s mayor, who promised to "capture what's good" with revitalization while working to "mitigate what is the bad side of gentrification" (Jao 2014a). Additionally, in a 2015 report produced by a real estate investment management firm, its authors track the rising property values and developer investments along key stretches of the Los Angeles River, many of them located in Elysian Valley. Noting this trend, the report, rather un-ironically, asks "*Is 'Frogtown' the Next Arts District?*" before describing the similarities between the bustling downtown neighborhood and this small riverside enclave:

> A pocket of Elysian Valley, popularly referred to as Frogtown (in due part to an overwhelming frog presence in the riverfront), has sprung forward as the next frontier for active redevelopment. Similar to the Los Angeles Art District, the area continues to transform a formerly declining industrial base to a burgeoning creative epicenter. Elysian Valley developers are successfully repositioning legacy industrial buildings to accommodate this wave of creatives along the river (JLL 2015, 11).

The appealing and optimistic language of the report presents the current pattern of development occurring in Elysian Valley as unquestionably beneficial to the residents of this "frontier" neighborhood. Though the authors of the report do raise caution on how real estate development can "best integrat[e]" into an older, smaller neighborhood, their suggestions on prevention of gentrification come across as perfunctory, even trite (12). And given the well documented, even notorious, gentrification of the downtown Arts District over the last twenty years, to ponder if Frogtown could be the "next Arts District" is to celebrate neighborhood regeneration without considering or acknowledging that the flipside of that process is gentrification. The very real outcome of poor residents becoming displaced is sanitized and concealed by the trumpeting discourse of "redevelopment".

The seemingly neutral planning language surrounding river initiatives is present in two recent river planning projects—the River Improvement Overlay (RIO) district and a five-community economic and community development report (NELA-RC)—that appear to sustainably develop riverside neighborhoods. While both plans undoubtedly will benefit riverside communities and businesses in certain aspects, as well as promote more ecologically-sensitive urban design, they nevertheless rely upon the city's calculus of market-based development as an integral component to the future of the Los Angeles River. As one policy expert for the city described it:

> Part of the goal of the [NELA-RC project] is to come up with economic development mechanisms that would help develop the neighborhoods around the river, revitalize them using the L.A. River as the economic engine. Which we've never done in our city. We've never said, 'oh, we have a river so why not improve it so it because our tourism [attraction] or a way of getting more revenue out of it, both in terms of property or through more improved neighborhoods' (Interview #45, 2012).

Even when advertised as promoting community benefits or river-friendly architectural, the RIO and NELA-RC plans work from governance practices based on "smart" development rather than regulation of market forces that commodify that sustainability. Furthermore, planning projects like the RIO and NELA RC operationalize specific spatial imaginaries in order to brand urban places for the promotion of economic growth (Greenberg 2015). Discursively creating the 'Riverfront' or 'the River District' as discrete cartographic units, the RIO and NELA-RC plans mobilize and reinforce a carefully curated, depoliticized spatial imaginary, of ecologically-vibrant riverside landscapes supporting thriving, sustainable, and culturally-diverse communities.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Elysian Valley residents I spoke with were confused or cautious about the branding of their neighborhood as part of a 'Riverfront District'.[199] Some who were asked to join stakeholder committees in planning processes for the NELA-RC expressed dissatisfaction with the opacity of project objectives and the actual level of involvement afforded them (personal communication with EVRNC member, 2013). Among some longtime residents, the HUD grant's use of terms such as 'blighted' and 'redevelopment' pertaining to their

[199] Through numerous conversations with residents, I learned that many of them regard the term "riverfront district", which is being used by city departments, with derision, anxiety, or a combination of both.

neighborhood aroused wariness with regards to what future plans entailed; according to one NELA-RC project manager, residents articulated their anxieties on how 'redevelopment' to them bore too many similarities to the urban renewal processes that devastated so many U.S. inner-city neighborhoods in the 1950s-60s (Interview #39, 2013). As one resident told me:

> My biggest fear is that you're going to make this [neighborhood] into a Venice Boardwalk. …*Now they're using the term 'riverfront. I'm saying, wait one minute here, what are we talking about?* And I know at some point for every benefit there is a negative, and commerce and real estate are good things. They give jobs, they help the economy—wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. But are the willing to work with the environment? Are they willing to work with the people who live here? (Interview #55, 2013, emphasis added).

These thoughts, shared by multiple residents and stakeholders, reveal the acknowledgement among the community that plans toward riverfront development involve economic gains and growth; however, the questions remain whether the community will ultimately gain or how growth will impact their daily lives. These fears, as I show in the next section, are not unfounded concerns of NIMBYism, but rather stem from collectively-formed and held understandings of place, history, and identity. This politics of place is central to combating the depoliticizing effects of gentrification via urban sustainable development.

THE POLITICS OF PLACE: RE-POLITICIZING THE NEIGHBORHOOD ENVIRONMENT

Histories of Spatial Injustice and the Formation of Place-Based Identity

Critical examinations of Elysian Valley's urban environmental reconfiguration must consider the significant role of place, as "the politics of place-making are key to understanding how communities conceptualise and then motivate their reactions to (among other things) the socio-spatial re-ordering of the urban environment" (Pierce et. al. 2011, 55). For Frogtown residents, the socio-spatial re-ordering of their environment is rapidly unfolding through the processes of environmental gentrification associated with the restoration of the L.A. River, and how they perceive and respond to this change is deeply informed by their history, memory, and understanding of place. In particular, place formation, or the politics of place-making, is shaped through powerful narratives of past spatial injustices imposed upon the neighborhood and borne by the community. The embodied experiences and collectively-held memories of these injustices, which came in the form of large-scale, state-sponsored infrastructural projects that displaced households, demolished community spaces, and disrupted/disregarded residents, powerfully shape the ways in which residents territorialize the spaces of their everyday lives. One example is the channelization of the Los Angeles River in the 1930s by county and federal flood control agencies. Executed under the banner of public safety and flood protection, the project caused massive ecological destruction and removed huge swathes of potential public greenspace, serving as "a dismal portent of the continuing role of government in reshaping and degrading the regional environment" (Davis 1998, 69). Moreover, this infrastructure project established a watershed management regime that prohibited access to and use of the river, effectively criminalizing, in the name of public safety, the long interactions between riparian landscapes/resources and diverse riverside communities (see Chapter Three).

Another incident of experienced spatial injustice is the demolition of Chavez Ravine (Masters 2012). Settled in the hills of Elysian Park, near Chinatown, in the early 1900s, Chavez Ravine developed into a closely-knit and culturally vibrant Mexican American community

during the next several decades (Masters 2012). Then, in the mid-1950s, the city government designated the site for new public housing projects, and proceeded to remove the residents of Chavez Ravine via powers of eminent domain and police authorization. However, the public housing project did not come to fruition, as the site was then determined better fit for a sports arena, leading to the eventual construction of Dodger Stadium (Parson 1993). Though the community resisted their forcible removal, they were eventually dislocated, their homes razed, and many left without the replacement housing promised to them by the city government (Laslett 2015). While these events were geographically separate from development in Elysian Valley, a large number of displaced Chavez Ravine residents moved into the nearby neighborhood of Elysian Valley, thus forging a racialized historical-spatial connection between the two neighborhoods (Simpson 2014). As embodied examples of the city's long history of racialized discrimination against its Chicano/Mexican communities, and as collective memory-bearers of a neighborhood that no longer physically exists, the relocated Chavez Ravine residents signify how the history of one place becomes absorbed into the formation of another. The narrative of spatial injustice, exemplified so starkly in the case of Chavez Ravine's demolition, is incorporated into the place-history of Elysian Valley and gives shape to the place-based identity of its community.

Place history in Elysian Valley is also shaped by the collective memory of freeway construction. The Golden State Freeway, or Interstate 5, was constructed by the California Department of Transportation in the 1950s and 60s. Stretching almost 1,400 miles from Washington to the U.S.-Mexico border, the I-5 freeway is the largest North-South highway route along the western coast of the country, and symbolizes the enormous undertaking by the U.S. government in the postwar period to create the nation's expansive interstate freeway system and usher in an era of automobile transportation (Kaszynski 2000). In Elysian Valley, the freeway runs alongside Riverside Drive, one of the neighborhood's main arterial roads. According to residents of Elysian Valley and the surrounding neighborhoods, freeway construction was an egregious case of spatial injustice that produced numerous negative impacts. Many claim that homes were cleared and families displaced; as a result, large family networks, so characteristic of community settlement in this area, were divided by the displacement as well as the physical barriers of on/off ramps and multiple lanes bisecting the surrounding land. Those who remember the years of construction vividly recall the incessant noise, air pollution, habitat destruction, and construction-related hazards that riddled the neighborhood and the constant stress of living amidst these disruptive elements. Longtime residents also ascribe the disappearance of locally-owned commercial businesses—the majority concentrated along Riverside Drive—to the devastating effects of physical separation, community division, and onslaught of vehicles passing through the neighborhood (Interview #13, 2012; #58, 2012). Furthermore, for a community already hemmed in from the east by the channelized Los Angeles River and from the north by the ongoing construction of the Glendale Freeway (State Route 2), the construction of the I-5 freeway was considered by many to be the final barrier to a physically isolated community. Separated from surrounding neighborhoods by freeways, railroads, and flood control channels, Frogtown is an island neighborhood in a sea of concrete infrastructure. Therefore, to those living in Elysian Valley, the construction of the Interstate 5 Freeway (quite literally) cemented Frogtown's physical isolation and stifled their local economy.

Symbolically, residents view the I-5 (and to a lesser extent, the 2 freeway) as the consummate example of the blatant disregard shown by government agencies to the communities impacted—even decimated—by the freeways. For those who live and work in Frogtown, their

history of place reveals a pattern of spatial injustices, of continued disregard and disrespect, and even intentional targeting due to their race and class makeup. One resident's reflections on the treatment of the community are representative of how many others in Frogtown feel in regards to their place history:

> The history has been of agencies that will come in and overnight do something without ever consulting the neighborhood… That was the pattern. …Without having ever had any consultation, without any consideration having ever been given. […] *I think that this is not done by accident. I think that this is strategically planned this way* (Interview #17, 2013, emphasis added).

His belief in the strategically planned targeting of the neighborhood is echoed among other urban communities ravaged by freeway construction. As historian Eric Avila argues, the belief within a community that their neighborhood was intentionally selected in the freeway's planned route due to its marginalized status is not isolated to one particular locality, but is a strongly held conviction among many urban communities of color throughout the U.S. Drawn from traumatic lived experiences of displacement and political disempowerment, this conviction is overlaid with racialized understandings of the workings of the state, as he states that there is "a shared suspicion among city people of color that the interstate generation of freeway builders targeted their communities with malicious intent. This conviction persists in the barrios and ghettos of American cities" (Avila 2004, 3). Many Frogtown residents carry and voice this suspicion.

Therefore, these cases of past infrastructural intrusions shape the collectively-carried history of place in Frogtown and frame the community's experiences with urban change, state power, and environmental justice. Residents evoke the history of spatial disruption to legitimize their status as a marginalized community, one that has been disempowered, dispossessed, and excluded from decision-making processes at all levels of land use governance. In addition to these historical incidents, they point to decades of infrastructural neglect—lack of street lighting and sidewalks, poorly maintained sewer lines, unpaved roads, underfunded community centers—and environmentally harmful land uses to highlight the accrual of everyday injustices they have borne and continue to live with. These forms of neglect, though not "spectacular manifestations" of urban environmental injustice, are nevertheless the "quotidian" products of governmental "inaction" that still "have an impact on the capabilities of disadvantaged communities to live out a full life" (Whitehead 2009, 662, 665-6). While Elysian Valley residents did not classify these "everyday", "ordinary" manifestations of injustices as such, they still experience and understand them "as forms of experientially repressed discrimination that are surprisingly close at hand in the city" (2009, 666).

Moreover, residents also cite the poorly executed community involvement procedures for recent riverside projects—the construction of the Glendale Narrows riverside bikeway in the late-1990s and the creation of Marsh Park, a water infiltration park, in 2004—to illustrate how they have repeatedly experienced disregard from agencies, and how this resulted in their distrust for both public and private planning entities. Within this place-making process, where history is invoked to justify present conflicts, "the past becomes a 'resource' which may be selectively mined in the creation of new boundaries of a community whose social or geographical boundaries are threatened" (Dalby and Mackenzie 1997, 102). Therefore, these historical incidents of past injustices and narratives of misrecognition and marginalization from public agencies contribute to the formation of place and frame the environmental changes unfolding in that place. Not only that, they are also sometimes actively invoked in the construction of a place-based community identity and utilized in the community's contesting of unwanted land use developments, environmental disturbances, and/or exclusionary planning processes.

Rather than distant memories, the painful experiences of past injustices inform many longtime residents' perceptions of current neighborhood changes. For those who had lived through the displacement of Chavez Ravine, potential uprooting of residents for river restoration plans is not an unfounded fear but rather a new iteration of lived experience. They, like others in the community, regard river revitalization as a potential benefit, even a necessary urban environmental agenda, while remaining wary of the potential downsides. This concern clearly emerged during one conversation with a longtime resident who had moved with his family from Chavez Ravine into Elysian Valley. Still carrying the vivid memories of the demolition of his past home, and wearily familiar with dismissive planning agencies, he expressed ambivalence regarding urban greening and voiced concern for his neighbors, telling me: "I'm very fearful that these plans [on the river] don't include uprooting any of my neighbors that will live along the L.A. River in order to put some commercial [uses]" (Interview #58, 2012). His statement reveals not only the fear of the commercial development of riverside land, but also of possible involuntary removal of residents through government force. Even though agency representatives shared with me the unlikelihood of the city exercising eminent domain for river-related projects, and even though public officials have gone on record to promise the same, this resident's memory of Chavez Ravine continues to inform his expectations of how city governments can bring innocuous plans into material reality through forceful and even violent methods (Interview #20, 2013; #39, 2012). [200]

Similarly, another longtime resident I spoke with revealed how her understanding of the way state-sponsored infrastructure projects unfold in L.A. was informed by personal and collectively-held memories of the past in which communities with little political and economic clout were disregarded in the planning process. In regards to the L.A. River, she shared that:

> The first concept that I heard about was that they wanted to make it like the San Antonio River. …So, I mean, what would the development look like here? Probably great, compared to what it is now. But these people have lived here several generations also (Interview #13, 2012).

According to her remarks, riverfront commercial development, celebrated in places like the San Antonio Riverwalk, appears likely to surface along the L.A. River—and possibly jeopardize the generation-spanning tenure of residents who would be removed or priced out of their homes. Again, while the actual threat of eminent domain does not appear a substantive one at this time, the legacies of spatial injustices, infrastructural interventions, and the "quotidian" environmental injustices in the form of governmental neglect in Elysian Valley continue to inform the community's collective fear of displacement and unjust planning practices. The threat of displacement—even by gentrification and not forcible removal—strikes a particularly profound chord among residents whose parents, family members, or younger selves carried memories of Chavez Ravine and the Golden State Freeway construction.

The Politics of Place in the Environmental Justice Struggle over Metrolink

As its history illustrates, Elysian Valley's socio-spatial landscape was shaped by unequal power relations; therefore, the processes of place-making and identity formation is politically charged and contested. The politics of place that unfold in this neighborhood, then, are integrally

[200] Those involved with city-sponsored river projects were adamant about the unlikelihood of the use of eminent domain. Both project managers and planning bureaucrats confirmed that the city understood the trauma associated with the use of that particular executive power. Meanwhile, Mayor Garcetti stated in a recent article regarding the ACE Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study: "Nobody's houses can be taken. Nobody can be kicked out of rent stabilized apartments close to the river. People in public housing won't be moved" (Jao 2014a).

tied to the politics of environmental justice. Residents of Elysian Valley both consciously and unconsciously respond to the reconfiguration of their lived environments through the notions of place and place-identity they carry. And while Pulido argues that "place-based identities are not static or unitary, but are multiple and changing", a community's "efforts to stabilize places can be…acts of resistance on the part of the subordinated" (1997, 19-20). Communities' acts of resistance against environmental injustices and other forms of spatial marginalization can and do involve the construction of place-based identities and deployment of a stabilized place-as-territory (Anguelovski 2014; DiChiro 2003; Pena 2003). In Elysian Valley, where residents face injustices in the form of both environmental pollution and green gentrification, to engage in struggles for environmental justice is also to engage in the politics of place. Comprehending and mobilizing against unjust spatial processes that impact their neighborhood involves forming and performing a particular place-based identity that draws from the specific narratives of past instances of disempowerment and procedural exclusion. This politics of place is central to the community's struggles for environmental justice, exemplified in the conflict with Metrolink.

For the past several years, Elysian Valley's most urgent environmental issue has been the ongoing conflict with the Metrolink Central Maintenance Facility (CMF). Built in 1992 at one of the properties of the former Southern Pacific Taylor Yard railyard complex on the east side of the L.A. River, the CMF is a facility for Metrolink, a regional commuter rail system. Governed by a joint powers authority between the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission and the Southern California Regional Rail Authority, and representing interests of transportation agencies in five Southern California counties, Metrolink "operates over seven routes through a six-county, 512 route-mile network" and is "the third largest commuter rail agency in the United States" (Metrolink Website). The sixty-seven-acre CMF is a $35M facility which performs maintenance of train engines, runs safety checks and service tests, and carries out refueling and switching of trains. Though the CMF is located between the neighborhoods of Glassell Park and Cypress Park, it is directly across the river from the southern half of Elysian Valley.

Residents in 2001 began to voice concern over the plumes of smoke, harsh smells, and disruptive, late-night noises coming from the CMF. Because of the proximity of the railyard to the homes in Elysian Valley, the air and noise pollution was experienced daily. One resident described in detail how blaring horns from train engines went on for hours, sometimes in the middle of the night, the force of the sound enough to rattle his windowpanes. And on days when he noticed clouds of black smoke billowing from the CMF and the smell of diesel emissions was particularly strong, he would keep his children inside the house (Interview #71, 2013). In response to the pollution, a few residents attempted to generate political action, with little to no substantive progress made at the time. It was not until 2011 that considerable mobilization against Metrolink arose, when newer residents, having moved into the neighborhood, formed working partnerships with longtime residents who had continued living with Metrolink's pollution. Having formed a core group of community activists, residents and stakeholders began reaching out to elected officials, including city councilmembers (for Council District 1 and 13), the state assemblymember (Gil Cedillo), and Congressperson (Adam Schiff). Those in Elysian Valley formed working partnerships with community leaders in the other impacted neighborhoods of Glassell Park and Cypress Park, and further developed a strategic network by acquiring support from environmental and river-advocacy organizations.

Calling themselves the Northeast LA Residents for Clean Air Coalition, community leaders increased resident awareness through a series of public events/meetings. Most notably, the coalition leaders hosted a series of community meetings, beginning in October 2011, that

brought together residents of the three impacted neighborhoods, representatives from Metrolink's Board as well as the Southern California Air Quality Management District (AQMD, the regulatory agency for air pollution), city officials, and other invested stakeholders. One resident created a website which provided detailed and scientifically-based information about the health effects of diesel particulate matter, gave updates on the latest developments, announced upcoming community meetings, and laid out the main objectives of the NELA Clean Air Coalition's demands for cleanup at the CMF. In ten years, the community response to the air and noise pollution of Metrolink grew from resigned acceptance to full-fledged political mobilization that demanded: the adoption of cleaner practices at the CMF site, the conducting of a community health risk assessment (to be funded by Metrolink), the enforcement of stricter air quality standards and monitoring practices by regulatory agencies (including the AQMD), and greater community involvement in decision-making over CMF operations.

The fight against Metrolink pollution was—and still is—based on the collective concerns of NELA residents who spearheaded their opposition partly through activist rhetoric drawing from elements of neighborhood history, place-based identity, environmental justice discourse, and the growing prominence of the Los Angeles River. Activists, residents, and political allies repeatedly brought up the fact that the railyard was installed in its present location without a full environmental impact review, an egregious demonstration of lax regulations and poor government oversight (Hernandez 1992; Interview #7, 2013). At various community meetings and through public statements, community members enumerated the adverse health effects of exposure to diesel particulate matter emitted from idling train engines, stressing that they were placed at higher risk of asthma, other pulmonary illnesses, and cancer. These harmful impacts, community members adamantly and consistently pointed out, were compounded by their accumulated exposure to emissions from the I-5 and Glendale Freeways.

During one particularly heated community meeting in January 2012, residents listed these sources of pollution in their emphatic claims that they were systematically "being poisoned" because the surrounding land uses were "killing us". During that same meeting, the principal of a neighborhood elementary school asserted that in her twenty-nine years of teaching at the Los Angeles Unified School District, she had not seen higher rates of asthma and other respiratory illnesses in the children than she did currently. Later in the evening, during a Q+A with representatives from Metrolink and the AQMD, a boardmember of Elysian Valley's neighborhood council directly cited the construction of the I-5 freeway to demonstrate how the history of the neighborhood involved agencies "doing whatever they liked" without accountability; Metrolink, he then argued, was just one more example of that unacceptable practice. Moreover, community activists claimed that the siting of the CMF in an area disproportionately composed of nonwhite, immigrant, and lower income residents was an unequivocal demonstration of race- and class-based discrimination (Jao 2013). At a May 2013 press conference, one Elysian Valley resident declared that "riverside neighborhoods…bear a disproportionate burden of the regional transportation system" which is "at the core…an environmental justice issue" (NELA Residents for Clean Air 2013). That these disproportionately burdened neighborhoods are lower-income communities of color is central to discursively positioning the Metrolink conflict as an environmental justice struggle.

When examining the rhetoric of community activism, it is worth noting that aside from the nearby railyards and freeways, Elysian Valley faces other polluting land uses, some of which

they have previously—and unsuccessfully—attempted to remove from the neighborhood.[201] Poor planning directly placed industrial and residential zones adjacent to one another, a faulty spatial arrangement acknowledged by the city's planning department, which states that:

> While both [industrial and residential] uses have co-existed for nearly 60 years, the residential areas are impacted by truck traffic that serves industrial uses in the interior lots adjacent to the riverbanks…. *Moreover, the residential neighborhoods are impacted by noise and environmental pollutants generated by existing industry.* Often because of the compactedness of the area and the narrowness of the lots, there is no buffer between the uses (City of LA DCP 2004, I4—I-5, emphasis added).

Residents' recollections of growing up in close proximity to these polluting industrial land uses confirm the planning department's assessment. As one resident shared with me:

> I remember as a child playing on the playground…and you'd take a deep breath and your lungs would be pained. Because of the fumes and chemicals in the air, probably from the furniture [manufacturers] in this area and all the pollution that these factories were emitting before we shifted over to the restrictive rules that we're at now. But I remember what it was like before they had that and I remember…the dark, black smog in the air (Interview #55, 2013).

Another resident activist recounted a disturbing exchange with a youth from the nearby neighborhood of Cypress Park, in which he was told the pollution from railyards was, to the teenage boy, "the only thing he has ever known" (Interview #27, 2013). These recollections of NELA residents demonstrate a tangible, embodied counterpart to the city's conclusion that industrial pollutants have adversely impacted residents' health.

To residents and community stakeholders, the conflict with the Metrolink CMF is more than a discrete or historically- and spatially-isolated case of facility siting. Instead, community members frame their observations and understandings of neighborhood environmental conditions through the notions of place history and place-based identity they carry. In other words, how members of the Frogtown community conceived and experienced the environmental injustice manifested through Metrolink—disproportionate exposure to pollution, misrecognition through a continued pattern of disregard, exclusion from decision-making procedures—was shaped by the powerful spatial narratives that are so integral to the place-making of Frogtown. For those, especially, who had long resided in the neighborhood, there was an undeniable socio-spatial connection between the creation of the CMF and the historical cases of Chavez Ravine's razing and I-5 Freeway construction. Like those past incidents of spatial injustice, the Metrolink Central Maintenance Facility was intentionally built in its current location due to the racial/ethnic and socioeconomic composition of the community, which signified minimal political power and, therefore, little resistance.

For one longtime resident who was involved in the mobilization against Metrolink, the siting of the CMF was one more example of the pattern of injustice already inflicted against the neighborhood:

> I just think that—and I'm talking about Metrolink also—that if this was a different neighborhood with a different ethnic group, the thought of having what's going on in our community wouldn't happen. It just wouldn't happen. The freeway wouldn't show up and destroy a community and divide families, take out libraries, commercial retail, what this community had before and no

[201] For example, residents proposed in the 1990s for the removal of Mission Clean Labs from their neighborhood premises, citing the irresponsible disposal of hazardous manufacturing materials into the air, land, and even the river (Yokoi 1994). Though they were ultimately unsuccessful in their proposal to expel Mission Labs from their neighborhood, they continue to reference it as a polluting presence in formal and informal conversations about land uses and resident health.

> longer has. …If this was Pasadena, this 5 freeway wouldn't be here. That's what I'm saying (Interview #13, 2012).

Her thoughts illustrate how, for some residents, an explicit connection between the construction of the freeway and the construction of the CMF railyard exists; whether from the past or operating in the present, urban processes continue to materially and spatially burden certain communities. This sentiment was echoed by another longtime resident who also compared the specific place that is Frogtown—with its history of marginalization and particularly raced and classed population—to another neighborhood in order to underscore the significant role of place in the production of uneven environmental conditions:

> Why does the Metrolink Yard exist for the number of years that it has existed...? Because the communities have been dormant, they have been inactive, unengaged, uninformed. And [the agencies] know this. The developers know this. They're not building a Metrolink in the Palisades. Building in Elysian Valley and Cypress Park, where again, the general population is too preoccupied with basic survival (Interview #17, 2013).

Whether it is Pasadena or the Palisades—both home to whiter, wealthier communities—the comparison between these neighborhoods serves to starkly contrast Frogtown with a place characterized by the *absence* of Metrolink, the freeway, among other things. This linkage between past and present environmental injustices and the particularities of place was recognized and acknowledged by relatively new residents as well. According to one recent homeowner, the reasons for why the neighborhood was targeted for an environmentally harmful facility were "obvious" and "blatant":

> Once you live in the area and see that most people are first and second generation immigrants that have a little more difficulty with the language… That's why [the railyard] was put here. It was a way to put that there and get away with it for as long as they have. That they've taken advantage of people who have a harder time defending themselves…that's *definitely* the case here. …There was no regard to the neighborhood (Interview #27, 2013). [202]

The observation that many of his neighbors—nonwhite, immigrant, linguistically constrained, and lacking the social capital to mobilize political resistance—explains how the CMF could, for so long, intrude upon their everyday lives with air and noise pollution. Disregard for the community remains a permanent fixture in the forming and re-forming of place. Examined through the lens of place formation and identity, the Metrolink CMF, to residents, represents anything but an anomalous or accidental incident of politically neutral urban environmental planning.

The fight against the Metrolink CMF, then, demonstrates how Elysian Valley's politics of environmental justice is interwoven with a highly contentious politics of place. Throughout the conflict, residents and stakeholders drew from and strategically invoked past incidents to contend that a clear pattern of disregard and disrespect has historically been imposed upon the community, that these projects intentionally targeted politically and culturally disempowered neighborhoods, and that residents are already burdened by cumulative health impacts from other sources of environmental pollution. Place as territory, as material manifestation of historical narrative, and as spatial basis of social identity integrally informs the specific ways in which Frogtown's community makes sense of and resists neighborhood environmental injustice.

[202] This assessment of the political status of the community was confirmed by one of the first residents to notice the pollution from the CMF. He explained to me that many in the neighborhood were economically disadvantaged "minorities" with poor English skills. Therefore, they were "not sophisticated" enough to launch formal opposition efforts, and were too busy dealing with everyday "life" to give too much thought to operations at the Metrolink facility (Interview #71, 2013).

Through personal storytelling, political activism, and discursive positioning, members of the community reveal the bitter and brutal politics entangled in the formation of their place in order to expose the unequal power relations and exclusionary planning practices that they believe have long dictated the production of their everyday environments. By uncovering the highly politicized processes that go into shaping their neighborhood—and highlighting the gross spatial injustices that resulted from them—community activists demand greater inclusion in determining how those processes should proceed. In other words, residents' endurance of misrecognition, the "cultural and institutional processes of disrespect, denigration, insult and stigmatization, which devalue some people in comparison to others" and is "entwined with and realised through the misrecognition of places", justifies their right to participatory access (Walker 2009a, 626).

Ultimately what community members in Frogtown want and demand is a form of environmental justice that extends beyond the equitable distribution of environmental burdens and goods, to also encompass greater participatory access to decision-making, based on the recognition that underlying political-economic processes produce places inflicted with multiple forms of denigration (Fraser 1998; Schlosberg 2004). This multidimensional, pluralistic framework of environmental justice is one that recognizes that "to only be concerned with justice as distribution, to be locked into a Rawlsian framework of need, desert and entitlement, is insufficient—both theoretically and for capturing the nature of justice as practiced and argued over in everyday public life" (Walker 2009a, 625). For those in Elysian Valley who demand that powerful actors acknowledge the legacies of dispossession, disrespect, and exclusion in the socio-spatial formation of their neighborhood, and extend participatory opportunities to address—as well as to avoid repeating—those legacies, the politics of producing an environmentally just place involve much more than figuring out what gets placed where. It involves a politics of place that combines identity, territory, and recognition of lived experience.

Demanding and striving for environmentally just conditions which include recognition and participation, on top of equitable distribution, is crucial for residents of Elysian Valley for several reasons. First, it puts into practice a community-based politics of spatial justice which is keenly aware of the fact that distribution, recognition, and participation do not operate separately, but that "place stigmatisation and misrecognition…*also underlie the processes* through which certain places get to be chosen for development in the first place" (Walker 2009a, 626, emphasis added). As the most insightful examinations of environmental injustice elucidate, the unequal distributions of environmentally harmful and beneficial land uses throughout the urban terrain come about through uneven political, economic, and spatial processes which disproportionately disadvantage those who are poorer, nonwhite, and marginalized—essentially those who are repeatedly misrecognized (Hurley 1995; Pulido 2000; Sze 2007).

Second, understanding environmental justice as a set of socio-spatial conditions and relations encompassing more than distribution allows for certain environmental resources to even be considered injustices. This includes urban greenspace and other environmental amenities that are predominantly and uncritically categorized as benefits. Utilizing a more complex, dialectical framework of environmental justice that accounts for multiple scales, spatial forms, and social relations reveals how "different socio-ecological circumstances" require "quite different approaches to the question of what is or is not just" (Harvey 1996, 6). Within this framework, which considers the particular socio-ecological circumstances of Elysian Valley, the urban greening slated for the neighborhood through the restoration of the Los Angeles River cannot be solely examined through the lens of distribution; doing so runs the risk of obscuring the injustice of environmental gentrification with a simplistic presentation of an urban community benefiting

from the creation of environmental amenities. Instead, framing environmental gentrification as an environmental injustice "highlights the contradictions that emerge between an ecological rationality and its associated environmental ethics, and the production of injustices for politically and economically vulnerable people", thereby re-politicizing the reconfiguration of urban spaces implemented through hegemonic sustainability discourses (Dooling 2009, 630). Indeed, confronted with the double burden of environmental pollution and environmental gentrification, the Frogtown community faces the challenge of determining—and struggling for—what environmental conditions are or are not just.

POLITICIZING A PLACE-BASED IDENTITY TO RESIST THE INJUSTICES OF GREEN GENTRIFICATION

The politics of environmental justice in Elysian Valley reveal the complex entanglements of environmental pollution, ecological gentrification, and identity formation present in this place. The conflict over Metrolink CMF and the current plans for river restoration reveal the complicated relationship between Elysian Valley's environmental justice struggles and the Los Angeles River. While the status of the river as a major urban sustainability agenda intensifies the likelihood of environmental gentrification for riverside neighborhoods, the heightened political and cultural significance and visibility of the river allows the community members to draw attention to the problem of railyard pollution. As Chapter Five illustrates, activist groups strategically utilize the symbolic significance, political support and investment, and diverse coalition of socially- and environmentally-conscientious organizations associated with the L.A. River in order to advocate for environmental justice in their own communities. This has been the case for community activism in Elysian Valley as well. By 2011, when community resistance to the Metrolink CMF resurfaced, numerous revitalization plans had been completed, millions of dollars had been invested in enhancement projects, and various elected officials at city, county, state, and federal levels professed commitment to reviving and restoring L.A.'s waterways. Residents and stakeholders took advantage of this political and cultural shift, drawing attention to the environmental conditions of their neighborhood by appealing to politicians' purported support of healthier river communities as well as forming strong partnerships with pro-river environmental organizations.[203] One resident who led much of the community mobilization around the CMF acknowledged the role of the river, observing that:

> Things have changed so much more… […] I got involved with the Metrolink around the same time as this bike path got put in here. And after that there were regulations around the river, in 2010. I think my argument for having [Metrolink] change, certainly, the timing was great. *Let's say I did this 9 years ago, I wouldn't have gotten the attention. There was a lot to do with timing on this thing, for sure* (Interview #27, 2013, emphasis added).

[203] For example, during a January 5, 2012 roundtable between community stakeholders and the Air Quality Management District (AQMD), community leaders from Elysian Valley and Cypress Park were joined by representatives from not only several environmental justice groups, but also river-advocacy organizations (such as FOLAR, The River Project, and Urban Semillas) as well as city agencies working on river-related projects. Additionally, the website for the Northeast Los Angeles Residents for Clean Air Coalition also states that: "The quality of life is being negatively impacted for these neighborhoods, especially for the children and our elderly residents as well as for thousands of California residents who use the new Los Angeles River Bike Path. Also in danger are the children at The Rio de Los Angeles State Park and the new Sonia Sotomayor Learning Academies public high school."

Because restoring the ecological conditions of the river is discursively and managerially linked with promoting the health and sustainability of riverside communities, its status as an urban sustainability agenda assists in promoting environmentally just conditions in these communities' neighborhoods.

However, as latest developments in Elysian Valley indicate, the restoration of the Los Angeles River also threatens to catalyze gentrification in the neighborhood, particularly as it is designed and implemented within the political-economic logic of capitalist urban growth. As Gould and Lewis (2012) argue, rather than unequivocally benefit a neighborhood:

> due to the operation of markets and actors that form the urban growth machine…the creation or restoration of an *in situ* environmental good will increase environmental inequality […]. Therefore, without clearly focused public policy intervention, in situ environmental improvements will tend to increase race and class inequality, and decrease environmental justice, a process we refer to as 'green gentrification' (114).

Because of the race- and class-based inequality it reinforces, green gentrification is a form of environmental justice; it is also perhaps all the more insidious due to its appearance of improving urban neighborhoods through the creation of greenspace and other environmental amenities. Moreover, the depoliticization of discourses around gentrification and urban sustainability obscures or renders invisible the unequal power relations embedded in the processes of producing specific urban environments (Slater 2006; Swyngedouw 2009). Struggles for environmental justice must challenge this "mode of 'post-political' governance that shuns politics and de-links sustainability from justice" as well as "disables meaningful resistance" (Checker 2011, 212). For the Frogtown community, the act of place-making and identity formation helps reinsert the political into the environmental reshaping of their lived spaces. Given the history of the neighborhood—the channelization of the L.A. River, the clearance of Chavez Ravine, the construction of Interstate 5, the decades of infrastructural neglect and exclusionary planning—the identity of its residents is built upon the highly politicized narratives and framings of place. By emphasizing the unjust spatial outcomes of powerful political and economic forces that shaped their neighborhood, the residents of Frogtown, engage in acts of place-making that re-politicize their spaces of everyday life, and can challenge the post-political condition of environmental gentrification.

At the center of Frogtown's resistance to environmental gentrification is the community's demand for greater inclusion in planning and decision-making processes in order to be able to actively participate in the shaping of their environment. Residents are apprehensive of the changes that restoration is guaranteed to usher in, while still recognizing the potential benefits contained in those changes. For many, ultimately, their concern with the L.A. River lies in whether they will have control over *how* restoration will impact their lives and lived spaces. As one resident told me:

> [The river] comes with a lot of pros and it comes with a lot of cons. …There is no stopping it. […]Now you have so many outside groups converging on this community, and how do you…*ensure that the principle stakeholders are not trampled on and that they remain engaged and remain a part of the decision-making of what goes in and what goes out*? (Interview #17, 2013, emphasis added).

His statements reflect the community's concern for procedural justice, a concern that is inextricably linked to place and identity formation. Having lived through incidents of spatial injustice and repeatedly exposed to patterns of exclusionary planning, residents' embodied

experience and shared memories of place inform and legitimate their demands for increased participation.

The community's concern has resulted in action that directly responds to the development pressures along the L.A. River. The official neighborhood council—Elysian Valley Riverside Neighborhood Council (EVRNC)— has in recent years intensified their role in overseeing neighborhood affairs, liaising between the community and state offices, and facilitating outreach and interaction among diverse residents. Composed of an eclectic mix of residents and stakeholders, both old and relatively new, the EVRNC in 2012 formed their Environment and Land Use Committee, a group dedicated to monitoring and becoming involved in neighborhood land use changes. Along with investigations into environmental nuisances, this committee closely tracks new development projects slated for various riverfront properties. The EVRNC also formed an Ad Hoc Displacement Committee in 2015, largely in response to the growing concerns that river restoration could possibly displace low-income residents and renters. Despite performing varied tasks, the council's central objective is greater participation in the environmental planning of the neighborhood. The committee and councilmembers work towards fostering strong relationships with elected officials, public agencies, and other planning entities in order to cultivate a well-informed, policy-literate neighborhood constituency, and to acquire increased access to decision-making procedures. During meetings and workshops, residents repeatedly emphasized the critical need to be informed and included by agencies, given the neighborhood's history of enduring decades of disrespect and disregard by agencies.

Two recent actions carried out by the EVRNC most clearly exemplify the community's attempts to challenge the onslaught of redevelopment slated for riverfront properties. In 2014, the neighborhood council proposed to modify zoning regulations in order to stymie rampant riverfront development. In partnership with their district councilmember, the EVRNC hopes to pass an ordinance that would tighten building/design restrictions (known as "Q Conditions") in certain industrially-zoned lands adjacent to the L.A. River. Specifically, existing Q Conditions would be updated to reduce the maximum permissible building height, require new buildings to occupy no more than 50% of the lot area, reduce the amount of standard residential development, and reduce building density by lowering the floor-area-ratio (City of LA DCP August 2015).

In addition to the Q Condition ordinance proposal, the neighborhood council, with support from many residents and stakeholders, opposed the latest proposal of the Bimbo Bakery redevelopment project. In a May 2015 letter of recommendation to the city planning department, the EVRNC issued a formal statement against moving forward with the project review process. In the letter, the neighborhood council identified that though the developer had been in communication with the Environment and Land Use Committee, "there has not been satisfying evidence that [community benefit measures] are secured for the community in the long term, in good faith or explicitly spelled out" (EVRNC 2015). Moreover, the council declares that the decision to oppose the Bimbo redevelopment proposal was largely based on the strong reservations voiced by the community, stating that:

> [C]ommunity members at neighborhood council meetings, community members engaged in EVRNC door to door outreach efforts and community members walking along the river and streets of Elysian Valley Riverside have expressed deep concern regarding the influx of development in the neighborhood and their place in it (EVRNC 2015).

These deep concerns involve the belief among community members that incoming large-scale redevelopment projects along the river are not "conscientious and sustainable" nor do they look to be "built with community and public good in mind". As a result, the EVRNC's opposition of

the project included a request for a stay of the review process, in order to allow for the community to become better informed of the plans and have adequate time to provide input.

Aside from the attempts to gain greater access to planning and decision-making processes, select community members engage in a politics of place by issuing reminders of the neighborhood's fraught spatial history in public discussions on urban development along riverside land. Narratives of spatial injustices that are foundational to the construction of place and place-based identity are strategically utilized to legitimize residents' fears of displacement and justify their demand for minimal riverfront development. In recent news articles examining the rising land values and development pressures along the L.A. River, Elysian Valley residents refer to freeway construction and Chavez Ravine as reasons for their community's fear of displacement; one interviewed resident declares that with restoration projects, "people who live here won't be able to afford it anymore" which is "particularly sad considering so many of the people here are the ghosts of Chavez Ravine" (Sagahun and Saillant 2014; also Simpson 2014).

Similar statements are shared in meetings and events. In 2014, two stakeholders commissioned a neighborhood design firm (LA Más) to gather information on present and future issues related to river restoration and land development in Elysian Valley. Through data collected from a series of public meetings, interviews, and community workshops, LA Más produced a report (*Futuro de Frogtown*) documenting residents' major concerns and presenting recommendations on how future planning in Frogtown could ameliorate those concerns. The report found that among many longtime and lower-income residents, there was genuine fear of displacement due to gentrification. In meetings among community members and conversations with planning department representatives, these residents invoked the painful, politicized place history of Elysian Valley, fraught with incidents of spatial injustice, in arguments against gentrification and market-based riverside development. In particular:

> Long time residents expressed concerns about yet another predominantly low-income Latino neighborhood being neglected... Those who had moved to Elysian Valley after the tragic events of Chavez Ravine, when families were displaced by eminent domain in the 1950's…especially felt the sentiment. *The events of Chavez Ravine serve as a reason as to why developers should not be allowed to shape their neighborhood*. … Many residents believe the process of constructing new housing stock in the neighborhood could lead to displacement similar to that of Chavez Ravine (Leung and Lamadrid 2014, 27, emphasis added).

Fearful of displacement and distrustful of government agencies, these residents rally behind the place-based identity of being a community long experienced with forcible removal, government disregard, and unjust development practices. In doing so, they reinsert the highly fraught politics of place formation into dialogues around urban greening and disrupt the naturalizing and neutralizing discourses embedded in environmental gentrification. Re-politicizing place is crucial; it challenges the hegemonic discourses of urban sustainability and positions green gentrification as an environmental injustice.

Recently, efforts to use 'smart growth' as a strategic urban planning tool to counter the glut of large-scale development complexes that could potentially crop up alongside the river have brought subsets of the community together around a common cause (Jao 2014c; Lubell 2014). Undoubtedly, the mobilization of residents to conduct workshops, gather data, and propose new land use regulations shows the community's attempts to exert more control over how the neighborhood will be shaped by restoration of the L.A. River. However, I argue that there is a danger in reducing the problem of environmental gentrification into the single issue of resisting neighborhood densification; already much of the discussion around real estate

speculation, neighborhood change, and increasing land values emerging since the publication of the Army Corps' ARBOR study conflate gentrification and densification. Conflating these two related yet distinct aspects of urbanization—one a *process* and another a specific *form*—places an overemphasis on the matter of neighborhood 'character' and aesthetics at the cost of concealing the urgency of displacement. For example, a neighborhood design firm, RAC Build, is pushing a smart growth initiative that would reduce maximum density allowances of buildings along the river; the firm decries development proposals that look like "a Century City superimposed on the river" (Sagahun and Saillant 2014), prompting one journalist to conclude that it "seems concerned primarily with aesthetics" (Strauss 2015).[204]

Moreover, reducing gentrification down to the issue of densification sets up a problematic dichotomy between density and affordable housing, as one of the ways developers can receive additional density allowances is through the apportioning of a percentage of units as affordable housing, according to the California State Density Bonus Law. Residents are presented with an either/or choice between denser construction and more available affordable units; during the *Futuro de Frogtown* workshops:

> residents largely preferred to attempt to keep the neighborhood as is rather than advocating denser, affordable developments. The top, articulated priority was *preserving the physical appearance of the neighborhood*—seemingly, at any cost (Strauss 2015, emphasis added).

Though the either/or scenario presented to residents restricts the conversation around ways to address neighborhood gentrification, that workshop participants favored the preservation of low-density character over affordable units starkly illustrates the limitations of reducing gentrification as solely a matter of density.

Instead, the focus of environmental gentrification in Elysian Valley must remain on impacts to the most vulnerable members of the community. This will require greater cooperation between newer and older residents, as "new spaces of politics for sustainability" can emerge around "new strategic territorial and class alliances and divisions" (Curran and Hamilton 2012, 1028). Newer residents, those perceived as 'gentrifiers', need to ally themselves with their working-class neighbors. The neighborhood's struggle against the Metrolink CMF offers valuable lessons on engaging in effective activism, including the necessity of alliances between older and newer residents, and countering assumptions that urban policies are politically neutral. Mobilization was successful partly due to the combined capabilities of older residents, who embodied the experience and knowledge of living with pollution, and newer residents, who possessed the higher social capital, access to resources, and English language skills to bring political attention to the problem (Jao 2013). Mobilizing these same alliances between working- and middle-class residents, between oldtimers and newcomers, will build "a newly organized constituency…now more rooted in environmental justice" that can practice a placed-based politics that resists "the model of a green city" that "quite literally 'naturalises' the disappearance of working-class communities" (Curran and Hamilton 2012, 1032, 1028).

[204] While there is expressed concern of displacement along the river, it is, again, framed in relation to neighborhood character, architectural forms, and the needs of artists. According to one artist: "It's a reality that the warehouses these [neighborhood] artists call home may not be here next year. They'll be priced out. Buildings would be bought, torn down, and condos or apartments built in its place. I really doubt there will be room for artists to live and work. […] These buildings are part of the character of Frogtown. It's why we throw artwalks. It's a scary proposition to think it could become history within a year" (Jao 2014a).

CONCLUSION: CAN FROGTOWN BE "JUST GREEN ENOUGH" AMIDST THE GREENING OF THE RIVER?

The case of Elysian Valley illustrates how environmental injustice re-orders the material-cultural landscape of one neighborhood, and how place complicates the formation of a postpolitical city. I show how residents form and utilize a place-based identity that highlights the environmental and spatial injustices held in collective memory, and further helps to re-politicize their lived environments so that they remain "just green enough" (Curran and Hamilton 2012). Through collective action, residents of Frogtown carry out a just green enough strategy that involves fighting air pollution and demanding cleaner industrial land uses while still resisting rampant redevelopment carried out in the name of sustainability. For those who live and work in Elysian Valley, just green enough does not necessarily refer to the actual greening of their place, as residents have long appreciated, used, and formed attachments to the Los Angeles River and express desires for it to become ecologically healthy once more. To them, a just green enough strategy involves receiving more information, being included in planning processes, and finding the means to exert control over the environmental conditions they live, work, and play in. The formation of a community identity that is informed by, among other things, place-based histories of injustice and exclusion can strategically challenge the depoliticized discourse of urban sustainability and green gentrification. As there is still uncertainty in how the neighborhood will proceed with pressures brought about by the L.A. River, challenging depoliticization is vital. More work is needed toward building alliances between newer, middle-class professionals and older, working-class families, and expanding community resistance to gentrification by demands for more affordable housing. All members of the Frogtown community must embrace a strategy of just green enough that entails challenging what appears to become yet another moment of spatial injustice—this time in the form of environmental gentrification—from occupying a place in their neighborhood history. While no longer derided as "Dogtown", the neighborhood now faces new challenges with the reclaimed title of "Frogtown" *(Figure 6.4).*

Figure 6.4. A mural of frogs painted along the Los Angeles River in Frogtown. (Source: Photo taken by author.)

CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSION: FLOWING TOWARDS JUST SUSTAINABILITY IN LOS ANGELES

"SOMETHING TO SEE" IN LOS ANGELES: WHERE IS THE RIVER HEADED NOW?

In the 2011 film *Drive*, the protagonist, a sad-eyed loner, asks his love interest and her young son if they "want to see something?" The next scene cuts to a languid, lingering shot of the three characters driving happily along the concrete bed of the Los Angeles River, bathed in the golden glow of late afternoon sunlight. Eventually, they reach a lushly vegetated portion of the river, whereupon they spend an enjoyable hour or so skipping stones, digging up artifacts, and reclining against trees growing along the banks of flowing water. The carefree serenity of this scene is amplified by the soothing, even dreamy synth-pop melody of the soundtrack song playing in the foreground. What is striking about this scene is not the use of the recognizable trope of the nuclear family unit recreating amidst natural beauty, but that the L.A. River provided the setting for this picturesque portrayal of familial bonding. The river, long portrayed in Hollywood films and television shows as a dystopic place, a dirty and derelict site where corpses were discovered and mutated monsters emerged to terrorize the city, was now being portrayed as a literal urban oasis. For our beleaguered characters, the riverbanks and waters serve as a getaway locale, where they can, for a short time, escape both the drudgery of the city and the dangers posed by its inhabitants. Watching a young boy frolic in the shade of green foliage, picking up crawfish claws, it is difficult to believe this is the same river that was the site of an infamous car chase in *Terminator II*. However, given the prominence of the Los Angeles River within L.A.'s recent environmental initiatives and sustainability plans, it should not be surprising that the river's pop culture portrayals are beginning to transform toward favorable depictions as well. No longer the butt of environmental jokes or a perpetual potential-freeway, the L.A. River, as depicted in *Drive*, is re-presented as a place for recreation and site of natural beauty.

Indeed, at the time of finishing this dissertation, there appears to be a never-ending parade of new headlines regarding the Los Angeles River. The river, it appears, has never enjoyed so much attention and activity. The long awaited Los Angeles State Historic Park, once known as the Chinatown Cornfield, finally held its formal grand opening. Other parks along the Pacoima and Tujunga Wash, little more than renderings on published reports or construction sites full of mounds of excavated soil at the time of fieldwork, are now available and open for public enjoyment. The design plans of Frank Gehry continue to advance toward material actualization, while other artistic creations around the river gain publicity and acclaim. The Frog Spot, a riverside public gathering space managed by FoLAR, is a popular venue for scheduled events such as morning yoga classes, weekend music concerts, and food and art festivals. In terms of policy, several California state bills have recently passed, all of which are intended to facilitate the restoration of the river: Assembly Bill 466 will create an Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Working Group dedicated to creating a master plan for the upper watershed area; Assembly Bill 530—which is proposed by the Assembly Speaker—will create a similar working group and revitalization master plan for the Lower Los Angeles River; and finally, another bill would allow the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works to embark upon a twenty-year review and update of the 1996 Los Angeles River Master Plan (FoLAR 2017). At the federal level, two Congressional representatives from Southern California have proposed the Rim of the Valley Act, which would bring much of the Los Angeles River—along with other swathes of open land in L.A.—into the National Parks System for greater federal protection and recognition (Chiland 2017). Beyond the rehabilitated image popularized by Hollywood films, the river stands

to undergo ecological improvements and aesthetic enhancements that will cement its status as a symbol of a sustainable Los Angeles.

However, as exciting new projects continue to develop along the Los Angeles River, it becomes all the more crucial that these developments can and will contribute to the remaking of L.A. as a more just, equitable, and livable city for all. Superfund sites still dot the upper watershed, particularly in lower-income areas of the San Fernando Valley, such as Pacoima and Sun Valley. Continued urbanization of the L.A. basin place stressors along the existing LACDA system, eroding flood capacity and threatening the lower L.A. River communities with intensified inundations, all of which ultimately curtail restoration possibilities. The looming possibility of environmental gentrification in greened, cleaned areas throughout the watershed necessitates serious policy interventions by local (and state, federal) governments, if displacement of lower-income and economically vulnerable communities are to be avoided. And polluted neighborhoods along the river, whether in the upper San Fernando Valley, downstream southeast Los Angeles County, or the harbor areas at the river's mouth, still exist in a state of environmental degradation and political disempowerment. Programs to clean up, restore, and revitalize the L.A. River, if properly expanded to include these neighborhoods, could mean that the river serves as a catalyst for environmental remediation and urban improvement in these much needed areas. As the head of the River Revitalization Corporation often stated, the L.A. River, like the region's celebrated beaches and mountains, could become a destination spot for both Angelenos and visitors alike. With the proper improvements and investments, the river could, as it did for the characters of *Drive*, serve as an oasis, a ribbon of reclaimed nature—a place "to see something". It is critical, then, that this sought after destination remains open, accessible to all, and a means of furthering just sustainability for the city (Agyeman et. al. 2003).

At its core, this dissertation investigates just how much the river can further—and is furthering—a just and sustainable Los Angeles. It approaches the re-imagined and re-claimed Los Angeles River as a potential vehicle for advancing a myth and practice of urban sustainability that is committed to upholding and promoting urban environmental justice. Each of the chapters focus on an aspect of the restoration/sustainable management of the L.A. River watershed in order to investigate the discursive, symbolic, and programmatic linkages between an urban sustainable development agenda and locally based environmental justice efforts. Through these analyses, I present the history of the transformations of the Los Angeles River watershed, first from a free-flowing, flood-prone stream into a mammoth flood control system, and then later, from forgotten infrastructure to a fiercely protected symbol of a greener L.A. Tracing through these histories and unpacking the conjunctural moments that defined them, I demonstrate how hegemonic logics of urban development channelized the river and how, years later, grassroots activists challenged the ideologies and outcomes of those dominant logics. As such, activism beget advocacy organizations like Friends of the Los Angeles River and the Council for Watershed Health, resisted technocratic water resource regimes (i.e. the concrete expansion of the LACDA system, the overreliance on imported water supply), and promulgated counter-hegemonic narratives of urban waterways to re-define the river and re-claim the public's access to it.

Moreover, the histories and case studies I discuss in the chapters demonstrate the changing role of the local state in relation to river restoration, watershed protection, and urban sustainability. Once an avid champion of channelizing the river, the county and city of Los Angeles readjusted their positions with regard to the local waterways, as they faced the growing reach of environmental regulations, new scientific paradigms of water management, and the

economic restructuring of their industrial districts. Now, the local state, in particular the city of Los Angeles extol the benefits of restoring streams and revitalizing riverfronts, matching their rhetoric with the dedication of public funds and department manpower towards sustainable watershed management. Having repositioned itself as the central player in the political-cultural arena of environmental restoration, the city is poised to determine the direction it takes. The local state is, now, committed to excavating the Los Angeles River and demonstrates that commitment through incorporation of socio-ecological improvement as part of its sustainability portfolios, such as Green LA 2007 and pLAn 2015. According to the city's calculus, in addition to increasing local water supply, improving water quality, creating ecological habitat, and ensuring better flood protection, restoring the river also potentially serves as a vehicle for regeneration/redevelopment of postindustrial waterfronts and neighborhoods in the urban core (Keil and Desfor 2003, 2004). Encouraging and investing in the creation of parks, bikeways, transit infrastructure, and mixed-use development not only allows the city to comply with environmental regulations and mollify environmental (justice) activists, but also facilitates the transition of riverfront land use that is more favorable to tourism, commercial development, and accommodating a middle-class service sector workforce. A sustainable river, based on the city's assessment, brings benefits to all.

By presenting the story of the river's transformation, as well as that of the local environmental movement that arose to campaign for its resurrection, I also show how environmental justice principles, efforts, and advocates became incorporated into the assemblage of projects, policies, and programs that constitute the urban sustainability agenda of the L.A. River watershed. Examining the environmental activism of the river movement's central actors reveals their ongoing struggles to re-script the river as public space, a valuable natural resource, and a public good. By doing so, the movement sought to re-establish and expand public access to the river; while it was important to engage in projects that would clean up its waters, restore its habitats, and green its banks, restoring the river also came to mean providing available recreational space to any and all communities. These ideas of public space, access, and recreation—*the right to the river*, according to Gottlieb (2007)—articulated with local environmental justice efforts focused on tackling the inequitable distribution of greenspace and parkspace throughout the county. Activist agendas that pushed for opening the river to the public, and increasing public space for disproportionately burdened communities found common ground in advocating for restoration of a promising recreational and ecological corridor that ran through some of the most impacted urban neighborhoods.

The chapters then move into providing in-depth case studies that illustrate the way that river restoration articulated with environmental justice, in places like Pacoima and Elysian Valley, and with coalitions like the Chinatown Yard Alliance and the *Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio*. These case studies explore the racialized, spatialized environmental politics and outcomes of these intersecting agendas. Throughout several chapters, I clearly demonstrate both the political leverage provided by invoking/interacting with L.A. River sustainability initiatives, as well as the limitations of a deeper, more substantive engagement between restoration of the river and advancing the interests and efforts of environmental justice in Los Angeles. I argue that policies and practices to address injustice—through the creation of urban parks, greening and cleaning up of neighborhoods, providing space for inclusion into environmental policymaking—stem from a conceptualization and practical handling of environmental justice as primarily a matter of distribution. Inequitable distributions of specific land uses or facilities become reduced down to discrete problems or standalone issues that require a straightforward solution, rather than delving

into the multiple (and oftentimes entangled) causes and underlying structural forces that contribute to those inequitable urban conditions. For communities battling the severe *and* the mundane environmental injustices of their everyday landscapes, justice is conceived and understood as more than matters of distribution; oftentimes, it requires acknowledging and addressing the racist/racialized spatial patterns in Los Angeles that result in the unjust urban environmental conditions which residents struggle against. This recognition, of the historical and structural forces which devalue certain cultural groups and stigmatize the places they live, work, and play in, is necessary toward expanding substantive participation in decision-making processes that can hopefully combat the reproduction of injustices. Without engaging in the challenging work of approaching justice in a multivalent way, the projects that unfold along the L.A. River—such as creating parkspace—could reproduce unjust spatial relations by catalyzing environmental/ecological gentrification or excluding communities from procedural spaces.

Tracing the rise of the river movement reveals how early activists challenged the dominant water-land management regime in Los Angeles County by promoting radical ideas of what livable, healthy cities could and should be. Given what these activists were fighting for, it is, perhaps, not surprising that their movement intersected eventually with environmental justice objectives and ideas. However, I argue that the current river agenda, with its formalization through state involvement and reliance on market-based approaches to urban spatial reconfiguration, handles environmental justice in a depoliticized and simplistic way, which constrains the possibility for realizing the radical ideas of the sustainability city. While the symbolic and material contributions of the river restoration movement toward increasing urban park distributions, protecting neighborhoods from undesirable land development projects, and reigniting concern for urban wildlife habitats are significant, the failure to fully recognize culturally oppressed and procedurally excluded communities runs the risk of downplaying the politically-charged agendas of local organizations that could benefit from associating themselves with restoration activism. It also renders the environmental justice advocated by river restoration agendas as an anemic and ultimately ineffective add-on to the ecological and economic objectives identified under the mantle of river revitalization. The Los Angeles River may ultimately become an exciting destination and "something to see", but it could become exciting and accessible only for a select, privileged subset of the city population.

EXPANDING THE COALITION: NEW ALLIANCES, PARTICIPANTS, AND PLACES

How can the restored Los Angeles River be for everyone? How can the transformation of this urban nature promote just sustainability in an unjust Los Angeles? Based on the case studies presented in this dissertation, one way to work towards a just and sustainable river is to expand the restoration agenda to include new participants and better include existing ones. Some of the river movement's most significant victories resulted from successful coalition building between existing organizations and new allies, especially those that work on different issues and with different communities. For example, the coalition of actors formed in resistance to the Los Angeles County Drainage Area expansion project in the early-1990s included artists, planners, and architects in addition to traditional environmentalists. The urban park victories at the Chinatown Cornfield and Taylor Yards came about through the alliance between river/environmental organizations and social justice/community-based groups. Even the smaller success of a health impact study commissioned for Elysian Valley residents against the Metrolink Central Maintenance Facility resulted from the combined efforts of residents (old and

new), community groups, and environmental organizations. In each of these cases, as well as the smaller or ongoing ones discussed in this dissertation, the formation of partnerships among actors brought about the inclusion of new participants within the sphere of political engagement toward environmental change.

As a central tenet of environmental justice, participation and procedural justice are critical to the process of achieving more equitable environmental conditions among differently raced, classed, gendered communities. Enabling communities to participate—to substantively access and engage in spaces where environmental decision-making take place—is crucial to ensuring that they ultimately have power over how their everyday places are shaped, altered, and claimed as their own. If we understand environmental justice not only as a concrete *thing* that can be achieved, a state of distributional equality, but more as an *ongoing process* whereby communities determine the kind of environments they live and thrive in, then continued and meaningful participation is the key by which this process remains just (Boone 2008; Foster 1993). Forming a stakeholder committee that includes local residents, or having a plan be reviewed by a special panel of community representatives are steps that ensure inclusivity and participation among impacted members of society. However, these steps must be ongoing, repeated throughout the course of a project's timeline, and built into the planning process itself, if they are to allow continued participation that is actual procedural justice.

Relatedly, reaching out to diverse communities in order to ensure their participation and build stronger political alliances may require shifting how environmental and environmental justice issues are framed and problematized. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, substantive engagement between environmental and justice-based organizations is partly constrained by how these two broader agendas are defined, framed, and politically practiced. Although social and economic concerns such as neighborhood health/security, mixed-use development, and access to transportation are nestled in the wider goals of urban sustainability through river improvement, the ongoing efforts around the L.A. River are still predominantly framed and understood as environmental ones. How issues are framed is crucial in forming justice claims, as the drawing of boundaries around a particular problem determines who possesses standing in the arena of political representation and procedural negotiation (Fraser 2010; Kurtz 2003; Taylor 2000; Whitehead 2009). Social movement activists make arguments for "their preferred frames of meaning" which delineate "what is wrong with the world and advocating change" that lie within those sets of meanings (Walker 2012, 4). Moreover, "frame-setting is among the most consequential of political decisions", as is the case when "questions of justice are framed in a way that wrongly excludes some from consideration, the consequence is a special kind of meta-injustice" (Fraser 2010, 19).[205] The prevailing idea that the L.A. River interests are firmly positioned in an environmentalist ethic and agenda preclude a deeper, more substantive, and critical engagement between social justice advocates and watershed-oriented environmentalists; this engagement is needed in order to fully address the multifaceted problems inherent in the (re)production of urban environmental injustice.

There are promising signs that those working within the broad umbrella of sustainable watershed management of the Los Angeles River value the importance of sustained community participation. A former member of the *Alianza de los Pueblos del Rio* remarked on the need for continued engagement of impacted communities as restoration projects move and there is more

[205] Though Fraser discusses this "misframing" within the context of injustice claims in a post-Keynesian globalized world order, her argument that framing issues in particular ways sets up boundaries that include and exclude those who can be politically represented nevertheless applies to the case of environmental politics in L.A.

material change observed along the river. Describing the lessons that could be extrapolated from the work of the Alianza during the creation of the city's river master plan, he explained that: "If we engage in community-based participatory research and advocacy, it makes all the difference in the world. Because in a democratic society, government is supposed to respond to the needs of the people, as defined by the people…" (Interview #60, 2012). Part of that effort to engage communities is to frame environmental issues/problems in ways that are salient to the experiences and everyday lives of diverse groups and stakeholders.

This form of advocacy, of expanding participatory opportunities and spaces, is put into practice by the former Alianza organizations, which have sought to remain included in the processes of river restoration. Long after the finalization of the L.A. River Revitalization Master Plan, and though no longer part of a wider coalition of organizations able to meet on a regular basis, all of the organizations find ways to stay involved in what occurs around the river. The City Project continues to advocate for urban greenspace, both along and beyond the L.A. River, while the Anahuak Youth Soccer Association attends outreach meetings and workshops held on behalf of river projects, such as the NELA Riverfront Collaborative planning process. Mujeres de la Tierra has shifted much of its focus on empowering Latina women through professional development in sustainable, green employment sectors. Urban Semillas, another environmental justice and watershed advocacy organization associated with the Alianza, conducts environmental education programs for Latino youth in L.A. city as well as Compton. Meanwhile, William C. Velazquez Institute has developed several environmental projects as part of their roster of Latino-based advocacy, holding a series of public meetings called the Mountains to Sea Dialogue, as well as environmental stewardship events for Latino youth within L.A. County.[206] Much of the work carried out by these non-traditional environmental organizations intersects with non-traditional environmental issues, such as public health and safety, community and youth development, employment.

Despite these ongoing efforts, increasing participation among diverse groups in Los Angeles requires identifying the availability restrictions of groups, the modes by which they take in information, and diverse mechanisms for gathering honest feedback. Doing this well means acknowledging—and accommodating for—the specific needs, concerns, and histories of these groups, their relationships to government bodies, and the cultural ties they maintain with place. The case studies of the neighborhoods of Pacoima and Elysian Valley demonstrate why a one-size-fits-all approach to gathering community input or extending feedback opportunities does not ensure effective participation. For city representatives, environmental NGOs, consultants, and educators, all of whom are invested stakeholders in the L.A. River restoration agenda, reaching out to communities that live along the river, or who would be impacted by watershed improvement measures, must include this form of recognition. In order to facilitate and foster engagement with communities like those in Chinatown, Cypress Park, or Elysian Valley, there must be an understanding of the histories and politics of place, identity, and cultural differences that influence the ways issues are framed and engagement is perceived and performed.

[206] Expanding the opportunity for diverse communities to engage in environmental planning and policymaking is all the more needed in light of the willingness of many of these communities for improvement projects. Several key stakeholders discussed with me their experiences of encountering high receptiveness of watershed projects among communities of color in certain parts of the city. As one watershed advocate told me: "I think you see a lot more support in communities that are predominantly Hispanic and African American, and to a certain extent, Asian, than you would see in communities that are predominantly white. [In Council District 1] there is a lot of support. […] Someone who is living in East LA, they're seeing real benefits to these changes [in the river]. And then you've got the West Side, where…they're kind of on the other side, where they want the ocean to be beautiful and they don't want any jobs. They all have jobs, they don't need more jobs" (Interview #53, 2012).

The need for recognition of differences among diverse communities was acknowledged, again, by certain residents and NGO representatives I spoke with. Encouragingly, it was also identified as a foundation for participation by several city bureaucrats involved in environmental management/programs. One engineer, who works for the city's public works department, explicated the need for targeted—and ongoing—outreach to different communities:

> The community has to be taken into account for whatever outreach has to be done. In South L.A., they call it the landing spot of the immigrant from Central America, South America, Mexico. So education in that area…has to be continuous because that community shifts every five to ten years. L.A. is culturally very different, so education for places like South L.A. (which drains into the river and Compton Creek)…has to be a continuous process. *We cannot just do it for one year and stop. And it has to be targeted to what community is there.* What is working in West L.A. is definitely not going to work in South L.A. …Yes, we can revitalize the river but revitalization of the river cannot be the same *throughout* the river (Interview #4, 2013, emphasis added).

His observations, that what works in West L.A. is not what works in South L.A., are astute and aligned with what communities themselves have claimed to want/need from the city government. That local agencies working on river restoration have workers who understand the crucial need for recognition of cultural identity and place history, as well as place-sensitive participation, speaks to the city's commitment to equitable environmental planning.

Ensuring that various communities' needs and concerns are understood in order to more effectively enroll them as engaged participants involves a difficult, time- and resource-consuming process. Even for city workers who understand the value of community outreach and participation, budget shortages and an overload of duties may prevent them from doing the work needed to conduct outreach in this manner. Environmental non-profits may also face similar challenges of budget constraints and staff shortage. However, forming partnerships and collaborative working groups could be one mechanism by which to achieve greater inclusion of participants in environmental planning. These collaborations can improve public-private sector communication, facilitate the exchange of valuable information, and provide new opportunities for reaching new constituents. For example, the creation of the Cornfield Arroyo Seco Specific Plan (CASP), while primarily a city-led urban development project, involved extensive outreach and gathering of community input (City of LA DCP 2014). The CASP, which was ostensibly an L.A. River restoration project, was not presented to stakeholders only as an environmental project, but also framed as one concerned with transportation, housing, and innovative design/planning. Communities involved in the development of this plan came to understand it through the framework of affordable housing, sustainable Smart Growth, and transit-oriented planning due to the NGOs involved and the forms of outreach utilized. As new participants and issues come under the umbrella of restoring the river, the coalition can expand to further spatial justice.

A TALE OF TWO RIVERS: MAKING THE CASE FOR GREATER INCLUSION OF "THE LOWER 19"

What does expanding the umbrella of restoration look like? Perhaps the case of the lower Los Angeles River most clearly exemplifies the challenges and possibilities of expanding the coalition and moving towards just sustainability in L.A. Southeast Los Angeles County, also called the Gateway Cities, are composed of twenty-seven municipalities and nine unincorporated communities, many of which lie adjacent to the lower nineteen miles of the Los Angeles River. Often referred to as "the Lower 19", this downstream stretch of the river flows beyond of the city

of Los Angeles and, therefore, is excluded from many of the most important restoration plans, which tend to focus on the upper thirty-two miles. The need for environmental regulation and sustainability measures in the Gateway Cities is dire: not only are there heavily industrialized areas that produce harmful air and water emissions, but the area is also bisected by a major transportation corridor—made up of major freeways and roads—that connects the San Pedro Ports with the rest of the county. The emissions from industrialized districts and the freight routes (the I-710 Freeway and Alameda Corridor) contribute to urban environmental conditions that—despite some attempts at regulation—remain alarmingly detrimental to the health, safety, and general livability of residents (Pastor et. al. 2005; Pulido 2015; Valle and Torres 2000). Residents that live near the Los Angeles and Long Beach Ports, moreover, must deal with the air pollution that accompanies the freight activities of the eighth-largest port complex in the world (Fried-Cassorla 2012; Barboza 2015). On top of this, the southeast sections of Los Angeles County host some of the most densely urbanized neighborhoods, many of which, in addition, are predominantly inhabited by lower-income communities of color (*LA Times* Mapping LA 2000). It is through these neighborhoods that the lower nineteen miles of the Los Angeles River flow, before emptying out into the ocean at the Los Angeles harbor.

Due to both political and geographic factors, the restoration activities and projects along the "Lower 19" are still minimal and have yet to enjoy the investment and attention as the stretches within the bounds of L.A. city.[207] The geographic conditions of the region produce different flood hazard and watershed restoration constraints throughout the entire river basin itself. First, the lower watershed communities face greater flood dangers due to the simple geographic reality of being positioned downstream of a large, urbanized river basin.[208] Thus, the Gateway Cities' governments and residents are occupied by the central concern of maintaining the river's flood control infrastructure system (Los Angeles County Drainage Area Alliance 1994).[209] With environmentalists—especially the white, middle-class types—trumpeting visions of releasing the concrete banks of the river to establish wetlands, meandering streams, and a natural hydrologic flow regime, those who face the downstream dangers of calamitous floods are leery of handing restoration reins to upper watershed environmental 'elites'. In addition, the hydro-geology of the region also privileges restoration of the upper versus lower watershed. Because the soils found in the river basins around the San Gabriel Mountains are particularly porous, the upper watershed areas, including the entire San Fernando Valley, is ideal for capturing stormflow in order to replenish local aquifers (Holmes et. al. 1917). These favorable

[207] The exception to this statement would be the restoration and revitalization activities carried out by the City of Long Beach, which lies at the very end of the L.A. River watershed. This is due to Long Beach being a larger municipality than the others residing in the Gateway area of the county, and its unique geographic location at the mouth of the river.

[208] The higher flood hazards of downstream areas in L.A. County are identified repeatedly throughout the Army Corps of Engineers' 1991 LACDA Review report. In it, the agency concludes that: "Based on review of precipitation and runoff and on re-evaluation of system capacity, it was determined that the LACDA system does not adequately protect many areas; the potential for the system to fail is particularly serious in the lower river reaches. …The Los Angeles River lacks 100-year protection through about half of its length. In the most critical reaches, such as the leveed sections along the Rio Hondo and the lower end of the Los Angeles River, the level of protection is less than the 50-year level" (USACE 1991, 60). Several pages later, the report continues on to state that: "The most serious flood threat is to this Los Angeles River reach, from the Rio Hondo to the Pacific Ocean" (62), largely because "the lower mainstem is carrying the collected flow from the hundreds of square miles of drainage area. *This massive accumulated flow represents a greater flood threat in the event of a system failure than exists in the upper reaches*" (63, emphasis added).

[209] Related to the problem of downstream communities dealing with greater river flows, there is also the matter of accumulated waterborne pollutants that flow through the lower areas of the watershed. This complicates the issue of downstream municipalities struggling to meet water quality regulations for pollutants they perhaps did not produce, and can generate tensions (see Higginbotham 2010).

drainage conditions have positioned the upper watershed as a crucial opportunity area for water infiltration. A host of local, state, and federal agencies have conducted studies on the drainage potential of the upper L.A. River basin and developed measures for enhancing infrastructure in order to maximize capture/infiltration (see LA Regional Water Quality Control Board for summary). The result of these geographic conditions is the differential distribution of hazards and opportunities throughout the watershed.

Political factors overlay the geographic ones, contributing further to the division between the upper thirty-two miles of the L.A. River and the lower nineteen of the Gateway region. The term "the Lower 19" even carries a somewhat negative connotation, implying that this specific stretch of the river remains neglected, treated as an afterthought or remnant, or else excluded from the exciting restoration efforts of the upper watershed. Politically, the schism between the upper thirty-two and lower nineteen miles comes from the political division between the much larger, wealthier city of L.A. and the smaller, resource-tight collection of municipalities of the Gateway area. Despite attempts in the late 1990s-early 2000s to create a watershed-wide agency that would oversee and coordinate all restoration activities of the L.A. River, no such agency exists today, partly due to the Gateway Cities' fear that such an authority would be controlled by the desires and interest of the city of L.A. (Gumprecht 2000; Mozingo 1999; Waldie 1999). Not only were attempts to create a regional river authority resisted, but conflicting political interests thwarted the creation of a watershed-wide Integrated Regional Water Management Plan in 2006 (Interview #3, 2013). While certain watershed stakeholders in Los Angeles advocated for an IRWMP body and plan that covered the entire Los Angeles River watershed, conflicts and tensions among representative bodies led to the formation of two separate IRWMPs, the GLAC IRWMP for the upper watershed and the L.A. Gateway Region IRWM JPA for the lower watershed.

In both cases—the failed L.A. River agency and the county-wide IRWMP—the Gateway Cities felt that there were multiple conflicting interests between themselves and the city of L.A. However, a major point of contention is the flood dangers posed by the Los Angeles River, with residents of the Gateway Cities living with higher risk of being flooded and fearful that upstream environmentalists' interests in restoring the river would somehow reduce the integrity of the existing flood control system. If that were so, not only were their homes and businesses under greater threat, but they would be required, under federal law, to purchase flood insurance; for many of the Gateway's lower-income residents, this represents a real economic burden. This upper-lower division came to a head during the conflict over the raising of the levee walls along the lower Los Angeles River, in the early 1990s, and has since been a simmering tension that continues to tint the perceptions of all involved stakeholders. Those who had been involved in that conflict in the 90s recounted the dimensions of class and privilege that operated among different stakeholders. One engineer stated that:

> Obviously, the people upstream, there is less water coming at them. If you're at the end of the river, you got a lot of water coming at you. […] The people that supported [LACDA] were usually the people who lived in the [downstream] area. …You'd go to some of these poorer areas and say: 'okay, you're going to have mandatory flood insurance of $800 next year.' And they're saying, 'wait, I barely have enough money for the food for my kids, and I'm going to have to pay $800? Why?' (Interview #10, 2013).

According to another county engineer, the matter over maintaining capacity of the LACDA flood control system was about time as well as finances. While sympathetic to arguments of those who

were for and against raising the river's levees, he explained that time was a factor considered differently by those in disagreement:

> [Raising levee walls] provides quick capacity increase and potentially takes people out of a flood zone. Versus a longer-term, watershed-based approach, which is more desirable, obviously, [but] takes a lot longer to implement. …It's a challenge. Because if you live in a floodzone and are paying a couple thousand a year and you're barely making it as it is, and all of a sudden you're assessed another couple thousand a year… Those voices are going to want to be heard (Interview #59, 2013).

Because of the different levels of risk, and because of the ways that the issue was framed during the LACDA conflict, the problem of what to do with the Los Angeles River watershed are often framed as how to maintain the flood control system.[210] And the unfortunate reality is that there continues to be a binary framing of the L.A. River, as either about restoration or flood protection.

Watershed stakeholders and municipal representatives from both within and outside of the city of L.A. expressed the political schism along the river. One watershed advocate stated that: "The focus of the river is always in the City of Los Angeles. Everyone always talks about Los Angeles. Which is part of the reason why there's the whole Gateway Cities thing; they feel burned because L.A. [city] gets all the attention" (Interview #14, 2012). This perception was echoed by representatives from the city of L.A. as well. One environmental engineer shared that:

> One of the things that's a drawback for the city of L.A. is that we're so big, some of the smaller cities along the river feel threatened by us. [They think] we're pushing the agenda of what the city of L.A. wants, not listening to what the other smaller cities actually need. …I think just because the city is so large, that feeling already resides with smaller cities like Vernon and [other] Gateway cities. It's a challenge there (Interview #4, 2013).

With regards to the split in the IRWM plans, one watershed advocate who was central to the GLAC-IRWMP attributed it to similar reasons—that there were tensions among local governments. According to her experiences working with the IRWMPs:

> The folks in the Gateway region, they broke away and formed their own IRWMP because they felt that L.A. City, it was too big, too [distant], too complicated, and they felt they have uniquely different problems from the rest of the region. They're much more dense, they're much more park-poor, they're much poorer—just period, poorer communities, they suffer disproportionately from diesel emissions because of the ports and truck traffic, and they felt that they wouldn't get enough resources if they stayed with the Greater L.A. [plan] (Interview #53, 2012).

As a result of these real—and perceived—conflicts over how to manage the urbanized L.A. River watershed, the plethora of projects, nationwide recognition, and narratives of success are concentrated around the upper river areas. This has resulted in, according to one environmentalist, the current "tale of two rivers", where "it is the best of times, but it's the best of times if you're in the City of L.A. …Once you cross outside the City of L.A. to lower [areas], it's the worst of times" (Interview #35, 2013).[211]

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[210] According to Gottlieb (2007, 144): "Over the next several years, the Corps proposed a series of measures to address a number of problems that had emerged subsequent to the river's channelization. These included increased residential development along the river's edge, debris flow concerns, and emerging fears about flood-damage insurance for homeowners owing to FEMA's redrawing of its maps that now indicated that certain areas bordering the river, including several of the working-class neighborhoods that had been some of L.A.'s earliest suburban-industrial clusters, would now be considered 'flood-hazard zones.' Residents of those areas called the FEMA action a 'flood tax' and strongly opposed any effort to prevent the Army Corps from completing LACDA."

[211] This environmentalist, who worked for an organization that carried out programs in both the upper and lower watershed areas of the L.A. River, also attributed the dearth of restoration activities in the Gateway Cities to the smaller municipalities' inability

The political and programmatic split between upper and lower L.A. River actors is unfortunate, given that the Gateway Cities face a unique set of environmental justice issues that could benefit from the support of river/watershed advocates. One major and ongoing issue is the expansion of the Interstate 710 freeway, known as the I-710 Corridor Project (Metro 2009). The project, headed jointly by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans and the L.A. County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro)) would expand the I-710 freeway throughout the stretch that runs from Long Beach up to its junction with the CA State Route 60 in the unincorporated area of East Los Angeles (Metro 2009; Newton 2009). According to the 2012 EIR/EIS produced by Caltrans/Metro, the expansion would entail expanding the existing eight lanes of the freeway to the preferred fourteen lanes, four of which would be Freight Movement Lanes exclusively designated for truck usage (Caltrans I-710 EIR Belittles 2012). Though the project has faced criticism from community and environmental groups, as well as other government agencies, it is touted as necessary for the alleviation of congestion on one of the most important transportation corridors of the L.A. region. And despite ten years of setbacks and a rapidly rising price tag (now nearing $12B!), the I-710 Corridor Project is continually pushed by its host agencies due to the persuasive argument that freight movement between the San Pedro ports and the rest of the Southern Californian metropolitan region can and must be fixed through infrastructure improvement (Hymon 2017; Penzella 2017).

If implemented, this project carries monumental environmental impacts. Analyses from air quality monitoring agencies, as well as environmental organizations and academic researchers, conclude that residents living near the freeway are already at a higher chance of developing illnesses related to inhalation of diesel emissions (Polidori and Fine 2012). Environmental justice and public health organizations have for years fought for stricter regulation of emissions from transportation corridors, claiming that communities living near them disproportionately bear the burden of these environmentally harmful land uses (CBE 2016; EYCEJ 2017; Gateway Cities COG 2007). Throughout the development of the I-710 Corridor Project, these organizations have advocated for cleaner, more sustainable alternatives to the expansion proposal. Organizations such as Communities for a Better Environment and the East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, along with others, formed the Coalition for Environmental Health and Justice (CEHAJ) and put forward their own project proposal, Alternative 7 (PSR-LA 2009). This alternative, among other measures, proposes a mandatory zero emission corridor, investment for a comprehensive public transit element, improvements to the L.A. River, and Community Benefit Agreements (EYCEJ 2017). Statements from CEHAJ representatives position Alternative 7 as the equitable and sustainable option for Caltrans, one that puts the region on a path toward zero emissions and public health (Kato 2012).

The Los Angeles River is an integral part of these freeway plans. After passing through downtown areas of the city of L.A., the river swerves east and, from the city of Maywood onward, runs next to the I-710 all the way to Long Beach. For most of its lower-nineteen mile length, the concrete channels of the L.A. River run alongside the congested lanes of this freeway;

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to coordinate projects at larger scales. As he explained to me, "You have a number of cities, small municipalities, who have been in the papers for the wrong reasons. Corruption, mismanagement of public funds. Who, for lack of a better word, can't necessarily organize their own city. So how can you expect them to organize around a regional plan, a regional concept, a regional infrastructure? Absent that regionality or that leadership, you have those traditional folks that begin, again, trying to drive a process that is very, in my opinion, singular in its focus." These singular processes he referred to were flood control and freeway expansion.

as a result, any modification to one infrastructure system will impact the other.[212] Given the inextricable spatial relationship between the river and the freeway, the visibility and popularity of the L.A. River restoration agenda could serve as a political leverage to ensure a more sustainable alternative is selected by Caltrans/Metro. The lack of substantive involvement by environmentalists, restoration champions, and watershed advocates within the I-710 expansion conflict reveals the socio-political disconnect between the sustainability/restoration efforts in the upper watershed areas, and the environmental justice problems of the lower areas (Interview #3, 2013). Moreover, for neighborhoods in Southeast L.A. County, the dearth of restoration efforts along the lower nineteen miles of the L.A. River translate into an inability to mobilize against projects that would modify and/or be detrimental to the river. One longtime environmentalist articulated this problem in such a way:

> The widening of the 710 freeway…is a huge issue which is going to negatively affect the river if it goes ahead as planned. […] If the river had been more visible [downstream], people would have felt and taken more responsibility for it, and this particular 710 freeway widening wouldn't do things [to disrupt the river]. That battle's not over yet, but it's just much more difficult (Interview #43, 2010).

Another environmentalist drew similar conclusions, but elaborated on the multiple aspects at play in the lack of a river-based argument against the I-710 project:

> I mean, with all this talk about having a federally recognized watershed, and yet you're going to pull this out? The reason why they're able to do that is because there's no coordination. There is no lead agency saying, no no no, we are trying to re-envision the LA River—at least in the lower 19 miles. …So absent that…you still see larger state agencies who *do* have a vision [exerting control]. Their vision is, "mine is development, mine is flood control, mine is I need to move goods [...]Yet you see what's being planned for the northern LA River and you start looking back at this, and…in the south, it's a paucity, if not a desert, of *any* vision, *anything* (Interview #35, 2013, original emphasis).

The Gateway Cities area, therefore, represents a unique opportunity for combined river restoration and environmental justice work. Because the area suffers from environmental burdens, because it is largely populated by lower-income communities of color, and because it faces multiple flood, greenspace, and air pollution challenges, it is an optimal place for realizing the environmental justice potential in restoring the L.A. River. Preliminary work has already been conducted to identify opportunities for addressing environmental injustices in Southeast L.A. County through environmental improvement of the Los Angeles River. For example, the Coalition for Environmental Health and Justice included greening and enhancement measures in their proposed Alternative 7. The City Project, which was part of the Chinatown Yard Alliance, also carried out several studies that examined how restoration of the lower L.A. River could bring health benefits to poor communities of color. Their conclusion was that the focus should expand to include the entire watershed.[213] There is already some organizational infrastructure

[212] Since the release of the I-710 Corridor Project's EIR/EIS, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers emerged as a strange ally to CEHAJ, voicing concern over Caltrans' proposals to shift electricity towers and other structures into the river channel to make room for the added lanes (Liefield 2012). Though the transportation and flood control agencies have continued discussion since then, the latter's authority over the L.A. River system renders it a potential check in the former's implementation of expansion plans.

[213] According to one representative: "The City Project also did a demographic analysis, using GIS mapping and census data to document the fact that people of color and low-income people disproportionately live along the parts of the river from Vernon to the ocean. And the City of L.A. was focusing on the opposite direction, from Vernon to the headwaters in Canoga Park. So we

established through the Lower Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, as well as watershed-level objectives identified by the county and programs like the Urban Waters Federal Partnership.[214] Lastly, the passing of Assembly Bill 530, and the subsequent creation of a Lower Los Angeles River revitalization master plan, could further harness the efforts around the river to address environmental justice issues of the Gateway Cities.

Yet restoration efforts on "the Lower 19" remain underdeveloped and disconnected from the successes unfolding upstream. Communities living along the southern stretches of the L.A. River are still not included in the broader watershed management efforts, and this exclusion fosters a sense of spatial separation. One environmental justice advocate, and a resident of Southeast L.A. County, elaborated on the limited engagement between existing restoration activities and the Gateway Cities:

> I grew up and currently live in the city of Lynwood in Southeast Los Angeles. Lynwood is a low-income, predominantly Latino and black neighborhood. From the time I was born until I turned 18, I lived a 10-minute walking distance from the river. […] Of the communities that live along the southern edges of the river, 37% of communities live within half a mile of the river are in the worst 10% of polluted and vulnerable census tracts in California. 94% of those communities are people of color. […] Today, the communities who live near the Southern part of the river are still facing environmental risks we faced decades ago. As Los Angeles gears up to revitalize the northern part of the LA River, the southern communities continue to organize everyday around issues of environmental justice (Negrete 2016, 29-31).

As her comments illustrate, residents living in the southern stretches of the river feel excluded from the slew of efforts, plans, and policies that are predominantly geared toward restoring the upper stretches of the watershed. And given the prevalent environmental injustices in Southeast Los Angeles County that the communities mobilize around, the restoration of the river could be a promising vehicle by which to initiate policy interventions for cleaning up neighborhoods as well as shed public attention and political leverage for addressing injustices and inequalities.

What could be gained by promoting greater engagement with stakeholders and communities of the lower Los Angeles River? How would expanding the restoration agenda to include and intersect with these downstream communities result in more justice-oriented sustainability initiatives concerning the watershed? As the cases of the Chinatown Yard Alliance and Pacoima Beautiful illustrate, bringing in non-traditional organizations can benefit the river restoration agenda by increasing political and public support, expanding ideas of environmental protection, and building alliances among diverse stakeholders. By doing the difficult work of holding regular meetings, planning joint committees, and collaborating on events, there could be the gained benefits of improved information sharing among organizations and the development of stronger, more regionally based alliances between upstream and downstream actors. Moreover, bringing the lower L.A. River communities would challenge river proponents to

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said, as a matter of environmental justice, equal justice, equal access to these resources, you should approach the entire river along its fifty-two mile length" (Interview #60, 2012).

[214] Regarding the Urban Waters Federal Partnership, one stakeholder involved in the advisory committee acknowledged the need for greater efforts and coordination for the lower L.A. River areas. He explained that: ""[The UWFP's priority] is to really do more outreach and work with the lower part of the watershed. Because we have a lot of really challenged communities down there. We do have someone from the Gateway Cities Council of Governments participating in the group. He gave an overview at one of our meetings last year; just showing the *huge* unemployment rates in a lot of those cities down there. There isn't really a really good master plan equivalent to the city's plan for that area. …There is probably not enough resources within those cities to prepare something as ambitious as the city of L.A.'s, but could we work with the county and some of those cities down there to get some framework for improving the river in that part of the watershed" (Interview #38, 2012).

cultivate their ideas of justice, place, and equality. Issues associated with the river/watershed would perhaps need to be framed in ways that will resonate with communities/organizations that experience "the environment" in vastly different ways; this could complicate the ways that environmental justice is conceptualized and worked toward. The urban geography of the Gateway Cities has led to the proliferation of strong environmental justice advocacy and mobilization in downstream communities; these organizations could teach—and in turn, learn from—the traditional environmental organizations clustered in the upper river reaches.[215] Doing so could expand the river coalition, ensuring that new participants are included and new frameworks for approaching urban environmental change are adopted; this can advance a form of urban sustainability that is informed by and works for environmental justice. Such a river—and such a city—would indeed be something worth seeing.

[215] This is all the more urgent as there are already strong environmental justice organizations mobilized in Southeast L.A. County. One environmentalist who works in southern county neighborhoods summed up the valuable alliances that could spring up between environmental and social justice groups: "As you look at the general layout of the two river sections…there is not a lot of river focused groups south, in the Lower 19. There are social justice groups who are slowly coming around to this notion of the environment. And the environmental community equally is slowly coming around to this notion of: wow, community health and environmental health, there is a linkage there. …I think the environmental community is slowly starting to realize, wow, there is even more reason to go back into the urban core and green it" (Interview #35, 2013).

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