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“Community Organizing in Los Angeles Chinatown:
Historical Case Study of the Cornfields”

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Asian American Studies

by

Sophia Cheng

2013

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“Community Organizing in Los Angeles Chinatown:
Historical Case Study of the Cornfields”

by

Sophia Cheng

Master of Arts in Asian American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor King-Kok Cheung, Chair

Abstract: This thesis uses a case study to analyze community organizing for grassroots decision-making in urban redevelopment, with a focus on land use struggles in multi-ethnic, immigrant communities. Using historical methods, I trace the evolution of “the Cornfields,” 32 acres of land located between Los Angeles Chinatown and Lincoln Heights from neglected property to state park and redevelopment centerpiece. I draw and analyze three lessons for community organizing to influence land use in Chinatown and surrounding areas. Community organizing groups should: 1) ally with environmentalists to mitigate residential and commercial tenant displacement; 2) forestall misrepresentation of community interests by ethnic elites; and 3) focus on governance and implementation, not only representation.

The thesis of Sophia Cheng is approved.

Valerie Matsumoto

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University of California, Los Angeles

2013

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis uses a case study to analyze community organizing for grassroots decision-making in urban redevelopment, with a focus on land use struggles in multi-ethnic, immigrant communities. I trace the evolution of “the Cornfields,” 32 acres of land located between Los Angeles Chinatown and Lincoln Heights. The land’s transition from neglected property to state park, and now the centerpiece of an ambitious redevelopment project, offers three lessons for community organizing groups seeking socially and economically equitable development. Community organizing groups should 1) ally with environmentalists to mitigate residential and commercial tenant displacement; 2) forestall misrepresentation of community interests by ethnic elites; and 3) focus on governance and implementation, not only representation.

The City of Los Angeles has introduced comprehensive plans to transform the ecological, manufacturing, retail and residential landscape surrounding Chinatown and Downtown. Key proposals include the L.A. River Revitalization Master Plan, adopted by City Council in May 2007, and the Clean Tech Corridor, introduced by L.A. Mayor Villaraigosa in September 2008, and including the Cornfield Arroyo Seco Specific Plan (CASP), which will create a brand-new neighborhood north of Downtown. While the city champions these plans, ground has already broken on formerly stalled projects and Chinatown is seeing a flurry of construction. Given these changes, the current moment presents both a challenge and an opportunity to theorize and implement organizing strategies that frame economic justice and environmental concerns as complementary rather than competing, and build shared power between different ethnic groups.

The immediate future of Chinatown is important to the neighborhood's more than 9,000 residents,¹ as well as the many more that have roots in the neighborhood through family, work, friendship, church, or other relationships. Yet, this story is also important because the evolution of the Cornfields reflects larger trends and debates in the transformation of global cities. It provides a case study to analyze the relative value afforded to ecology, profit and basic human need. Diverse interests – residents, elected officials, community organizations, civil rights groups, environmentalists, and private developers – alternately compete and collaborate to shape the future of the area.

My position as not only a student but also as a participant in activist organizations² regarding Chinatown and local development influences the questions posed and answers sought in this thesis. For example, I am interested in analyzing a history of redevelopment and land use activism that will yield lessons and be immediately helpful, or at least offer food for thought, for current activist organizations. Although I acknowledge a diversity of approaches to analyzing campaigns,³ I am particularly interested in identifying specific actors (who remain relevant today) and parsing the extent to which base-building and organizing, rather than solely legal and media advocacy, has shaped the social and physical landscape of Chinatown and its surrounding areas. Finally, my involvement in these organizations has both limited and increased access to sources. Regular canvassing and outreach to residents, small business owners, community leaders and organizations have yielded rich insight as to diverse perspectives on current and proposed

¹ "Mapping L.A.: Chinatown Profile." *Los Angeles Times*. Access at: <<http://projects.latimes.com/mapping-la/neighborhoods/neighborhood/chinatown/>>

² On and off throughout the past six years, I have lived, worked or volunteered in the areas discussed. Specifically, I was a staff member of the Southeast Asian Community Alliance between 2008 and 2010, volunteer in 2011, and currently a volunteer in Chinatown Community for Equitable Development.

³ For example, Bindi Shah's study of the youth organizing arm of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network emphasizes the ethnic identity formation of specific youth members, highlighting their individual experiences.

development. Since my participation in these organizations has been extra-curricular rather than as an embedded researcher, I chose not to use community members' individual stories or experiences as research material due to ethical issues. The primary limitation of this thesis arises precisely from these issues of access. If I were to start again with what I know now, I would recommend either an academic thesis, in which the researcher remains primarily an observer rather than participant,⁴ or a research report written in collaboration and on behalf of an organization.

The thesis consists of two chapters. The first provides a theoretical foundation by explaining the material and symbolic significance of urban ethnic enclaves, drawing on work from Saskia Sassen, Jan Lin, and Dolores Hayden. Neighborhoods borne out of racial segregation and discrimination, like Chinatown, have now become tourist sites. Ironically, as investment from multi-national corporations increasingly homogenizes commercial landscapes around the world, a historically and aesthetically distinct district like Chinatown becomes more valuable for its ability to draw tourists. At the same time, Chinatown is not only a tourist site, but also a place where people live and work. City planners are currently attempting to balance the dual imperatives of environmental sustainability and economic growth. Thus, the first chapter also explores theoretical and practical tensions between environmentalism and economic growth, as well as environmental justice, which attempts to wed social and economic justice with environmentalism.

⁴ Some scholars have combined research and engagement. For example, Karen Brodtkin and Lynn Fujiwara both volunteered with the organizations they analyze and document in their work on environmental justice and welfare reform, respectively. The key here is for the researcher to define the primary motive for their work – is it to be active in an organization and the research provides analysis for the organization, or is it research and volunteerism provides further insight for analysis? See: Brodtkin, Karen. *Power Politics: Environmental Activism in South Los Angeles*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. 2009. See also: Fujiwara, Lynn. *Mothers Without Citizenship: Asian Immigrant Families and the Consequences of Welfare Reform*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. 2008.

The second chapter describes the evolution of the Cornfields from 1999 to the present, with a focus on the 1999-2001 to establish the Los Angeles State Historic Park. I draw three lessons from the park campaign and its aftermath that may be useful to future land use and development struggles. To provide context for the park campaign, this chapter also sketches a historical background on Chinatown land use activism.

I conclude with thoughts on current and proposed redevelopment for Chinatown and Lincoln Heights, including the Clean Tech Corridor, its residential component, the Cornfields Arroyo Seco Specific Plan (CASP), and the Los Angeles River Revitalization Plan. Collectively, these plans aim to create a more environmentally friendly city from the residential (CASP), commercial (Clean Tech Corridor) and recreational (LA River) angles. If executed well, they could position Los Angeles as a model of urban sustainability. Yet, at least one of these plans has also come under fire for failing to ensure affordable housing or other safeguards against displacement.

Environmental justice scholars and organizations have long argued that environmental concerns encompass more than wilderness preservation, but rather, are holistic, affecting us where we live, work and play. Yet, how does this intersectional analysis translate to action? Drawing lessons from the park campaign, I speculate about potential opportunities and risks to residential and commercial tenants, as well as offer suggestions for community organizing to advance the concerns of the most vulnerable – specifically, immigrant residents and small businesses. Over 90% of Chinatown residents are renters.⁵ They may have a “home” in

⁵ Chen, Bonnie and Mai, Randy. “The State of Los Angeles Chinatown.” University of California, Los Angeles. Report prepared for Asian American Studies M108/Urban Planning M122. May 2013. Access at: <<https://www.dropbox.com/s/fkq1hq89k6oeyxp/chinatownfull.pdf>>

Chinatown, but not property, and will be directly impacted – whether it is through increased access to amenities or displacement – through the transformations that are already underway.

CHAPTER 1:

MATERIAL & SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF CHINATOWN

This chapter provides a theoretical foundation to analyze land use struggles in Chinatown. Chinatown is an “urban ethnic place,”⁶ to use Jan Lin’s term, and these places have both material and symbolic significance. Community organizing to influence Chinatown redevelopment must, therefore, address and win in the policy arena as well as the discursive arena, such as media coverage and popular understanding of Chinatown and its surrounding areas. I argue that economic growth and environmental sustainability, two key aims of city planning, can also be understood as material and discursive, manifesting as policy and investment as well as public relations and advertising.

Sociologist Jan Lin distinguishes between ethnic community, ethnic enclave, and ethnic place. He explains that “ethnic community” is broad, encompassing social dimensions such as church life, family, and neighborhood, while “ethnic enclave” emphasizes “the economic dimension of ethnic subeconomies.” In contrast, “ethnic place” refers to “the spatial territory of the community,” and is narrower than community, broader than enclave. Given this thesis’s focus on community contestation of land use, I also focus on place, which includes not only territory, but also, as Lin points out, history and culture associated with that territory. Saskia Sassen and Jan Lin emphasize the political economy of place, while Hayden examines the discourse on place, examining specifically public history. First I address Sassen and Lin’s contributions, then Hayden’s. Finally, I explore key aims of city planning, including

⁶ Lin, Jan. *The Power of Urban Ethnic Places: Cultural Heritage & Community Life*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

environmentalism and economic growth. I conclude with a summary of the current redevelopment context in and around L.A. Chinatown.

Material Significance of Urban Ethnic Places

Sassen argues that despite economic globalization, which has enabled companies to disperse around the globe in search of greatest profit, the importance of specific places and cities persists, as units of analysis and arenas for organizing.⁷ Notwithstanding the hollowing out of industrial production in the U.S., globalization has also created an agglomeration of certain industries, like finance, in specific places that Sassen calls “global cities.” For example, Downtown Los Angeles is home to a critical mass of banking and investment institutions. Although the white-collar workers in these firms may rely primarily on technology, crossing and skipping borders with the click of a mouse, there is a whole host of geographically-bound, low-wage industries that support their work – such as low-wage workers in janitorial firms, restaurants and goods delivery. Sassen’s analysis of place-bound, low-paid and less visible industries in the “global economy” is a useful lens to understand the prevalence of the working poor alongside highly skilled, high-income workers in Los Angeles.

While Sassen provides a useful macro view of global cities, Jan Lin contributes a race and ethnic analysis by focusing on urban ethnic places, specifically, American Chinatowns.⁸ Him Mark Lai, as the father of Chinese American history has long-documented that Chinese American and Chinatown history has always been a global history. Early Chinatown residents and political leaders concerned themselves as much, or even more, with politics in China, as with their life in

⁷ Sassen, Saskia. *Cities in a World Economy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2011.

⁸ Lin, Jan. *Reconstructing Chinatown: Ethnic Enclave, Global Change*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

the United States.⁹ Lin's analysis of Chinatowns in the context of global conditions continues this tradition of study. He outlines specific links between local ethnic places and global trends, including 1) the fight to improve and maintain manufacturing jobs, such as in the garment industry, that are a mainstay of employment for new immigrants, 2) the infusion of Asian capital in real estate and other land use investment, literally transforming the landscape of a neighborhood, and 3) more recently, the growth of "cultural tourism" as Asia rises in stature on the world stage.¹⁰

One of Lin's most compelling frameworks is the "ethnic growth machine." The traditional "growth machine," first described by sociologist Harvey Molotch, refers to an alliance, formal or otherwise, between public officials and commercial developers to facilitate and fast-track development.¹¹ They mutually benefit as the city creates jobs, increases revenue through sales tax, and attracts investment, while developers have an inside advocate to save them expense and unpredictability. The "growth machine" can lead to projects that benefit powerful individuals over the public because it prioritizes efficient development over, for example, environmental review or public participation. In urban ethnic places, an additional broker may be necessary – individuals or institutions that can literally and figuratively translate the development process to secure the support of key community members. Like other actors in the traditional growth machine, these ethnic representatives primarily represent their own interests in decision-making, but for symbolic value, they also represent (racially, ethnically, phenotypically, and linguistically) the community at large. As Lisa Lowe pointed out in her seminal work on

⁹ Lai, Him Mark. *Chinese American Transnational Politics*. Ed. Madeline Y. Hsu. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010.

¹⁰ Lin explores the first two in his 1998 book, *Reconstructing Chinatown*, and the third, cultural tourism, in his 2011 book, *The Power of Urban Ethnic Places*.

¹¹ Molotch, Harvey. "The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place." *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 82, No., 2 (Sept 1976): 309-332.

heterogeneity, hybridity and multiplicity, Asian American communities are diverse and intersectional.¹² Lowe warns against depictions of a uniform racial or ethnic culture. This point is especially relevant in Chinatown, which defies easy ethnic or racial categorization. The neighborhood is about 25% Latino/a and 70% Asian,¹³ and the Asian population is itself very diverse, with a mix of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Filipino, and ethnic Chinese from Hong Kong, mainland China and Southeast Asia.¹⁴

Although Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders may at times unite politically in an act of strategic essentialism, this provisional unity does not eradicate fundamental differences in power between and within groups.¹⁵ Viewing Lin's "ethnic growth machine" through the lens of Lisa Lowe's postmodern analysis of heterogeneous and hybrid Asian American community, it is useful to ask who is represented by these ethnic representatives. What definition of "community" is constructed through the ethnic growth machine? This struggle over public narrative, which carries material consequences, carries over to the next point – Hayden's theory of "the power of place."

Symbolic Significance of Urban Ethnic Places

Hayden combines an intersectional analysis of public history with an architect's design sensibility to explain "the power of place."¹⁶ Hayden argues that most public, official

¹² Lowe, Lisa. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996.

¹³ "Mapping L.A.: Chinatown Profile." *Los Angeles Times*. Access at: <<http://projects.latimes.com/mapping-la/neighborhoods/neighborhood/chinatown/>>

¹⁴ Observation from the past six years of living, working and volunteering in the neighborhood. See also: Chen, Bonnie and Randy Mai. "The State of Los Angeles Chinatown." UCLA Department of Urban Planning, Luskin School of Public Affairs. Report prepared for Asian American Studies M108/Urban Planning 122. May 2013. Access at: <<https://www.dropbox.com/s/fkq1hq89k6oeyxp/chinatownfull.pdf>>

¹⁵ Espiritu, Yen Le. *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1992.

¹⁶ Hayden, Dolores. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscape as Public History*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997.

acknowledgement of historic places overlooks or erases the lives of women, the poor, and people of color. For example, Hayden cites Gail Dubrow's 1986 count of Los Angeles cultural-historic landmarks, which found that a whopping 97.7% of city-designated landmarks celebrated White Americans, despite the fact that by 1990, Los Angeles was 47% people of color. Hayden argues that this whitewashing of public history not only upholds factual inaccuracies, but also obscures the link between past and present urban life, and limits communities' imagination to create a more equitable and inclusive city. As an architect, Hayden identifies "public history" in visible markers such as walking tours, public statues and murals, and government-issued plaques.

Hayden's work, in short, argues for the importance of a community narrative, and the broadcasting of that narrative through the design of public space. Chinatown and its surrounding neighborhoods are among the most historically rich places in Los Angeles, widely acknowledged as the founding site of this city. In fact, the Los Angeles State Historic Park, located on the northeast side of Chinatown, and the subject of this thesis's second chapter, invokes this history in its very name. It is important to note that Hayden does not advocate a strictly celebratory version of history. She acknowledges that some of this history may be racist, misogynist, and otherwise averse to the American mythology of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness for all. Yet, this confrontation with history is necessary for a fuller understanding of the present.

For example, one common historical experience shared by Chinatown and its surrounding neighborhoods is displacement. Currently, public discourse about redevelopment focuses on the immediate aim of economic development and profit. Injecting this historical context into public conversation, as Hayden suggests, would shift the debate and perhaps cast a more cautious tone and context on current proposals. Some tenants' rights organizations in Los Angeles have done just that. For example, in Boyle Heights, the "Somos Wyvernwood" campaign kicked off in

2013 to protest the redevelopment of 1,187 units of low-income housing into a denser mix of retail and 4,000 units of mixed-income housing (some affordable, some market-rate).¹⁷ Somos Wyvernwood has characterized the Wyvernwood project as “the New Chavez Ravine,” invoking the notorious displacement of Mexicans from Chavez Ravine in the late 1940s. The characterization drew the ire of the project’s developer, the Fifteen Group, which immediately decried the comparison as “beyond the pale...demonstrat[ing] a level of insensitivity and poor judgment that is far below any ethical standard.”¹⁸ Here, “ethical standard” refers to the Fifteen Group’s belief that it is unfair to compare their project with the notorious Chavez Ravine displacement.

Narrative influences development. Just as the Somos Wyvernwood campaign has raised public concern about residential displacement by comparing the Wyvernwood development to Chavez Ravine, different discourses regarding Chinatown redevelopment can frame and give rise to divergent definitions of community need and desired change. Chinatown has been characterized throughout history as a public health hazard, tourist attraction, and immigrant ghetto. Currently, Chinatown exists in the public eye as property ripe for redevelopment. This year, Chinatown will elect a new city council representative and a recent *Los Angeles Times* endorsement of Jose Gardea praised the candidate for ushering “long-moribund

¹⁷ Bachrach, Eve. “Boyle Heights Too Divided to Take Any Position on Huge Wyvernwood Redevelopment.” Curbed LA. March 26, 2013. Access at: <http://la.curbed.com/archives/2013/03/boyle_heights_too_divided_to_take_any_position_on_huge_wyvernwood_redevelopment.php>

¹⁸ Sanders, Mark. Fifteen Group. “Letter to Ms. Maria Cabildo, President, East LA Community Corporation (ELACC).” Access at: <http://www.wyvernwood.com/files/ELACC_-_Wyvernwood_1-31-13.pdf>

Chinatown...[into] the midst of a building boom.”¹⁹ The implication is that a “long-moribund Chinatown” should welcome any kind of development.

While most economic analysis of Chinatown and nearby redevelopment is celebratory,²⁰ looking at the potential for investment, increased property value, and new jobs, Sassen and Lin remind us that it is also important to think about the potential for economic polarization, as well as analyze more critically the promise of profit – by and for whom, and at what cost? Hayden also provides an alternative perspective – in this case, on the public history advanced by Lin’s “ethnic growth machine” in the interest of cultural tourism. A focus on multi-ethnic/racial community and resilience in the face of multiple displacements is a different sort of public history than the characterization of Chinatown as, for example, “the original theme park.”²¹ The fight for equitable development, placing people over profit, will also require a fight to advance the narrative and public history of these places. Different stakeholders jostle to advance their own version of history, and each narrative serves, or facilitates, a different type of economic development and land use.

Two major themes in Chinatown redevelopment and Los Angeles city planning are economic growth and environmental sustainability, which I examine in the next section.

Community organizing must effectively address both of these aims.

Environmental & Economic Aims of Development

¹⁹ “Endorsement: Jose Gardea in City Council District 1.” May 5, 2013. Access at:

<<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/endorsements/la-ed-end-council-district-1-20130505,0,1726834.story>>

²⁰ While urban development is not universally heralded as positive (for example, New York Chinatown has seen significant controversy over gentrification. See, for example: Meisel, Duncan. “Chinatown Residents Fight Gentrification.” *Village Voice*. April 28, 2008), the changes in Los Angeles Chinatown have been widely acknowledged in media as positive, something long-coming and much-needed. See: “A Decade Later, Blossom Plaza Breaks Ground.” *Los Angeles Downtown News*. May 20, 2013.

²¹ Fong, Gary. “Chinatown: crouching hamlet, hidden gem.” *The Los Angeles Times*. January 25, 2004.

As Los Angeles attempts to position itself as a leader in environmental sustainability, while still needing to address a range of economic challenges, planning and land use have become an important vehicle to negotiate these two aims. In the past few years, the City of L.A. has promoted a series of land use initiatives, including the Clean Tech Corridor, Los Angeles River Revitalization, and transit-oriented development, which in theory combine environmentalism and economic stimulus in the form of job, housing and transportation growth. Since these projects are in the works or have only just begun, they have yet to demonstrate their long-term impact. Rather than sit back and wait to see what materializes, community should collectively analyze and propose development that is responsive to their needs. To provide an informed analysis, the community must understand what, in theory and practice, has been the historical relationship between environmental and economic aims of urban redevelopment.

Environmental Aims

Historically, environmentalism in the United States has focused on a conservationist angle, emphasizing wilderness preservation and ecological restoration, and defining “environment” as pristine and separate from humans, to be protected from manmade destruction. According to this view, development is undesirable because it tramples on the environment. In Los Angeles, the dual goals of wilderness preservation and ecological restoration manifest, for example, as preservation of mountain ranges and ocean clean-up days.

Traditional environmentalism in Los Angeles has had to contend with the fact that the city is already developed. Los Angeles is the second largest city in the United States, after New York, and does not have much pristine green space. Land is treated as valuable real estate rather than as ecology. Additionally, Los Angeles’s sprawling freeways and limited public

transportation system have given rise to the city's hallmark car culture, which creates an environmental strain on air quality. This poor air quality is compounded by emissions from goods movement from the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach through Downtown L.A. and into the Inland Empire.²² Angelenos breathe this polluted air every day. As a result, traditional environmental concerns of preservation and restoration have necessarily expanded in Los Angeles, to fuse the "natural environment" with the "built environment" and address quality of life issues – such as air quality, access to green space, energy and water conservation, and efficient transportation.

Environmentalists have sought to deal with urban development through regulation, certification and design. For example, in terms of regulation, the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) are federal and state laws, respectively, that require environment analysis and public disclosure for new development. The purpose of these laws is to ensure that new development meets certain environmental standards, and also to provide a venue for public comment. These regulations have also, perhaps unintentionally, become an important hook for litigation as well as a forum for public intervention on non-environmental matters.²³ In terms of certification, environmental groups offer third-party certification programs for developers to demonstrate to consumers that their buildings are green. The most prominent of these third-party programs is LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification. In addition to individual building certification, environmental design can extend to entire cities.

²² Matsuoka 2005

²³ Douglas, Karen, Matt Vander Sluis, Ian Douglas and Erin Beller. "Everyday Heroes Protect the Air We Breathe, the Water We Drink, and the Natural Areas We Prize: Thirty-Five Years of the California Environmental Quality Act." Planning and Conservation League Foundation and the California League of Conservation Voters. 2005. Access at: <http://www.pcl.org/pcl_files/full_report.pdf>

For example, the City of Los Angeles has joined other cities in the country to promote “transit-oriented development,” mixed-use communities composed of retail, residential and workplaces, located next to public transit hubs. As the city vigorously expands its light-rail system,²⁴ the areas surrounding each rail station have the potential to become a TOD (transit-oriented development). TOD is both a physical form as well as a community design theory intended to foster a tight-knit neighborhood.²⁵ Environmentalists promote TODs as a way to reduce pollution, traffic congestion, sprawl, and vehicle trips, while encouraging walking.

Although TODs boast these environmentally-friendly design principles, some advocates for the poor have expressed concern at their possible unintended consequences. Gen Fukioja, an urban planner with the Chinatown Community Development Center and formerly of the National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development, recently warned that without stronger advocacy for affordable housing and other protections for low-income people, TOD may just “become a greener version of gentrification.”²⁶ Developers who prioritize profit may not have a financial incentive to build affordable housing or other necessities for the poor. Meanwhile, traditional environmentalists may prioritize sustainability over affordability.

Economic Aims

²⁴ The first line opened in 1990. Since 2009, there have been three grand openings for extension of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority light rail system – the Gold Line Eastside Extension from Union Station to East L.A., and the Expo Line extension to South L.A. as well as Culver City. Construction is underway for MTA light rail extension in the Northeast, into Glendora, as well as West to Santa Monica, and South close to Los Angeles International Airport.

²⁵ Carlton, Ian. “Histories of Transit-Oriented Development: Perspectives on the Development of the TOD Concept.” Berkeley Institute of Urban and Regional Development. Working Paper 2009-02. Fall 2007. Access at: <<http://www.iur.d.berkeley.edu/publications/wp/2009-02.pdf>>

²⁶ Fujioka, Gen. “Transit-Oriented Development and Communities of Color: A Field Report.” L.A. Streets Blog. Access at: <<http://la.streetsblog.org/2011/03/23/transit-oriented-development-and-communities-of-color-a-field-report/>>

The most obvious economic beneficiaries of urban development are corporate developers, investors and property owners. However, community organizations, labor unions and economic justice groups have been fighting for a share of the economic benefit, too. One of the most prominent and relevant examples is the 2001 community benefits agreement²⁷ in Downtown L.A., negotiated between the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice and the Staples Center. In order to win popular support to build the Staples Center, the L.A. Arena Land Company, owned by billionaires Philip Anschutz and Rupert Murdoch, agreed to a range of community benefits, including preferential hiring and living wage jobs for local residents, affordable housing construction, and the establishment of a fund to build parks and recreation.

Since development requires construction, and the building trades remain a source of living wage jobs with a clearly articulated career ladder, community benefits agreements and project-labor agreements are popular ways to secure job training and placement for community members. These types of agreements usually employ a range of preferential indices, from race, income, to “local hire” (that is, people who live close to the development site, or within certain zip codes).

The technical expertise necessary to pull off these agreements require a sophisticated coalition that can combine community organizing with research, media, legal negotiation, and

²⁷ Community benefits agreements, or CBAs, have become a popular strategy for local communities to win benefits out of new development. A traditional CBA is a legally enforceable agreement between a developer and a third party, such as a coalition of community organizations and unions. CBAs have also evolved to become agreements between developer and government. Some advocates believe this developer/government type of CBA are limited in protecting communities, especially if community members have limited decision-making within government. This information was shared at the “CBAs 101” panel, organized by the University of Southern California Partnership for an Equitable Los Angeles, on April 4, 2013. See also: Beach, Benjamin. “Strategies and Lessons from the Los Angeles Community Benefits Experience.” *Journal of Affordable Housing* 17:1-2 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008). Also: Leavitt, Jacqueling. “Linking Housing to Community Economic Development with Community Benefits Agreements: The Case of The Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice” in *Jobs and Economic Development in Minority Communities*. Ed. Ong, Paul and Loukaitou-Sideris, Anastasia. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. 2006.

policy advocacy. These campaigns have given rise to a variety of labor and community coalitions, as well as research and policy think tanks. For example, in the construction of the Alameda Corridor, a multi-billion dollar transportation project to expedite goods movement from the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to Downtown L.A., the Alameda Corridor Jobs Coalition created an alliance between labor unions, community organizations, service providers, community development corporations, and academic institutions. Drawing on diverse strengths within the alliance, the Alameda Corridor Jobs Coalition was able to harness federal transportation funding to secure over 1,200 good-paying construction and non-trades jobs for the Latino/a and African American residents of Southeast Los Angeles.²⁸ The Alameda Corridor project has been heralded as a model transportation project because it created a “triple bottom line” of equity (for local residents), environmental benefit (mitigating emissions from the ports), and efficiency (boosting profit for companies by quadrupling the speed of goods movement).²⁹

The Staples Center and Alameda Corridor community benefits agreements represent significant community victories. Cooperation between labor unions and community organizations was critical to these wins. However, whereas developers, community organizations and labor unions were able to frame, for example, the Alameda Corridor as a “triple bottom line,” affordable housing and rent control are less obvious “win-win” agreements. There are real conflicts between the drive for profit, on one hand, and the need for stable housing, on the other. Neil Smith’s influential rent-gap theory posits that a neighborhood is ripe for gentrification when there is a difference (“gap”) between the revenue that a landowner actually earns from tenants,

²⁸ Matsuoka, Martha. 2005. “From Neighborhood to Global: Community-Based Regionalism and Shifting Concepts of Place in Community and Regional Development.” Ph.D. Dissertation. University of California Los Angeles.

²⁹ Callahan, Richard, Linder, Alison and Pisano, Mark A. 2009. “Leadership and Strategy: A Comparison of the Outcomes and Institutional Designs of the Alameda Corridor and Alameda Corridor East Projects.” *Public Works Management Policy*. 14: 263-287.

and could possibly and realistically earn. In other words, the property owner has not fully exploited the profit potential of his or her property and a market exists for higher-paying tenants.³⁰

To understand “economic aims” of urban redevelopment, it is useful to broadly sketch the economic aims interests of different stakeholders. Developers seek profit from residential and commercial investment, whether that involves the renovation of existing property, as in classic gentrification, or the construction of new buildings, as in “new build gentrification.”³¹ In cases like Downtown L.A. gentrification, the property is so expensive that only large, nationwide development companies can afford to purchase and invest in the land. As the *Los Angeles Downtown News* recently noted, just in 2011-2012, Chicago-based Equity Residential spent about half a billion dollars to purchase properties in Downtown L.A. and Chinatown, including Jia apartment buildings at Cesar Chavez and Broadway.³² Equity has become Downtown L.A.’s second-largest market-rate residential landlord, second to Geoffrey Palmer, who in 2009 infamously sued the City of L.A. (and won) to outlaw affordable housing requirements. Similar to developers, landowners also benefit from increases in property value.

Labor unions, meanwhile, see development as a potential source of unionized jobs. In addition to jobs, community advocates look to secure community amenities, like parks and community centers, out of new development. Meanwhile, cities in California seek tax revenue. After the passage of California Proposition 13 in 1978, the state has been limited in its ability to raise funds through property taxes. As a result, many local municipalities, including the City of

³⁰ Smith, Neil. “Gentrification and the Rent Gap.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77.3 (1987): 462-465.

³¹ Davidson, Mark and Loretta Lees. “New-Build Gentrification: Its Histories, Trajectories Geographies.” *Population, Space and Place*. Vol. 16 (2010): 395-411.

³² Vaillancourt, Ryan. “Meet the Downtown Apartment Giant You Never Knew About: Equity Residential Quietly Becomes a Major Player.” *Los Angeles Downtown News*. March 18, 2013.

Los Angeles, increasingly rely on sales tax to raise revenue, leading to the “fiscalization of land use,” in which the city privileges commercial development over residential or public space because it generates much-needed sales tax.³³

Perhaps at the bottom of the list, in terms of wealth and access to power, are poor and working class immigrants and people of color. This thesis is written with the needs of this community in mind. The Chinese Progressive Association in Boston, which organizes low-income Chinese immigrants in Boston Chinatown, has framed one of its economic (and social) campaign goals as “community stabilization.” This is in sharp contrast to the profit-driven aims outlined above. As urban planner Donald Krueckeberg astutely asks, development projects should not only answer, “Where do things belong?” but also, “To whom do things belong?” Krueckeberg advocates a fundamental shift in our conception of land use, to uphold the “right to use” over the “right to profit.”³⁴ This shift requires struggle and change in both discourse and policy.

Environmental Justice

As mentioned earlier, the traditional environmental movement defines the environment as the natural environment, separate from and even tainted by humans. The concern is for ecology – the environment itself – rather than humans. In contrast, the environmental justice movement prioritizes the effect of an unhealthy environment on humans, specifically, people of color and the poor. The most widely used definition of “environmental justice” comes from the 1991 First

³³ Lewis, Paul G. "Retail politics: Local sales taxes and the fiscalization of land use." *Economic Development Quarterly* 15.1 (2001): 21-35.

³⁴ Krueckeberg, Donald A. 1995. "The Difficult Character of Property: To Whom Do Things Belong?" *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 61(3): 301-309.

National People of Color Environmental Summit.³⁵ The summit's EJ Principles were keenly aware of race and advanced a holistic, person-centered approach to the environment. EJ defines the environment as encompassing the places where people "live, work and play." In this way, EJ extends beyond the pristine wilderness privileged in traditional environmentalism, which has historically been oblivious about race or even openly racist, promoting population control of people of color. Robert Bullard, the African American sociologist widely identified as "the father of the environmental justice movement," defines a four-part framework for EJ: 1) focus on prevention, 2) the burden of proof is on polluters, 3) focus on effect instead of intent, and 4) targeted, e.g. race-based, benefits to people who suffer from environmental injustice.³⁶

In this way, EJ bridges ecological concerns with the survival needs of poor people and people of color. EJ is race-conscious and does not shy from identifying environmental racism where it exists. In this way, environmental justice seems like a useful analytical framework and practical movement to bring into the fight for equitable development in Chinatown. It can champion the environmental amenities of TOD while also credibly fight for anti-displacement measures. However, given the severity of environmental racism, wherein people of color bear a disproportionate burden of exposure to pollutants, most environmental justice organizations focus on fighting and mitigating toxic environments. A more complex situation, like transit-oriented development, in which development may be environmentally sound but economically hazardous to people of color, may not warrant the same level of attention.

³⁵ *Proceedings: The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit*. United Church of Christ, Commission for Racial Justice. The Washington Court on Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C. October 24-27, 1991.

³⁶ Bullard, Robert D. and Glenn S. Johnson. "Environmental Justice: Grassroots Activism and Its Impact on Public Policy Decision Making." *Journal of Social Issues* 56.3 (2000): 555-578.

If EJ organizations are busy fighting disproportionate impact, traditional environmentalists laud TODs, unions look to the potential for unionized jobs, and developers and city promote these developments for tax revenue, community members are left as the stakeholders most invested in their own survival. In the coming decade, if not sooner, L.A. Chinatown and surrounding ethnic neighborhoods will experience changes through transit oriented development, the Clean Tech Corridor, and the Los Angeles River Revitalization project. The intensity in this array of development – intense in terms of scale, money, pace, and comprehensiveness – demands of community members and advocates an analysis of potential opportunities and risks.

Current Development in L.A. Chinatown & Adjacent Neighborhoods

Currently, Los Angeles Chinatown and its adjoining neighborhoods are undergoing massive transformation. The “adjoining neighborhoods” to which I refer are Lincoln Heights, Solano Canyon, Downtown L.A., as well as William Mead Homes, which, although not a neighborhood per se, is a community unto itself and one of the city’s oldest public housing projects. This thesis focuses on Chinatown while acknowledging that conditions within neighborhood influence and are influenced by nearby places, as well as larger city-wide and regional conditions. An analysis of one neighborhood requires analysis of wider-scale phenomenon.³⁷ Thus, although I focus on redevelopment in Chinatown, I also touch on changes in nearby places.

In the past decade, Downtown L.A., just south of Chinatown, has undergone rapid gentrification. The classic model of gentrification involves the restoration of old buildings to rent

³⁷ DeFilippis, James, Robert Fisher and Eric Shragge. *Contesting Community: The Limits and Potential of Local Organizing*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010.

(or sell) at a higher price.³⁸ Local government typically facilitates the process by subsidizing new investment in a de-invested neighborhood. Displacement often results, as existing residential and commercial tenants cannot afford the higher rent and voluntarily leave or are pushed out. It is important to note that gentrification is not just an economic transformation. It is also a social and cultural transformation – in many cases, corporate chains replace mom and shop businesses; white people replace people of color. Ironically, the cultural distinctiveness that attracted “pioneering gentrifiers”³⁹ fades. The cycle continues as renters, home buyers, and real estate speculators seek a new neighborhood.

The “classic gentrification” pattern accurately describes what has happened in Downtown L.A. In 1978, historic preservations were galvanized by the announcement that the city was planning to demolish the L.A. Central Library. Preservationists banded together to create the Los Angeles Conservancy, which today is the city’s largest historic preservation organization, and successfully campaigned to save the library. They did not stop there. They lobbied to pass the Historic Preservation Overlay Zone Ordinance (HPOZ) in 1981, which creates historic districts as a tool to revitalize physically decaying neighborhood. The late 1990s and early 2000s saw an explosion in the use of HPOZ, beginning in Angelino Heights.⁴⁰

Historic preservation and its accompanying financing strategies became an important means to facilitate real estate investment strategy in Downtown L.A. In the 1990s, developer Tom Gilmore, the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency, and the Central City Association began to lobby for an Adaptive Reuse Ordinance to speed up and reduce the cost of

³⁸ Lees, Loretta, Tom Slater and Elvin Wyly. *Gentrification*. Oxford, UK: Routledge, 2007.

³⁹ Lees et al. They define pioneering gentrifiers as individuals who have money to buy a home and fix it up, but are different from other homeowners in that they are willing to live in neighborhoods that others would not. In contrast to later waves of gentrifiers, pioneering gentrifiers intend to actually live in the homes they restore.

⁴⁰ Bernstein, Ken. “A Planning Ordinance Injects New Life into Historic Downtown.” *Planning Los Angeles*. Ed. David Sloane. Chicago: Planners Press, 2012. 253-263.

real estate investment in historic buildings in Downtown L.A. By 1999, the City Council passed the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance (ARO). Meanwhile, the L.A. Conservancy partnered with developers, notably, Tom Gilmore, to identify historic buildings that could be restored and qualified for subsidies under the Federal Historic Rehabilitation tax credit and the 1977 Mills Act, which provides 20-80% tax relief for owners of historic properties.⁴¹

This cooperation between commercial developers, city government, and historic preservationists resulted in rapid gentrification. Those who look favorably upon the transformation of Downtown L.A. say that the city finally has some semblance of a thriving downtown, befitting L.A.'s global status – safe, well-lit, home to high-end boutiques and restaurants. Critics say that the changes have brought wide-scale gentrification, displacing poor and working class residents, as well as increasing police harassment of the area's large homeless population. What's indisputable is that this "Downtown Rebound"⁴² has resulted in an overall increase in market-rate housing and a decrease in affordable housing. As of 2011, the Adaptive Re-use Ordinance has resulted in 76 downtown projects, including 9,137 units of new housing, of which 2,479 are for-sale condos, and fewer than 10% constitute affordable housing. There has been a net loss of at least 982 affordable units, as five single-room occupancy buildings were converted to market-rate housing between 2000 and 2003 alone.⁴³

This Downtown L.A. gentrification has spilled over into Los Angeles Chinatown as well, which has seen the establishment of art galleries and a thriving artist community, as well as

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Gil Cedillo, one of two remaining candidates (the other is Jose Gardea) to represent Downtown L.A., Chinatown, and other communities in L.A. City Council District 1, has boasted of his support for California Assembly Bill 2870, the "Downtown Rebound" bill that provided grants and loans for Downtown L.A. development. See Cedillo's campaign website: "Meet Gil Cedillo." *Gil Cedillo for Los Angeles 2013*. Access at: <<http://show.simplesend.com/gilcedillo.html>>

⁴³ Bernstein 2012

increasing residential and commercial rents.⁴⁴ One of the most prominent examples of residential transformation is the Orsini project, composed of two enormous, Italianate apartment buildings on Cesar Chavez Avenue, at the southwestern edge of Chinatown. Orsini was built and is owned by Geoffrey Palmer, the real estate developer famous who sued the City of Los Angeles to dispute a requirement to build affordable housing. Palmer won and now the City of Los Angeles cannot require any developer to construct affordable housing.⁴⁵ In *Palmer/Sixth Street Properties v. City of Los Angeles*, the California Supreme Court ruled that the state cannot artificially restrict rent by requiring “inclusionary zoning,” that is, the construction of affordable housing units.⁴⁶ One of the exceptions to this ruling is new construction within a Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) project area, which includes Chinatown. Before California Governor Jerry Brown dissolved the CRA at the end of 2011,⁴⁷ California law required the construction of affordable housing (between 15-30%, depending on the developer) for buildings developed within a CRA project area.⁴⁸ However, the 2011 dissolution of the CRA also dissolved this affordable housing requirement.

Alongside the pressures imposed by gentrification, Chinatown is grappling with the development of flourishing ethnoburbs to its east. Since the 1970s, and accelerating into the 1980s, San Gabriel Valley – a set of suburban Asian and Latino/a communities, ranging from working-class to affluent – has become a magnet for Asian immigrants of all class backgrounds,

⁴⁴ Evidence of artist, commercial and residential change

⁴⁵ Hickey, Robert. “After the Downtown: New Challenges and Opportunities for Inclusionary Zoning.” National Housing Conference, Center for Housing Policy. February 2013. Access at: <http://www.inhousing.org/PDFs/InclusionaryReport201302.pdf>

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Wilson, Simone. “Redevelopment Agencies Across California, Including L.A. CRA, Abolished: Governor Jerry Brown Victorious.” *Los Angeles Weekly*. December 29, 2011.

⁴⁸ Mukhija, Vinit, Lara Regus and Sara Slovin. *The Inclusionary Housing Experience in Southern California: An Evaluation of the Programs in Los Angeles and Orange Counties*. A Research Report for the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation. August 2006.

as well as transnational investment from Asian corporations and individuals.⁴⁹ In addition to siphoning off potential residents, businesses and investment from Chinatown, San Gabriel Valley is also an object of desire for many current residents of Chinatown and Lincoln Heights. Many residents see it as part of their American Dream – moving up from the ethnic enclave into the (still comfortably ethnic) suburb.⁵⁰ Currently, despite the name “Chinatown,” many residents, workers and small businesses in the neighborhood are Southeast Asian and Latino/a. Some estimate that over 80% of the small business owners are ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia. Approximately a third of Chinatown residents are Latino/a.

In short, L.A. Chinatown’s transformation is intimately tied to overall gentrification within the city, as well as the evolution and increasing suburbanization of the Chinese American community. Although in 1990, only an estimated 4% of Chinese in Los Angeles County lived in Chinatown proper,⁵¹ the neighborhood remains a symbolic center for the Chinese American community. Since the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, the Asian American community has become increasingly polarized by class, with poverty rates steadily dropping for Asian Americans as a whole, while persisting among some ethnic groups, such as Hmong, Bangladeshi

⁴⁹ Saito, Leland. *Race and Politics: Asian Americans, Latinos, and Whites in a Los Angeles Suburb*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998.

⁵⁰ Experience from door-knocking in Chinatown and Lincoln Heights. In the past five years of working and living in the area, I have repeatedly encountered this thinking. When I talk to long-time business owners, they complain that business is down as products that were once only available in Chinatown are now widely available, even cheaper, in San Gabriel Valley. While door-knocking in Lincoln Heights, residents in [Puerta del Sol], an affordable housing building, told me that one by one, almost all of the Chinese residents in the building had moved out, to the San Gabriel Valley. Interestingly, for some people, moving to the San Gabriel Valley is not necessarily “moving up.” The mounting rent brought on by gentrification has pushed some residents to move from Chinatown and Lincoln Heights to more affordable SGV cities, like Rosemead and El Monte.

⁵¹ Tseng, Yen-Fen. “Chinese Ethnic Economy: San Gabriel Valley, Los Angeles County.” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 16(2): 1994. 172

and Cambodian Americans.⁵² Gone are the days when most Asian immigrants shared the “port of entry” experience of living and working in urban, segregated communities like Chinatown.

As this direct experience and memory fades for the majority of Chinese (and other Asian) Americans, the question arises – how will we define Chinese American and Asian American community? Will we focus on a celebratory story of upward climb and achievement of the American Dream? Will we highlight the enduring conditions of Asian immigrants and refugees who struggle with poverty, linguistic isolation and political disenfranchisement? Over 90% of Chinatown residents are renters and 56% have an annual income below \$20,000.⁵³ The creation of New Chinatown out of the ashes of Old Chinatown required a self-conscious effort to define the community, its interests and future – at that time, this project was undertaken primarily by Chinese American business leaders. Today Chinatown faces a similar crossroads with its current and future redevelopment. The second chapter examines past community organizing and draws lessons that can hopefully benefit current and future struggles.

⁵² Asian American Center for Advancing Justice. “A Community of Contrasts: Asian Americans in the United States: 2011.” Access at: <

⁵³ “Mapping L.A.: Chinatown Profile.” *Los Angeles Times*.

CHAPTER 2:

LESSONS FROM THE CORNFIELDS

This chapter draws lessons from land use struggles around the Los Angeles State Historic Park, better known as “the Cornfields,” between 1999 and 2011. The park was born out of a high-profile campaign to turn 32 acres of blighted land, slated to become a warehouse and manufacturing site, into a community park. I trace the park’s roots, as a victory in the Urban Parks Movement, to its present, as a centerpiece in a contentious redevelopment plan to be approved by the Los Angeles City Council in the summer of 2013.

First, I provide historical context by describing two previous periods of community activism around land use and planning— the 1930s effort to establish New Chinatown, and the 1980s-1990s campaigns to influence large-scale development. Secondly, I describe the evolution of the Cornfields, focusing specifically on the campaign to establish the Los Angeles State Historic Park, as well as the campaign’s aftermath. Finally, I draw and analyze three key lessons from the campaign that may be helpful in fighting for equitable development in the future: 1) the most effective source of community power in Chinatown is collective organizing, given the absence of formal power, as well as an existing power structure that is undemocratic; 2) communities must ensure governing and decision-making power because representation is no replacement for governance; and 3) coalitions are crucial to both win campaigns and to advance the interrelatedness of social justice concerns; specifically, Chinatown community must forge a productive, equal and reciprocal relationship with environmental groups.

Chinatown Legacy of Land Use Activism

Land use has been a consistent arena for community activism in Chinatown and its surrounding neighborhoods, which have suffered – and not always survived – multiple displacements. For example, in the few decades between the 1930s and the 1960s, the City of Los Angeles destroyed three neighborhoods in and around Chinatown. Old Chinatown became Union Station, Chavez Ravine became Dodger Stadium, and Bunker Hill became a commercial district. Of these three examples, the history of Bunker Hill is probably the least well-known. Bunker Hill used to be one of the densest residential neighborhoods in the city, and was razed during the 1950s under slum-clearance policy in order to expand the Pasadena Freeway and build a business district. Between 1933 and 1980, over 50,000 units of housing in and adjacent to Bunker Hill were demolished.⁵⁴ This recent history of displacement – all legally sanctioned – and broken promises, in the case of Chavez Ravine, forms part of the backdrop for current redevelopment. This historical context is useful for framing and understanding continued debates about land use – not to condemn change, but rather, to call for greater public oversight of redevelopment and protection for existing residents.

From Old to New Chinatown

Present-day Chinatown is not the original Chinatown. Beginning in the 1860s, Chinese began to create a community on “Calle de los Negros,” or “Nigger Alley,” at the southeast corner of La Placita Olvera, near the intersection of today’s Los Angeles and Arcadia Streets. In the late 1880s, Calle de los Negros, or “Old Chinatown,” was home to a mix of businesses and about 2,000 individuals. Chinese immigrants initially worked as vegetable peddlers and later branched

⁵⁴ Klein, Norman M. *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*. New York, NY: Verso, 1997.

out as Chinese entrepreneurs opened laundries, restaurants, groceries, curio shops, and import businesses.⁵⁵

Residents and merchants in Old Chinatown faced intense xenophobia and racism, both in government policy and public opinion. For example, during the Chinese Massacre of 1871, an angry mob lynched and killed at least nineteen (some estimate up to 84) Chinese in Calle de los Negros. The Page Act of 1875 prohibited Chinese women from entering the U.S. on the basis of their “immoral character” as concubines and prostitutes. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 broadened immigration restrictions to all Chinese, while the 1931 Alien Land Law forbade property ownership by aliens ineligible for citizenship, which included Asians such as Chinese and Japanese.⁵⁶ This federally legislated racism was compounded by discrimination at the local level. As early as 1913, there had been public debate between railroad companies, property owners and city government about demolishing Calle de los Negros to build a train station. The plan gained traction in 1931, when the California Supreme Court ruled to condemn and raze Chinatown to build Union Station. Construction began in 1933 and finished by 1938.

Chinatown residents and community leaders were not simply passive victims, but devised their own survival strategies. For example, during the first half of the 1900s, the municipal government sought to restrict and control Chinese launderers and produce sellers through policy governing public health and land use.⁵⁷ The 1913 Municipal Market Ordinance imposed financially prohibitive requirements on vegetable peddlers to reduce “unsanitary storage” of their produce, at a time when 50 of 60 registered vegetable peddlers in the city were Chinese. In 1932,

⁵⁵ Lin, Jan and Eugene Moy. “The Removal and Renewal of Los Angeles Chinatown From the Exclusion Era to the Global Era.” January 2005. American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, 2006.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Molina, Natalia. *Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006.

the Los Angeles City Board of Health Commissioners amended health code to require a separation of work and living quarters for laundry workers and owners. This posed a problem for Chinese launderers, who often lived in rooms adjacent to their business. The launderers successfully fought this policy at City Hall by hiring legal representation and collecting petitions from both Chinese and non-Chinese supporters, including their landlords, who stood to lose revenue if they lost their launderer tenants.

According to Lin and Moy, after the demolition of Old Chinatown, at least three new Chinese communities developed – one around Ninth and San Pedro Street, and two commercial districts, “New Chinatown” and “China City.” Socialite Christine Sterling created China City as a tourist spot, similar to present-day Olvera Street, which she also helped to develop. China City featured booths by at least seventy Chinese merchants and had a “carnival atmosphere” as a “Hollywood-style simulacrum of Chinatown.”⁵⁸ However, China City suffered two fires and disappeared by the 1950s. Today’s Chinatown started out as “New Chinatown” opened in 1938 and was the brainchild of the Chinese American Soohoo family, notably, Peter Soohoo. Lin and Moy attribute the success of New Chinatown to the Soohoos’ ability to garner support from the Chamber of Commerce, non-Chinese business investors, and middle-class Chinese and Chinese American entrepreneurs. In addition to Peter Soohoo’s individual savvy, Lin and Moy are also careful to attribute the success of the transplanted Chinatown to the overall social climate – the 1930s rapprochement between China and the U.S., as well as growing public appetite, stimulated through World Fairs, for a slice of the foreign in one’s own backyard.

Lin and Moy characterize the creation of the New Chinatown as an act of “business activism,” which helps to explain some of the enduring characteristics of Chinatown seventy five

⁵⁸ Lin and Moy, 2006.

years later, such as the kitschy architecture and many business plazas. Perhaps the most important point of this history is that Peter Soohoo deliberately crafted a vision and secured financial backing for New Chinatown, taking into account local as well as global conditions. Individual leaders, whether self-appointed or somehow chosen by the community, can have a tremendous impact on development.

Chinatown is once again at a crossroads. Its northeastern edge has been designated an “opportunity area,” the future home of the Arroyo Seco neighborhood.⁵⁹ History begs the question of which individuals, institutions and organizations will shepherd this process, whose interests will prevail and what alliances may form in the process.

Chinatown Redevelopment Under the CRA

The second key period of Chinatown land use transformation occurred during the redevelopment debates of the 1980s and 1990s. In 1937, Congress passed the Wagner-Steagall Act, creating U.S. Housing Authority to facilitate slum clearance and build public housing in its place, a process known as urban renewal. Real estate lobbyists, sensing the investment opportunity in newly-raised land, supported state and local redevelopment legislation to promote commercial investment in areas newly vacated through slum clearance. In 1945, with the backing of the real estate lobby, the state legislature passed the California Community Redevelopment Act, which “provid[ed] the framework for local governments to set up redevelopment agencies and pursue slum clearance and private investment.”⁶⁰ Locally, the Los Angeles City Council created the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) in 1947 to

⁵⁹ “Name This ‘Opportunity Area’ Northeast of Chinatown.” December 17, 2007. Curbed L.A. Access at: <http://la.curbed.com/archives/2007/12/name_this_oppor.php>

⁶⁰ Parson, Don. “The Development of Redevelopment: Public Housing and Urban Renewal in Los Angeles.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 6(3): October 2009.

implement the state act.⁶¹ Throughout the 1950s until its dissolution in 2012, the CRA designated different parts of Los Angeles as blighted, making these neighborhoods eligible for subsidized commercial and residential investment. In 1980, Chinatown became one of these CRA project areas.

During the 1940s, one of the strongest real estate lobbying groups for redevelopment policy was the Urban Land Institute (ULI),⁶² which today remains an influential consultant on city planning projects, including ones discussed in this thesis. For example, in 2010, the CRA and Los Angeles Department of Water and Power hired the ULI “to provide recommendations and alternatives to guide the future of development in the CleanTech Corridor.”⁶³ In 2011, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority and the Los Angeles Department of City Planning hired ULI to draft “a strategy for renewing the Union Station District,”⁶⁴ which borders Chinatown, Olvera Street, Boyle Heights, and the Arroyo Seco neighborhood.

In a modification of Lin’s “ethnic growth machine,” the influence of real estate power brokers was tempered by intervention from a handful of Chinese American activists. Unlike the Soohoo family, these activists did not come primarily from the business community, but rather, from a more grassroots perspective and were either directly or peripherally involved in the Asian American Movement.

The tail end of the Civil Rights Movement gave rise to leftist social movements, including the Asian American Movement, which were inspired by solidarity with de-colonization

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Urban Land Institute. “Cleantech Corridor, Los Angeles, California: A Vision for the Evolution of an Industrial Corridor.” May 2010. Access at: <<http://www.uli.org/wp-content/uploads/ULI-Documents/2010CleanTechReport.pdf>>

⁶⁴ Urban Land Institute. “Union Station, Los Angeles: A Strategy for Renewing the Union Station District.” December 2011. Access at: <<http://la.uli.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Union-Station-Advisory-Services-Panel.pdf>>

and anti-capitalist movements across the world. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, a proliferation of progressive and leftist Asian American organizations sprang up in Chinatown, such as the Chinese Progressive Association, Chinese Awareness, Asian Americans for Equality, and others.⁶⁵ These groups organized to fulfill a range of immediate needs, such as mental health services, English classes, and childcare, as well as to advance ideological aims, such as the destigmatization of “Red China.”⁶⁶ Although land use was not a major focus in Chinatown during that period, nearby Little Tokyo had to contend with an infusion of corporate capital from Japan.⁶⁷ Leftist Asian American organizations, such as East Wind, fought for community participation to preserve senior, low-income housing against the incursion of Japanese corporate investment. They framed their struggle not only in terms of immediate needs for housing, but also as a fundamental struggle for self-determination of their land. Given the violent removal of Japanese from Little Tokyo during World War II, displacement via redevelopment was an added insult.⁶⁸

Chinatown activists who developed organizing skills, relationships and political acumen through the Asian American Movement brought those assets to bear during Chinatown redevelopment debates in the 1980s and 1990s. In a precursor of what was to come, in 1979, Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE) protested at City Hall after a 9-year-old boy and an elderly woman were killed after being struck by cars at the same unsafe crosswalk, in two separate accidents that occurred within the span of ten weeks. AAFE protested the indifference

⁶⁵ Pulido, Laura. *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006.

⁶⁶ Cho, Jenny and the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California. *Chinatown in Los Angeles*. Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009.

⁶⁷ Yoshimura, Evelyn. “Higher Rises Lower Depths.” *GIDRA*. 5:3 (March 1973), 11-13.

⁶⁸ Commentary from Kathy Masaoka, guest speaker in Professor David Yoo’s Fall 2012 course, “Asian American Movement,” at UCLA. Nov 28, 2011. See also: Toji, Dean and Karen Umemoto. “The Paradox of Dispersal: Ethnic Continuity and Community Development Among Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo.” *AAPI Nexus: Community Development Volume 1*(1): Summer/Fall 2003.

of their local councilperson, Gilbert Lindsay, and “also announced opposition to the proposed Chinatown Redevelopment Plan, which, it declared, would greatly increase the traffic flow in Chinatown and create a ‘tremendous hazard for the safety of the community.’”⁶⁹ One female AAFE member was dragged out of City Hall by police during this protest.

AAFE’s recognition of the impact the Chinatown Redevelopment Plan would bring proved prescient. In 1980, the CRA officially designated the 303-acre neighborhood a CRA project area, making it eligible for subsidized investment. Margaret Leo, the project manager for the Chinatown Redevelopment Project, said, “In Chinatown, one of the major reasons for redevelopment is to deal with severe overcrowding problems and a housing shortage.”⁷⁰ This overcrowding was partly the result of a 40% surge in the Chinatown residential population during the 1970s, after a wave Southeast Asians, including ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia, settled in the neighborhood.⁷¹ Views diverged on how to deal with overcrowding. Activists – many of whom were veterans of the Asian American Movement and had become lawyers, non-profit staff and government workers – prioritized the construction of low-income housing. Some of these activists, such as Don Toy and Sharon Lowe, served on the Chinatown Community Advisory Committee, which advised the CRA on development in Chinatown.

One of the advisory committee’s biggest successes was the 1983 construction of Cathay Manor, a \$23 million, sixteen-story building, funded partially by federal grants, that created 270 units of low-income housing for the elderly. Cathay Manor was the first low-income housing

⁶⁹ Baker, Erwin. “Woman Ejected from Council Meetings: 2 Traffic Deaths Spark Protest.” *Los Angeles Times*. December 19, 1979.

⁷⁰ Halstuk, Martin. “Growth Spurs Development: New Face Lift Saves Chinatown.” *Los Angeles Times*. May 13, 1984.

⁷¹ Ibid.

project in the neighborhood and the second Chinatown project that the CRA undertook.⁷² It not only provided much-needed housing to the neighborhood's elderly, it also set a precedent for low-income housing – although five years after the building opened, 200 seniors marched in public to protest its substandard living conditions and poor management.⁷³

In addition to Cathay Manor, another high profile project involved the fate of “Lot 45,” a 1.7 acre plot of land on New High Street owned by the County of L.A. The County wanted to turn the land into a revenue-generating parking lot. Individuals on the Chinatown Project Area Committee, which advised the CRA, spoke out against this plan, advocating instead of more affordable housing. In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Lewis Au, a committee member, said that the fate of Lot 45 – affordable housing or parking lot – would symbolize whether Chinatown would be for people or for profiteers.⁷⁴ However, the neighborhood itself was divided on the issue. Some business owners wanted a parking lot that could serve their customers. “You don’t take filet mignon and cook chop suey,” said one Chinatown restaurant owner, deriding the proposal for affordable housing.⁷⁵

In a series of events seemingly pulled from a soap opera, then-City Councilmember Gilbert Lindsay disbanded the advisory committee in February of 1984 after anti-parking lot members of the committee boycotted a meeting with the CRA. Citizen committees were mandatory only during the first three years after a neighborhood was designated a redevelopment area and by 1984, Chinatown had had its designation for four years. Although politically heavy-handed, the decision was upheld by City Council, which also authorized a replacement

⁷² Kaplan, Sam Hall. “Construction Set on Chinatown Complex: Cathay Manor Will Meet Affordable Housing, Social Services Needs.” *Los Angeles Times*. May 15, 1983.

⁷³ Spano, John. “Chinatown Seniors in Housing Protest March.” *Los Angeles Times*. September 28, 1988.

⁷⁴ McMillan, Penelope. “Chinatown Split On Parking Lot: Moneymaking Potential Vies With Need for Housing.” *Los Angeles Times*. February 21, 1984.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

committee, hand-selected by Councilmember Lindsay. Lindsay told the *Los Angeles Times*, “I was not getting satisfactory results from that [ousted] group. I thought the best thing to do was to dissolve it and have a new committee.”⁷⁶

In spite of these obstacles, activists were able to prolong the debate for another year. By 1985, there was discussion about turning Lot 45 into a Chinese cultural center.⁷⁷ The plan even gained support in the state legislature, which in September 1985 passed a resolution, introduced by Senator Art Torres and Assemblywoman Gloria Molina, urging the L.A. County Board of Supervisors to “approve a proposal for the construction of a Chinese American Community and Cultural Center and related facilities...” Despite this high-profile support, the plan never came to fruition, largely due to factionalism and in-group fighting among activists. Gloria Molina said of the planning committee for the cultural center, “In Chinatown, some people say, ‘If so-and-so is in charge, I don’t want to be involved.’ I don’t want to get myself or my staff involved in these divisions. Chinatown and its leaders should develop a clear vision of what they want.”⁷⁸

Compared to the land use struggles of the 1930s, during which Peter Soohoo led other Chinese American middle-class families to reestablish Chinatown, the redevelopment fights of the 1980s and 1990s had a more populist flavor. Individuals clashed as to the correct balance of parking, commercial, market-rate and affordable housing in the neighborhood. However, similar to the creation of New Chinatown, a handful of individual activists gained enduring public prominence through these fights. Among the most prominent are Don Toy and Sharon Lowe.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Holley, David. “Chinatown Backs Cultural Center: ‘Ignored’ Community Sends Petitions to Supervisors.” *Los Angeles Times*. May 31, 1985.

⁷⁸ Andersen, Patrick. “Molina: Lack of Consensus Blocks C-Town Cultural Center.” *Asian Week*. November 20, 1987.

The two worked together in the 1990s to fight a plan the expansion of the county jails.⁷⁹ In 1990, they helped to organize the Latino and Asian Coalition to Improve Our Neighborhoods (L.A. Action), a multiracial coalition of Chinatown and William Mead stakeholders. L.A. Action successfully overturned the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors' 20-year plan to double the capacity of the county jail system, in part by expanding the Men's Central Jail just east of Chinatown.⁸⁰ One of the coalition members, Sampson Chan of Lincoln Heights, said of the multi-racial coalition, "It's the best combination. The Latinos have the political experience and the Asians have money." Lowe said, "The Latinos are bringing us...experience, a tremendous amount of spirit and willingness to speak out. I am really looking forward to seeing that rub off on some of our Asians."⁸¹

In 1991, Lowe unsuccessfully ran for City Councilmember of District 1, which includes Chinatown. She ran largely on her reputation as a populist advocate hailing from Philadelphia's Chinatown; a candidate's profile in the *Los Angeles Times* described Lowe's "underdog activist style." She told the paper, "I am confrontational and I am demanding but I can also achieve."⁸² Meanwhile, Don Toy remained chairman of the Chinatown Community Advisory Board into the 1990s.⁸³ In 2003, Don Toy ran for (and was disqualified from) representing Chinatown on the Historic Cultural Neighborhood Council, which includes Little Tokyo, Chinatown, Olvera Street, Victor Heights and Solano Canyon.⁸⁴ He was accused of falsifying his address to qualify as a

⁷⁹ Simon, Richard. "Supervisors OK Plan to Double County Jail Capacity Over 20 Years." *Los Angeles Times*. April 25, 1990.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Merina, Victor and Louis Sahagun. "\$196.5-Million Jail Bond Issue Placed on Ballot." *Los Angeles Times*. August 10, 1988.

⁸² Ramos, George. "Council Race – It's a Matter of Emphasis: Sharon Lowe: The Chinatown attorney sounds Molina's populist themes and says hers is clearly a woman's agenda." *Los Angeles Times*. July 21, 1991.

⁸³ Toy, Don. "Platform: Keeping Chinatown a Liveable Place." *Los Angeles Times*. February 12, 1991.

⁸⁴ Pelisek, Christine. "Voting Fights; After a recount and voter-fraud investigation, Chinatown gets a neighborhood council." *Los Angeles Weekly*. February 6, 2003.

resident representative of Chinatown. Today, Don Toy sits on the neighborhood council as a resident of Victor Heights⁸⁵ and is the director of a nonprofit youth organization, Chinatown TeenPost.

The fractured leadership within Chinatown remains relevant to this day. During the recent debate over the construction of a Walmart in Chinatown, most of these long-time activists, now nearing retirement age, remained silent or spoke in favor of the Walmart.⁸⁶ This support for the world's largest retailer, one that has been heavily criticized by workers and labor advocates across the world, is a far cry from their radical roots in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸⁷ When academics, journalists and spokespeople need an authority on Los Angeles Chinatown, they regularly turn to the same handful of people – among them are Don Toy, Sharon Lowe, Munson Kwok, Eugene Moy, and descendents of the Soohoo family.⁸⁸

The concentration of power in the hands of a few people –all Chinese, middle-aged or older – may not be intentionally self-serving or autocratic, but neither does it reflect the actual composition of Chinatown residential and commercial tenants or workers. In order for current and future urban development to truly reflect people's needs, community members themselves must organize to voice their needs, pass desired policy, and monitor the implementation of that policy. The next section fleshes this out by examining the evolution of the Cornfields, from an

⁸⁵ Historic Cultural Neighborhood Council. "HCNC Board of Directors Roster." January 2, 2013. Access at: <http://www.hcncla.org/roster_index.html>

⁸⁶ I attended almost all public hearings on the Walmart issue and closely followed coverage of the issue in both English and Chinese media. For example, Sharon Lowe spoke in favor of Walmart at a public hearing in March 2012 at City Hall as well as on NPR. See: Watt, Brian. "Chinatown residents, neighbors and business people anticipate incoming Walmart." 89.3 KPCC, Southern California Public Radio. July 23, 2012. Access at: <<http://www.scpr.org/news/2012/07/23/33401/chinatown-residents-neighbors-and-business-people-/>>

⁸⁷ Watt, Brian. "Chinatown residents, neighbors and business people anticipate incoming Walmart." Southern California Public Radio: 89.3 KPCC. July 23, 2012.

⁸⁸ See, for example, KCET Departures Chinatown <<http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/chinatown/welcome-to-chinatown.html>> and Jan Lin's Chinatown oral history project, conducted in Spring 2006 by Occidental College students in partnership with the Chinese American Museum of Los Angeles and the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

abandoned piece of land, to a state park, and now to the centerpiece of the new “Arroyo Seco” neighborhood.

History of the Cornfields

In working-class, immigrant neighborhoods, struggles around land use and the environment are inextricable from issues of racial and economic justice. As Robin Kelley puts it, working class people of color must “challenge the problems of the whole city – together,” because “the battle for livable wages and fulfilling jobs is inseparable from the fight for decent housing and safe neighborhoods; the struggle to defuse cultural stereotypes...cannot be easily removed from the fights for environmental justice.”⁸⁹ These issues are inseparable because they reflect the everyday experiences and concerns of residents. The story of the Los Angeles State Historic Park, popularly known as “the Cornfields,” touches on all of these issues – environmental, racial and economic justice through the lens of land use.

Communities around the Cornfields

Most Angelenos know the L.A. State Historic Park as “the Cornfields.” Competing accounts attribute the nickname to the land’s 19th century crop, or to the corn that tumbled out of passing Southern Pacific trains.⁹⁰ Spread over 32 acres, the equivalent of approximately 25 football fields, the land is located on prime real estate, one mile north of Downtown L.A., and half a mile north of Union Station, a transit hub for commuters in Greater Los Angeles. The Cornfields is surrounded by four neighborhoods, one on each side. To its north is Lincoln Heights and to the south is Chinatown. Solano Canyon, a neighborhood of no more than four streets and four blocks, lies directly to the west of the Cornfields. To the east is Dogtown, home

⁸⁹ Kelley, Robin D.G. “The New Urban Working Class and Organized Labor.” *New Labor Forum*, No. 1 (1997): 7.

⁹⁰ Chatten-Brown, Jan and William F. Delvac. “A River Tale: The Cornfield to Taylor Yard: From Industrial Development Plans to State Parks’ Acquisition.” *California Land Use Reporter, Law & Policy* 12:1 (October 2002).

to William Mead Homes, Los Angeles' oldest public housing development, built on a former oil refinery.

These neighborhoods represent at least 70,000 residents across two zip codes (90012 and 90031). Census 2000 may underreport the number of residents because it might not take into consideration undocumented immigrants, who may be less apt to fill out Census information. Education and income in all neighborhoods is well below the citywide and county average. 28.3% of Chinatown and Solano Canyon residents, and 32.7% percent of Lincoln Heights residents live below the federal poverty line.⁹¹ 100% of the residents in the 450-unit William Mead Homes live below the federal poverty line.

The two largest neighborhoods are Chinatown and Lincoln Heights. Both are home to Cambodian residents, including ethnic Chinese from Cambodia. Chinatown residents are older, with a median age of 37. Over 90% of residents are renters and three-quarters is foreign-born, with 68% from China and Mexico. Lincoln Heights, in contrast, has a young population, with a median age of 27, and a large number of Vietnam-born refugees. Almost one in five (16.9%) Lincoln Heights residents were born in Vietnam, including a huge proportion of Chinese Vietnamese.⁹² Because of Lincoln Heights' proximity to Chinatown, it is easy to subsume the Chinese Vietnamese under the general category of "Chinese," but to do so risks overlooking the unique experiences and needs of this group. Unlike Chinese immigrants from China, the Chinese Vietnamese came to United States as refugees. Some lived in William Mead Homes, one of the

⁹¹ Azuma, Andrew Misako and Robert Gottlieb. "Connecting the Parks to the Community and Community to the Parks: A Community Economic and Environmental Benefit Assessment of the Los Angeles State Historic Park (Cornfield) and Rio de Los Angeles State Park (Taylor Yard)." Urban & Environmental Policy Institute, Occidental College. October 2006.

⁹² "Mapping L.A.: Chinatown Profile." *Los Angeles Times*. Access at: <<http://projects.latimes.com/mapping-la/neighborhoods/neighborhood/chinatown/>>

few public housing developments in Los Angeles to house a significant number of Asian Americans.⁹³

Given the small size of both Solano Canyon and Dogtown (William Mead), it is difficult to pinpoint the demographics of both neighborhoods. However, what is known are some of the challenges these neighborhoods have faced over the decades. In 2000, scandal erupted when William Mead residents discovered that the Housing Authority of Los Angeles (HACLA) had been sitting quiet for six years on the knowledge that their homes were poisoned with cancer-causing toxins. As early as 1994, HACLA had determined that the soil at William Mead contained polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, at 19 times the rate safe for human habitation.⁹⁴ At the time, William Mead housed about 1,500 residents, primarily Latino and Vietnamese families. Although HACLA fenced off a playground and warned residents against gardening in 1996,⁹⁵ complete soil remediation did not begin until 2000, after residents sued the agency. Currently, most William Mead residents are Latino and African American.⁹⁶

Solano Canyon sits at the foot of Dodger Stadium, whose construction, beginning in 1952, sparked the decade-long displacement of working-class Mexicans and Chicanos from Chavez Ravine. The City of Los Angeles claimed eminent domain to evict the residents, promising they could move back to Chavez Ravine after the construction of public housing. However, after the residents left, the City dropped the housing plans and, instead, subsidized the construction of Dodger Stadium. Solano Canyon residents have repeatedly, and only sometimes successfully, fought to maintain control of their neighborhood. In 1953, construction of the Pasadena Freeway

⁹³ Yokoi, Iris. "Optimistic Mead Residents to Celebrate." *Los Angeles Times*. 08 November 1992: Online.

⁹⁴ Dimitrov, Slobodan. "Home, Sweet Dump." *Los Angeles Weekly*. 19 January 2000: Online.

⁹⁵ "Toxic Cleanup Set at Housing Project," *Los Angeles Times*. 21 January 2000: News Summary, Online.

⁹⁶ Personal observation, from outreach.

(110) sliced the four-block neighborhood in half, and in 1999, residents filed a lawsuit against Caltrans to prevent expansion of the freeway.⁹⁷

Given the area's history of environmental injustice and multiple displacements, resident participation in community planning is imperative. At first glance, the campaign for the L.A. State Historic Park seems to have represented community perspectives. However, a deeper look at campaign actors, message, and strategy reveal a more complex picture.

The Campaign for the Los Angeles State Historic Park

Southern Pacific purchased the Cornfields in the late 1800s⁹⁸ and used the land as a freight depot and railroad switch yard until the late 1990s.⁹⁹ In 2001, Union Pacific¹⁰⁰ put the land up for sale, piquing the interest of then-Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan and City Councilmember Mike Hernandez, whose jurisdiction included the Cornfields. Eager to bring jobs and tax revenue to the city, they solicited one of the nation's largest real estate developers, Majestic Realty Co., to purchase the land.¹⁰¹

By 1997, Majestic was poised to purchase the land, intending an \$80 million project for four buildings, totaling 909,200 square feet. At least half of the buildings would be warehouses, and the rest would be light manufacturing, such as a food processing, which would create 1,000 new jobs. All of Majestic's proposed uses were within the scope of the Cornfields' industrial zoning, and Mayor Riordan went as far as to solicit \$12 million in federal loans from the

⁹⁷ Mozingo, Joe. "Residents Battle New Pasadena Freeway Lane." *Los Angeles Times*. 16 April 1999: Online.

⁹⁸ Sanchez, Jesus. "L.A.'s Cornfield Row: How Activists Prevailed." *Los Angeles Times*. 17 April 2001: Online.

⁹⁹ Chatten-Brown, Jan and William F. Delvac. "A River Tale: The Cornfield to Taylor Yard: From Industrial Development Plans to State Parks' Acquisition." *California Land Use Reporter, Law & Policy* 12:1 (October 2002).

¹⁰⁰ Union Pacific purchased and merged with Southern Pacific in 1996.

¹⁰¹ To get an idea of the company's size, Majestic Realty Co. was a partner in the construction of the Staples Center in Downtown Los Angeles.

Department of Housing and Urban Development.¹⁰² Flush with money and political power, Majestic's plan seemed like a done deal.

No one would have guessed that by 2001, the Chinatown Yards Alliance, a multiracial coalition of over 30 neighborhood, civil rights and environmental organizations, would sue Majestic, persuade the company to sell the land, and successfully raise \$30 million from the State of California to purchase the Cornfields. Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR) and its founder, Lewis MacAdams, was the driving force behind the Chinatown Yards Alliance. The organization had publicly floated the idea of a Cornfields Park as early as 1998,¹⁰³ and the name "Chinatown Yards Alliance" derived from FoLAR's coinage, "Chinatown Yards," in place of "Cornfields."

Key to the Alliance's success was its image as a grassroots, uniquely multi-racial coalition. I speculate that FoLAR started the coalition not only to build power in numbers, but to create an image that could captivate mainstream media.¹⁰⁴ The *Los Angeles Weekly* called the Chinatown Yards Alliance "astonishingly multiethnic"¹⁰⁵ and the *Los Angeles Times*, to highlight the coalition's diversity, characterized it as "ranging from the National Resources Defense Council to the Chinese Benevolent Association."¹⁰⁶

The emphasis on a multiracial alliance served several purposes. First, it garnered positive press. Secondly, it evoked the area's multiethnic history – over the past 200 years, the neighborhoods surrounding the Cornfields have been home to Mexican, Italian, German, Irish

¹⁰² Sanchez, Jesus. "L.A.'s Cornfield Row: How Activists Prevailed." *Los Angeles Times*. 17 April 2001: Online.

¹⁰³ Gumprecht, Blake. *The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2001.

¹⁰⁴ In 2001 alone, local newspapers, including the L.A. Times, L.A. Weekly, and now-defunct L.A. Independent, ran over a dozen articles and editorials on the Cornfields.

¹⁰⁵ Price, Jennifer. "In the Beginning: An Introduction to and Brief History of the River." *Los Angeles Weekly*. 16 August 2001: Online.

¹⁰⁶ Sanchez, Jesus. "L.A.'s Cornfield Row: How Activists Prevailed." *Los Angeles Times*. 17 April 2001: Online.

and Chinese immigrants.¹⁰⁷ Third, and importantly, the visibility of Asians, Latinos and African Americans bolstered the campaign's legal strategy.

The environmental law firm Chatten-Brown & Carstens (CBC) represented the Alliance against Majestic. CBC pursued two legal action on two fronts – an environmental complaint on the state level, and a civil rights complaint on the federal level.¹⁰⁸ The civil rights complaint argued that “the communities with the worst access to green space tend to be those with the lowest income levels and the highest concentrations of people of color.”¹⁰⁹ The average U.S. city has 10 acres of urban parkland per every 1,000 inhabitants, compared to 0.9 acres per every 1,000 in Los Angeles, and 0.3 in the neighborhoods surrounding the Cornfields.¹¹⁰

However, the Alliance knew that its legal strategy was limited. Even if it won the most immediate lawsuit, the environmental complaint, all that the win could do was require Majestic to perform an Environmental Impact Report, not guarantee a park. A media offensive, in which local residents themselves voiced support for a park, would be critical to the campaign's success. The Alliance convened public meetings for local residents to express their desires. At different points, community-driven blueprints included a middle school, farmers market, affordable housing, soccer fields, “a Shaolin institute for Chinese philosophy and martial arts...; a separate Chinese cultural center; and a museum to commemorate the Zanja Madre irrigation system.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ “Los Angeles State Historic Park: General Plan.” State Park and Recreation Commission of the California State Parks. June 10, 2005: 23.

¹⁰⁸ Chatten-Brown, Jan and William F. Delvac. “A River Tale: The Cornfield to Taylor Yard: From Industrial Development Plans to State Parks’ Acquisition.” *California Land Use Reporter, Law & Policy* 12:1 (October 2002).

¹⁰⁹ Brakke, Anahid, Robert Garcia and Seth H. Strongin. “Healthy Parks, Schools and Communities: Green Access and Equity for Los Angeles County 2011.” Los Angeles: The City Project, 2011.

¹¹⁰ “Cornfield of Dreams: A Resource Guide of Facts, Issues & Principles.” UCLA School of Public Affairs, 2000. [Available at <http://www.spsr.ucla.edu/dup/research/main.html>]

¹¹¹ Ramos, George. “New Cornfield Proposal Includes Canal and School.” *Los Angeles Times*. 20 April 2001.

At a city planning meeting in July 2000, a group of Chinese seniors held signs saying, “We need parks!” “We need schools!” and “No warehouses!”¹¹²

In addition to public demonstrations of local support for the park, the Alliance also made sure that the lawsuit’s plaintiffs represented a range of races and interests. FoLAR, NRDC and Environmental Defense represented environmentalists; the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Society represented the immigrant Chinese community; Concerned Citizens of South Central L.A. represented African Americans; and Northern Renaissance Corporation was a local, Asian-owned business.

Given the unique history of politics and racial formation in Los Angeles, the Alliance was not short on progressive Latino or African American advocates.¹¹³ However, the coalition also needed an Asian American advocate who could represent Chinatown, the alliance’s namesake.

From its inception, the Alliance never sought to be a grassroots organizing, base-building group. Like most coalitions, it relied on the convergence of pre-existing stakeholders to advance a specific, immediate need. The distinction between community organizing and advocacy is that organizing directly recruits, trains and mobilizes the people directly affected by an issue to collectively intervene on their own behalf, whereas advocacy involves an individual – usually a professional, such as a lawyer – representing those directly affected. Saul Alinsky is widely acknowledged as the “father of community organizing” for his work codifying the steps of organizing a community. Alinsky emphasized pragmatic and systematic steps to building power through the building of an organization rather than the empowerment of individuals.¹¹⁴ Over time,

¹¹² Barnett, Heather. “The Chinatown Cornfields: Including Environmental Benefits in Environmental Justice Struggles.” *Critical Planning* (Summer 2001): 50.

¹¹³ Pulido, Laura. *Black, Brown, Yellow & Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006.

¹¹⁴ Alinsky, Saul. *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York, NY: Vintage: 1971.

Alinsky's work has been critiqued, adapted and expanded, especially by organizers of color with a racial justice and gender analysis.¹¹⁵

These new insights – for example, the importance of an intersectional approach to organizing that also takes into account the historic and cultural context of communities – coupled with the systematic, power-building analysis of Alinsky, is relevant for Chinatown and its surrounding areas. Organizing is typically more time-intensive than advocacy because it relies on building relationships, whereas advocacy may only require testimony from one or two individuals, and otherwise, mass mobilization for press conferences and protests. Although organizing and advocacy are certainly interrelated, it is also important for analytical clarity to distinguish between the two approaches. The park campaign did not build a lasting, organized base although it was very successful in mobilizing media and political attention.

Chi Mui quickly emerged as the campaign's de facto spokesperson for Chinatown, and by extension, for all Asian residents. Chi Mui, who passed away in 2006, was born in Hong Kong and immigrated to New York Chinatown at age 10. During the Cornfields campaign, Chi Mui was the Chinatown field secretary for then-State Senator Richard Polanco. Additionally, he was the first Asian mayor of San Gabriel, past president of the L.A. Chinese American Citizens Alliance,¹¹⁶ founded Friends of Castelar Elementary,¹¹⁷ and was married to and later divorced Chinatown power player Sharon Lowe.

With his credibility as a bilingual immigrant and considerable political savvy, Chi Mui was critical to bringing an Asian American name and face to the campaign. He was able to

¹¹⁵ Sen, Rinku. *Stir It Up: Lessons in Community Organizing and Advocacy*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003.

¹¹⁶ Pierson, David. "Chi Mui, 53; Was the First Mayor of Asian Descent in San Gabriel's History." *Los Angeles Times*. 28 April 2006: Online.

¹¹⁷ Castelar Elementary is the only elementary school in Chinatown and is critical for disseminating information to Chinatown residents. FoLAR advertised community meetings by distributing flyers to parents of Castelar students, and the meetings were held at Castelar.

organize support from ethnic-specific organizations, like the Chinatown Service Center and the Elderly Indo-Chinese Association.

However, the Alliance's over-reliance on Chi Mui is also apparent. Chi Mui was strongly associated with Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans, and he spoke Cantonese, not Vietnamese or Khmer. Accordingly, none of the media coverage about the Cornfields mentions Southeast Asian residents, and the Alliance did not include any Vietnamese or Cambodian organizations, with the exception of the aforementioned Elderly Indo-Chinese Association, which is composed of Cantonese-speaking, ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia ("Indochina").

This is not to criticize the Alliance or Chi Mui, but to point out that a strong Asian American spokesperson is no replacement for inclusive and deeper community participation. This became even more apparent after the campaign ended, with a legal settlement in which Majestic sold the Cornfields to the State of California for \$30 million.

Aftermath of the L.A. State Historic Park Campaign

The real balance of power between residents, activists, and institutions became apparent in the campaign's aftermath. The park became the jurisdiction of California State Parks, and a 36-member Cornfields Advisory Committee, culled from more than 100 applicants, gave recommendations on park design in 2003. The Advisory Committee included key members of the Chinatown Yards Alliance, including MacAdams, Chi Mui, and plaintiffs from the lawsuit, as well as Sharon Lowe, representing First District Councilmember Ed Reyes's office. The Advisory Committee recommended that the park acknowledge the area's multicultural history, provide recreation, link to public transit, and take a historically and culturally appropriate name.¹¹⁸ Although the committee gave recommendations, real decision-making lay with a ten-

¹¹⁸ Cornfield State Park Advisory Committee. "A Unified Vision for Cornfield State Park: Recommendations to the Director of California State Parks." April 2003.

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 Kenyon, a white resident of Mt. Washington with a track record of supporting green space and preservation. The first proposal was to demolish Dodger Stadium and rebuild it on the Cornfields. The second proposal was also aimed at entertainment, with a combination of theaters and a museum. The final, and winning, proposal, by San Francisco-based Hargreaves Associates, combines a large public plaza, a lawn, and a section of wetlands.¹¹⁹

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.¹²⁰ This dissonance between promises and design becomes even starker upon examining the California State Parks’ fundraising appeal, pitching the Cornfields as a “world-class park,” whose “breathtaking, unobstructed view of the downtown skyline” can compete with New York’s Central Park and San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park.¹²¹ Activists argued about the fair balance between a recreational park for locals, and a passive park for tourists.

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. In 2005, Lauren Bon, of the philanthropist Annenberg family, created a large-scale art installation on the Cornfields. Private companies rent the land as a performance, and

¹¹⁹ Hymon, Steve. “Park Design Finalists Draw Cornfield with Bold Strokes.” *Los Angeles Times*. 15 October 2006.

¹²⁰ “Cornfield of Dreams: A Resource Guide of Facts, Issues & Principles.” UCLA School of Public Affairs, 2000.

¹²¹ “Changing Our World, Inc: Fundraising Case Studies.” <<http://www.changingourworld.com>>

festival venue. Recent uses range from raves and circuses to dog races and grilled cheese competitions.

The park campaign began, and drew its moral force, by invoking the material needs of a people of color and immigrants in a park-poor area. However, the park design concluded with an emphasis on the potential for a historic, central park. By that time, Alliance activists had moved on, and there was no authentic, long-term base of local residents to hold accountable the California State Parks, the State Parks Foundation, or the City of Los Angeles. Ten years after the campaign victory, the park sits largely unused.

What the Chinatown Yards Alliance accomplished is incredible. It successfully fought off a well-funded, government-backed real estate developer, and convinced a cash-strapped state to put up \$30 million for parkland. The campaign proved that the urban planning process can be democratic, and yield to citizen demands. However, the Alliance did not develop or prioritize grassroots, local leadership, and failed to represent residents' needs during the planning or implementation process.

Currently, the Cornfields have become the focal point and namesake of an ambitious redevelopment plan called the Cornfield Arroyo Seco Specific Plan, or CASP, for short. The CASP is the residential component of the Clean Tech Corridor and seeks to literally create a new neighborhood, the Arroyo Seco neighborhood, in the area directly east of the L.A. State Historic Park, which is currently populated by warehouses and families living in William Mead Homes. A city's general plan establishes broad guidelines and a vision for city planning, while the city's 35 community plans provide a finer grain of detail. A "specific plan" is even more detailed, laying out guidelines for regulation and implementation. Thus, the CASP, as a specific plan, provides a fairly detailed and concrete idea of what change is to come.

The L.A. Department of City Planning began drafting a plan for the CASP in 2007 and envisioned an environmentally-friendly, transit-oriented development with LEED-certified buildings. Located within walking distance of both the Chinatown Gold Line light rail station and Union Station, the CASP would be a model of sustainable development. In addition to being a part of the Clean Tech Corridor and a specific plan in and of itself, the CASP is a demonstration project of the Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan, which was approved in 2007. The master plan is a multi-billion dollar, multi-decade proposal to revamp the river and its surrounding neighborhoods, from the San Fernando Valley all the way south to Long Beach. The L.A. River runs through Northeast Los Angeles by Chinatown and Lincoln Heights. The CASP is a demonstration project of the overall river revitalization because if successful, it could be a model for other residential neighborhoods bordering the river.

The city released its draft Environmental Impact Report for the CASP in 2012 and finalized a proposal in January of 2013 after negotiation and lobbying by the public interest law organization Public Counsel and the youth organizing group Southeast Asian Community Alliance.¹²² City Council is expected to vote on and approve the plan in the summer of 2013.

Given the anti-affordable housing climate created by Geoffrey Palmer's lawsuit against the City of L.A., banning the city from requiring affordable housing construction, community advocates had limited tools at their disposal. Public Counsel and the Southeast Asian Community Alliance adopted the oft-used strategy of creating a menu of incentives, offering developers "bonuses" in exchange for affordable units. The *Los Angeles Times* praised the final plan, calling

¹²² I worked at the Southeast Asian Community Alliance as a staff organizer between 2008 and 2010, as the members prepared to embark on the CASP campaign. In 2011, I volunteered to canvass Lincoln Heights to speak about the redevelopment plan with residents and found that no one knew about the proposal.

it a “model for L.A. planning” and “an example of smart development.”¹²³ The paper lauds the coming together of diverse interest groups, from commercial developers, to city planning department, environmentalists and housing advocates. In terms of policy, the paper praises the CASP’s mixed-zoning strategy. Traditional zoning separates commercial, industrial and residential uses, whereas the CASP creates four zones: a “greenway zone, oriented toward enhancing the [Los Angeles] river as the neighborhood’s front yard,” an “urban village zone” focused on housing with some ground-floor retail, an “urban center zone” focused on retail, and “an urban innovation zone,” with flexible space geared toward anything from artists’ studios to light manufacturing.

While appreciating the hard-won accomplishment to pass the CASP and negotiate affordable housing incentives, it is also important to take a historical perspective. The Los Angeles State Historic Park was also lauded when it was created over a decade ago. A green field is better than a brownfield, but almost none of the promised uses – recreation, school, community center, etc. – have come to fruition. I spend the final part of this chapter drawing out the lessons from the park campaign to apply to future development, including the L.A. River Revitalization, the Clean Tech Corridor, and the CASP.

Lessons from the Cornfields

Three lessons can be drawn from the park campaign. The first lesson is that community members must represent their own interests or else will be spoken for by an “ethnic growth machine.” The roster of Chinatown power holders and decision makers has more or less remained the same for over 20 years, since the 1990s. Whether it is the board of the local

¹²³ Editorial. “A Model for L.A. Planning: the Cornfields Arroyo Seco Specific Plan is an example of smart development.” *Los Angeles Times*. January 31, 2013.

recreation center, the advisory team of the L.A. State Historic Park, or the neighborhood council – the names are the same. This phenomenon may be true across many communities and institutions. Poor people, immigrants, and refugees face barriers to organizing, such as immediate needs for work, survival and adaptation to a new country. However, in the absence of grassroots participation, an “ethnic growth machine” may emerge and make decisions on behalf of the community that affect these very survival issues. For example, real estate developer Kim Benjamin of Laeroc Partners, Inc. has become President not only of the Board of the Chinatown Business Improvement District, but also President of the Historic Cultural Neighborhood Council.

Mr. Benjamin is a real estate developer and major property owner –until the early 2000s, he owned the Little Joe’s Restaurant site at the corner of Broadway and College. He is neither a resident of Chinatown nor Chinese American, although this has not stopped him from becoming a key decision maker in Chinatown affairs. Institutions like the Chinatown Business Improvement District ostensibly promote the interests of the neighborhood’s many small business owners. In reality, the BID is funded by commercial property owners, who pay a portion of their property taxes into a collective fund. The interests of property owners and their lessees – small businesses – do not always align.¹²⁴

For example, in the 2012-2013 debate over a Walmart supermarket in Chinatown, many small business owners objected to the store, saying that it would be unfair competition. However, George Yu , executive director of the BID – and the man who called Chinatown the “original theme park” – repeatedly and strenuously spoke out in favor of Walmart. Currently, the Chinatown BID is one of the only organizations that attempts to represent community interests.

¹²⁴ Insight as to the funding structure and power balance in the Chinatown BID based on personal outreach to small business owners through volunteer activities with Chinatown Community for Equitable Development. See also: Kang, Connie. “Business Improvement Zone to Be Created in Chinatown.” *Los Angeles Times*. August 17, 2000.

It represents a legitimate but also very narrow perspective – not “businesses” broadly, as implied by its name, but commercial property owners, who may not be invested in public space or tenants rights. For example, during the campaign for the L.A. State Historic Park, George Yu allied with the Chinese Chamber of Commerce to support Majestic Realty. However, he recently praised the park for funding itself through private events. “The park needs to be activated. Without these [new concerts and] events there’s no way to maintain a working budget to keep the park open in this day and age.”¹²⁵

This relative vacuum of community leadership allows for the outsized influence of a minority, such as organized business interests like the BID and Chinese Chamber of Commerce, or individual power brokers like Sharon Lowe. Ordinary Chinatown residents may be easily misrepresented or effaced. It is incumbent on them to create a collective, informed voice to represent their own interests.

The second lesson is that alliances between environmentalists and economic justice groups are necessary to mitigate residential and commercial tenant displacement. The National Resources Defense Council provided legal assistance and research for the park campaign and Lewis MacAdams laid the political groundwork through years of activism on the Los Angeles River. The campaign drew strength from its strong media coverage as an “unlikely bedfellows” story, bringing people together across issues and race.

Beyond this more pragmatic approach to alliances is the very real interdependence of social and ecological concerns. As environmental justice advocates point out, people of color are more likely to bear the brunt of environmental burdens. Taking an international perspective, the consumption and energy expenditure in developed countries exact a toll on the rest of the world.

¹²⁵ Guzmán, Richard. “Downtown Park Is Increasingly a Major Concert Venue: In Effort to Pay the Bills, Park Amps Up Concerts.” *LA Downtown News*. May 18, 2012.

For example, China is home to some of the dirtiest, most polluted air in the world – in part due to heavy manufacturing to create products that we, in the United States and others, consume. The countries that bear the brunt of U.S. consumption are also home to many immigrant and refugee community members. Rather than seeing an alliance as purely strategic, it must also provide mutual education for the long-term betterment of the world.—. Community organizations can gain a stronger appreciation for ecological integrity, while environmentalists need a more multi-faceted understanding of immediate community needs, like housing, transportation and jobs.

A strong alliance recognizes the different strengths of coalition members rather than assuming their identical perspectives and capacities. A long-term and deep alliance between environmentalists and community groups is necessary to combine power and gain enough strength to influence development. If environmentalists go it alone, the result may be something like the gentrification of Downtown L.A., where historic preservationists (unwittingly or not) facilitated real estate speculation and displacement of poor tenants.

The final lesson is for community organizers to focus on governance and implementation, not only representation. Lewis MacAdams, the architect behind the park campaign, attributed the success in Chinatown to Chi Mui's leadership:

“We met with everybody we could meet in Chinatown. I mean, we were able to do things that no other group could have done, because Chi was fluent in Cantonese and Mandarin, and had been a community organizer in Chinatown for a couple of decades. He...was a very political person... just everybody knew him, and that allowed us access in a way that we would never be able to have. I mean Chinatown, you know, it's just like in the movie *Chinatown*. It's a different world in terms, you know, of who owns what, and how things are decided. You know, so but we were able to not only to better than neutralize those people, those organizations like the Chinese Benevolent Association. I mean, I'm not saying their name right, but basically the organization that represented all the family associations, the Tongs, and the people, you know, groups like that, that really did

have the power. I mean, Chinatown was kind of powerless relatively speaking, I mean in terms of the outside world.”¹²⁶

MacAdams was clueless as to how to navigate the Chinatown power structure.

Fortunately, Chi Mui was available and invested in the park campaign. However, it is unfair as well as undemocratic to expect one person to represent an entire community’s interests. Chi Mui was an effective spokesperson, as well as literal and figurative interpreter – someone who could secure support where necessary and defuse opposition, also where necessary. After Chi Mui became Mayor of San Gabriel in 2006, he had a whole set of other responsibilities to attend to.

This point is not intended as a critique of the park campaign or Chi Mui, but rather, a moment of reflection on the strengths and limitations of an individual spokesperson. During intense periods of campaigning, it may be difficult to set aside time to find, train and encourage new leadership. Thus, recruitment and building up community capacity is an ongoing duty of any organization invested in community organizing. Although it may be easier to attract new recruits during periods of active campaigning, it is the periods of “down time” that allow for intentional leadership development. By developing grassroots leadership through community organization (whether already existing or new), the community not only has a larger base of individuals to draw on as spokespeople, but also a larger group to govern local development and serve as watchdogs.

As Ellen Reese astutely points out in her study on welfare rights activism, policy implementation is policy making.¹²⁷ In the case of the Cornfields, there are multiple gaps between what was proposed in public hearings, what was chosen as a park design, and what the

¹²⁶ MacAdams, Lewis. Interview with Jane Collings. Environmental Activism in Los Angeles: Session 4. UCLA Library, Center for Oral History Research. February 29, 2008.

¹²⁷ Reese, Ellen. *They Say Cut Back, We Say Fight Back! Welfare Activism in an Era of Retrenchment*. New York, NY: Russell Sage, 2011.

park is today.¹²⁸ This can be seen as a disappointment or a learning opportunity – I choose the latter. If the redevelopment twists and turns of the 1980s and 1990s demonstrate anything, it is that plans, votes and even committees can change, be disbanded, and reformed. Residents and community organizing groups should of course learn all policies and regulatory processes relevant to them – but they should also feel empowered to navigate and even pioneer innovation within these processes. Even after the CASP is approved, community members must continue to monitor its implementation and suggest amendments where necessary. This level of deep participation requires a different sort of politics, moving beyond what Grace Lee Boggs calls “protest organizing” to “visionary organizing,”¹²⁹ in which communities acknowledge their responsibility in governing and solving their own problems.

¹²⁸ The park will be closed for a year and re-opened in 2014. See: “Los Angeles State Historic Park to Close for a Year.” *L.A. Downtown News*. April 25, 2013.

¹²⁹ Boggs, Grace Lee. *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-first Century*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011.

CONCLUSION

This research began with a very straight-forward question. I used to live in Solano Canyon, on the west side of the Cornfields. On summer afternoons, people began setting up concert equipment, lighting and stage in the park. Police would use yellow emergency tape to block off the fences on Broadway and a few hours later, concerts would begin. Almost every weekend in the summer, there were music concerts that ran on past midnight. I lived literally across from the park, less than a quarter of a mile, up on a hill. The sound reverberated for hours. On one hand, I liked the free show (however cordoned off). I could just cross the street and sit on the hill to watch shows that other people bought \$40 tickets to attend. On the other hand, it was a huge sound nuisance. I could not imagine a similar scene happening across the city in West L.A. Neighborhoods would complain to the city.

Over time, I became increasingly curious about this big plot of land that appeared, for all intents and purposes, to be a concert venue. I learned about the impressive activism and wide-ranging coalition that banded together to create the park. I became more invested in the neighborhood and angry that huge-scale development was in the works, without consciousness or decision-making from people who would be most affected. This MA thesis was intended to better understand historic struggles over land use, and draw lessons from past campaigns that can be applied to the present and future.

Currently, the City of Los Angeles has several interconnected and ambitious plans in the works. The Los Angeles River Revitalization Plan seeks to restore the Los Angeles River, including making it a flowing, functional river, with a mix of housing and retail along the riverfront, and creating tourism, like rafting and other recreation, based on the river. Given

Chinatown and Lincoln Heights' proximity to the river, any changes and investment in the river will also affect these neighborhoods.

Alongside the aim of ecological restoration and commercial/residential investment in the river, the City has another green-related initiative: the Clean Tech Corridor. The City's plan to tackle the de-industrialization of Los Angeles is to reinvent Los Angeles as a greener, Southern California version of Silicon Valley. The Clean Tech Corridor extends from Little Tokyo in the south through Lincoln Heights in the north and includes an array of subsidies and commercial/academic partnerships to attract a "clean technology" industry in Downtown L.A. and adjacent neighborhoods.¹³⁰ The Arroyo Seco neighborhood is a "green neighborhood" and transit-oriented development that ideally will house these new "clean tech" workers. The La Kretz Innovation Campus, slated to open in summer of 2013 in the newly-popular "Arts District,"¹³¹ supports clean technology research, while manufacturing of these new technologies will happen in the Clean Tech Manufacturing Center.

As these plans unfold – and the La Kretz Innovation Campus, as well as the approved-CASP, are set to debut this summer – it is imperative that community members build the capacity to analyze potential impact and participate in decision-making. Just as historic preservationists perhaps unintentionally facilitated the gentrification of Downtown L.A., it is all too possible that corporate developers and environmentalists are championing clean technology and new industry without considering the impact on existing community. This can include

¹³⁰ Clean Tech Los Angeles. <<http://www.cleantechlosangeles.org/corridor/>>

¹³¹ The Arts District, located just east of Little Tokyo, was a mix of single-room occupancy and industrial buildings that has seen an infusion of commercial real estate investment since the mid 1990s. See, for example: Vincent, Roger. "Gaining Traction: Trendy shops, eateries and offices transform downtown L.A.'s art district." *Los Angeles Times*. January 20, 2013.

negative impact, such as residential displacement, but also simply missed opportunity, such as targeted job training and placement in “clean tech” industries for local residents.

Ultimately, planning struggles do not only concern the physical setting of a neighborhood, but the very narrative of a community – who is included, whose interests should be considered, and whose wishes should be actualized. Communities have both the responsibility and opportunity to organize themselves for socially and economically just development.

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