

Linking Race, the Value of Land and the Value of Life

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Abstract:

This article works to more fully integrate critical theories of race and privilege with political economy to explore the connections between segregation, property values and violence in U.S. cities. Through the prism of Los Angeles, it exposes the economic mechanisms and history of violent struggle by which whiteness became, and remains, an intrinsic component of high land values. The resulting articulations of racial ideologies and geography, connecting circuits of real estate capital to common sense and racialised constructions of 'community', have helped drive L.A.'s fragmented and unsustainable form and increasing privatisation. They also lie at the root of violence inflicted upon those excluded, both ideologically and physically, from white constructions of community. This dynamic is key for theorising in support of ongoing justice struggles to create safe and sustainable cities for all.

Keywords:

Segregation, racism, white privilege, hegemony, political economy, Los Angeles

For all the localisms, particularities, variegations and specificities of U.S cities, there is one aspect of urban life that has remained constant despite struggle and numerous victories. This is segregation (Massey and Denton, 1993). For those on the wrong side of its boundaries, it results in what are life-constraining and too often death-dealing differences in terms of access to jobs, transportation, health care, healthy food, healthy air, healthy and secure homes, green spaces, quality education, insurance, bank accounts, networks, personal wealth, the prospect for happiness and a full life having never seen the inside of a prison wall (Alexander, 2013; Sharkey, 2008). This list can be extended almost indefinitely through the intersections of social, environmental, economic and spatial injustices. This is not to say that there is no vibrancy or community, happiness or full life in the ghetto, but that such pockets are created through fierce love, determination and struggle against a weight of

exploitation, racism and the decay of the urban and social fabric. In L.A., once vibrant neighbourhoods have been essentially cut off from resources, and submerged beneath or split into two by massive freeways to allow people from the suburbs to travel above and through poverty and disinvestment at speed. This signals a society willing to resign itself to their slow death without caring for the fate of their inhabitants. The question of who is to blame continues to be fought in the media.

Too often these debates are conducted as if L.A.'s segregation, like almost all U.S. cities, had not developed through a long history of race restrictions, white mobs, burning crosses, harassment, bombings, racist real estate appraisal guidelines, redlining and racialised steering practices. Many of these practices continue into the present, just as their consequences continue to be etched in decaying concrete and opportunities denied (Bell, 2007). They clearly show the curious reality that one human being's money has – for centuries and across the whole of the United States – not been as good as another's when it comes to buying and occupying a home. Capitalist logics contain no intrinsic reason why race should play any role at all in efforts to generate profits through the buying and selling of land, nor why in the US context, a determinant of land value should ever have to come to be the race of its occupants. This article explores the mechanisms by which they have.

Cedric Robinson (1983) outlines the ways in which orthodox Marxist theories of capitalist development postulated that by its own internal logics, capitalism itself would destroy not only racial distinctions, but all differentiating characteristics of the proletariat. For many on the left, a focus on race worked counter to progress and actually hindered the movement to unite the working classes. It is often simply seen as a complicating but ultimately marginal factor to the city's development with ghettoisation as an unfortunate side effect (for further analysis see HoSang et al,

2013; Omi and Winant, 1994; Roberts and Mahtani, 2010). Yet capitalism has grown through the creation and exploitation of racial divisions, they are intrinsic to it rather than accidental (see Roediger (2008) and Robinson (1983) among others). Thus, in the words of Stuart Hall, ‘Capital reproduces the class, including its internal contradictions, as a whole – structured by race’, and these divisions remain ‘the site of capital’s continuing hegemony over it’ (1980, p. 341).

White supremacy emerged to justify white rights to property – both slaves and land (Roediger, 2008; Robinson, 1983), and this is as visible in the North of the US as it is in the South. California was annexed by conquest in 1848, vast properties taken over from Mexican settlers by Anglos through a process of legal and extra-legal methods and continued acts of genocide against a fast shrinking Native American population (McWilliams, 1946). Anglos justified seizure of the best lands – in terms of agricultural fertility and mineral wealth – through discourses of manifest destiny based upon Anglo-Saxon supremacy, pushing native and immigrant groups to marginal areas (Almaguer, 1994; McWilliams, 1946). An L.A. Chamber of Commerce article titled ‘The Los Angeles of Tomorrow’ encapsulated their vision: ‘For centuries, the Anglo-Saxon race has been marching westward. It is now on the shores of the Pacific. It can go no farther. The apex of this movement is Los Angeles County’ (Davis, 2000, pp. 73-74).

While definitions of prime and marginal lands have clearly shifted over time, the fact remains that maintenance of land as an asset of the Anglo-Saxon race has remained constant. Even as Ed Soja writes of Los Angeles as a ‘Cosmopolis’, claiming a ‘derigidifying of the social boundaries of class, race and income grouping’ (1996, 445), Ethington, Frey & Myers summarise their findings on the nature of its segregation:

1. Whites have retreated to a periphery and the other principal ethnic groups are less and less likely to have them as neighbors.
2. Blacks are the most isolated racial group; other racial groups have remained highly unlikely to have them as neighbors.
3. Hispanics and Asians are becoming more isolated even as they cause the county as a whole to be more diverse (2001: 1)

They note that whites alone ‘had the freedom to settle wherever their wealth enables them to purchase a home. They have used that freedom to flee the growing diversity of the metropolis, either by moving out of the county completely or by retreating to its edges’ (2001, p. 2). An earlier mapping of L.A. through 1994 showed how home values corresponded almost exactly with this retreat, with peoples of colour consistently hemmed into the ‘slow-growth, low opportunity core’ (Ethington, 2000: 39).

Lefebvre (1996: 109) argues that one definition of the city is ‘as a projection of society on the ground’; it is a way to see society itself mapped into the urban, but it is much more than a projection. The geographical sedimentation of economic, political, and ideological structures itself becomes constitutive of policies and ideologies (1991, 1996). What, then, does it mean that the drive towards segregation has remained so powerful? As an answer, this article builds a framework to incorporate both the insights of political economy and cultural and critical race theory. It explores how white supremacy has been built into definitions of U.S. land values and how this has articulated with the form of the city and ideas of community and belonging. It argues that the resulting physical mapping of segregated communities sits in dialectical relation both to the mental mappings of community and to the maintenance of a privileged white hegemony through defence of white space.

The illustrative examples from L.A.’s history presented here come first from thematic analysis of articles from two of L.A.’s African-American newspapers, *The*

California Eagle (referenced as *CE*) and the *Sentinel* from 1914 to 1963, mapping every incident of white violence against African Americans moving into their neighbourhoods, as well as documenting the rhetoric of neighbourhood groups from local white newspapers whose archives have not been preserved. These dynamics are compared to those currently visible through the gentrification of skid row, uncovered through interviews and examining newspaper and email archives in research carried out between 2011 and 2014. The process of exploring continuities between past and present and the nature of the historical sources throws into high relief the segregation between Black and white, which is used to illuminate the articulations of racial ideologies, land values, and ideas of community. LA has always been a city of diverse and shifting racial hierarchies. The hope is that a focus on the groups at the top and the bottom of this hierarchy will deepen spatial understandings of the whole. Space constraints mean that while such hierarchies are marked here, their analysis is not fully developed.¹ This is also true of the intersections of race, gender and class, where a focus on race does not mean to discount the intersectionality at play. Women's traditional roles in defining and defending the home, as well as the twinned dynamic of white male violence against women of colour and white male fears of miscegenation and violent defence of white women play a key part in the dynamics discussed here, and are explored more fully elsewhere.²

The Political Economy of Uneven Development

David Harvey's *Limits of Capital* (2007, see also Harvey 1973, 1985) develops a comprehensive theory of property and rent (briefly summarised here in

¹ For more on racial hierarchies see among others Almaguer (1994), Kurashige (2008) and Pulido (2006, 2000).

² Gibbons, forthcoming.

order to build on it), showing how property investment and development have been a key solution to overaccumulation -- an intrinsic contradiction of capitalism. The increasing centrality of real estate in the U.S. and global economies emerges from a function of the 'spatial fix', which allows surplus value to be channelled away from direct production and into a secondary circuit of capital – the built environment.

Lefebvre writes:

The city, or what remains of it or what it will become, is better suited than it has ever been before for the accumulation of capital; that is, the accumulation, realization, and distribution of surplus value (2003: 35).

Converted into a purely financial instrument, land is treated as nothing more than a commodity at this scale, its rent an asset available to be traded on the worldwide market and subject to global investment demands rather than local needs. Thus a global force organised around the need to maximise profit comes to operate with devastating effect on a very local and personal level – that of the neighbourhood and the home. This development is cyclical and uneven, maximising profits through development in one place only to move on to the next.

Neil Smith's work (1982, 1992, 1996) further develops how this spatial fix has been a primary mover both of suburbanisation and the return of capital to the inner cities in processes of gentrification. He theorises the process of devalorisation of inner city areas as a function primarily of time, 'an obvious sequence of transitions in the tenure arrangements, occupancy, and physical condition of properties in a neighborhood', a 'downward sequence' (Smith, 1982: 147). The movement of capital to the suburbs entails its abandonment of the inner city, leaving neighbourhoods to decay to the point that ground rent dependent on the use of the land is far less than the ground rent that could be collected if that land use were to change. This is the origin of the rent gap: 'When, and only when, this rent gap between actual and potential

ground rent becomes sufficiently large, redevelopment and rehabilitation into new land uses becomes a profitable prospect, and capital begins to flow back into the inner city market' (1982: 149). Clearly Smith makes some assumptions about the nature of transitions in occupancy in this temporal downward sequence, but they remain vague for the most part. Smith writes 'the question of where this capital flooding into the built environment will locate has no automatic answer' (1982: 150).

This is in spite of the fact that Smith came closer to an understanding of how race has been central in shaping these transitions through his case studies, particularly through his work on the revanchist city:

This revanchist antiurbanism represents a reaction against the supposed 'theft' of the city, a desperate defense of a challenged phalanx of privileges, cloaked in the populist language of civic morality, family values and neighbourhood security. More than anything the revanchist city expresses a race/class/gender terror felt by middle- and ruling-class whites who are suddenly stuck in place by a ravaged property market, the threat and reality of unemployment, the decimation of social services, and the emergence of minority and immigrant groups... (1996: 211)

The connections between place and white privilege are here brought forward through recognition of the fear of loss of privilege, but why that automatic connection between the race/class/gender terror, the advent of 'minority and immigrant groups' and falling property values? Full explanation of this dynamic remains absent, even though it lies at the very heart of both the tragedy of low income neighbourhoods of colour fighting resource flight and a constellation of geographically situated oppressions, as well as the mass displacement in these neighbourhoods once investment returns to redevelop and rebuild.

It is in the dialectic between the use value and exchange value of land that the nexus lies between (racial) ideologies, economics, and politics as they articulate with the physical form of the city. Sociologists John H. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch (1987) point to the nature of land as a most idiosyncratic commodity, 'place is not a

discreet element, like a toy or even food; the precise conditions of its use determines how other elements, including other commodities will be used' (1987: 18). People forge material, spiritual, and psychological connections with place as well as with the people and locations surrounding them through common experience created by a shared geography. It shapes their daily lives, who can help them get ahead, their chances for education and connections to culture. Logan and Molotch recognize that neighbourhoods 'organize life chances in the same sense as do the more familiar dimensions of caste and class' (1987: 19), but never explore how these dimensions intersect.

Property ownership ensures that this understanding of use value and its impact on life pathways and opportunities always sits alongside its exchange value – for most, a home is also seen as a financial asset. Logan and Molotch argue that the drive behind constant urban expansion and development at larger scales is the nature of place as 'a market commodity that can produce wealth and power for its owners' – the more development, the more wealth is generated and the city becomes a 'growth machine. One that can increase aggregate rents and trap related wealth' (1987: 50). The generation of profit through the urban form becomes paramount in local politics, and the power of developers creating the maximum exchange value is familiar in its ability to often, not always, trump the use values of homeowners. But again Logan and Molotch face the question raised by Smith (1982) of where and how this capital flooding into the development of the built environment will locate and what it will build, though their own arguments make part of the answer obvious – where a rent gap exists and the homeowners with the least amount of power, wealth and status are to be found.

The second half of the answer also lies in their theorisation of land's use value. This raises some flags for critical race analysis, particularly as racism and the role it plays in dynamics such as white flight are casually enough mentioned that they become a minor, perhaps exceptional, phenomenon. Thus, while recognising the uniqueness of land as a commodity and that its exchange value is at least in some part socially constructed, they miss two important processes: first, the ways in which racial ideologies have been key in the construction of value through years of homeowner-protected racially restrictive neighbourhoods along with professional and governmental policies prioritising a homogenous white area as the most significant factor in the appraisal of land values; and second, how a racialised property market has produced inequalities of wealth and power through its facilitation of the social reproduction of white privilege, as well as the wealth and power it generates as an asset for whites through market exchange.

In defending and further explaining the growth machine concept, Molotch later writes: 'I avoid social problems, like race and violent crime, which although often euphemistically termed "urban," lack central theoretic relation to place' (1993: 31). Seeing race as simply a 'social problem' makes it impossible to see the ways in which constructions of race have organised space and been fundamental to constructions of both its use and exchange values in North American cities. This theorisation of land values, however, allows us to see how racial ideologies become co-constitutive of urban space through the way in which they inform how value is understood and appraised in this drive to create wealth through development. Land structures experience, shapes lives (and deaths), opens up opportunities or closes them down for its occupants. Its use value is thus as important in achieving and maintaining wealth and privilege as its exchange value.

A Short History of Land values, Racial Ideologies and Hegemony

Bringing critical race theory together with political economy extends the explanatory power of both in understanding the articulation of the urban form and constructions of race. They are particularly necessary in trying to understand the form Los Angeles has taken, and the violence that has been mobilized to protect white space, both by the state and by white grassroots groups.

That race is socially constructed is fundamental. While race has no essence, racism does, and as Ruth Gilmore states so eloquently, it is a violent one: ‘Racism is a practice of abstraction, a death-dealing displacement of difference within hierarchies...’ (2002, p. 16). A handful of critical geographers have long been arguing that this abstraction is not only socially, but also spatially, constructed and this construction in turn is constitutive of space (Gilmore 2002, Hart 2002, Kobayashi and Peake 2000, Peake and Kobayashi 2002, Price 2010, Pulido 2000, 2006).

Stuart Hall theorises hegemony as a series of conjunctures, particular articulations of the political, economic and ideological that are born of a ‘process of social reproduction as continuous and contradictory – the very opposite of a functional achievement’ (1988, p. 54). Integrating a spatial analysis allows for the links between economic structures, politics, ideologies, and space to be drawn and redrawn over time with final determinism granted to none, charting changing hegemonies and identifying strategic points of weakness for concrete and strategic oppositional action. This focus on process, change, and resistance in the creation of a complex hegemonic structure is key to a more profound understanding of how strategies maintaining white domination and privilege through segregation have

changed in relation to struggle and material spatial change, and how they have articulated with the demands of capital and the ideologies and the practices of privatisation that have also developed through this process.

Through tracing the multiple violences employed to preserve the hegemony of white privilege through white neighbourhoods, this paper shows that the racial divisions in the US have resulted in one community privileged as the object of efforts to build consent. The very investment in maintaining racially pure geographic communities has articulated with common-sense equations of ‘American’ with white skin among a majority of whites in ways that stretch back to days of slavery and genocide, and that transcend class alliances to maintain white hegemony. This common sense is encoded not just in ideology but also in space, and is key to the dynamic of privileging whites while other communities continue to be segregated and subjected to hegemony’s more intensive forms of physical coercion. Just as the value of money can sometimes depend on the colour of one’s skin when it comes time to buy a home, so, too, certain lives have not been treated as of equal value in the defence of white property and privilege. This explains the overpowering role of coercion made visible by the prominent role that violence has played in maintaining the boundaries of race and neighbourhood space subject to a long war of position, and tragically brought to visible life in death after death of men, women and children of colour at the hands of security forces and vigilantes. It continues to be the key dynamic in the return of capital to communities of colour.

This wider callousness towards life has also been widely documented by important work carried out by grassroots groups involved in struggles for social and environmental justice, as well as the academic work that has helped theorise and support that struggle on the spatialities of white privilege and pollution (Bullard,

2007; powell, 2007). In particular, Laura Pulido's work on L.A. brings together critical race and geography studies, connecting a strong spatial understanding with theories of white privilege and investment. She writes:

White privilege, as a form of racism, is spatially expressed, indeed it is partially contingent upon a particular set of spatial arrangements. Take the case of neighborhoods. The full exploitation of white privilege requires the production of places with a very high proportion of white people (Pulido, 2000, p. 16).

White neighbourhoods are amenity rich, with good schools, clean air, parks, quality food markets – things absent from other neighbourhoods. Ultimately the exclusion of peoples of colour from physical communities and their resources articulates with their exclusion from social constructions of community and its rights and privileges. Both have been subjects of continual struggle, and communities of colour have won a number of significant victories yet still have not succeeded in bringing the walls down. LA embodies the way that these dynamics have shaped fragmented, sprawling cities of desperate racial and class inequality. Its very form, unsustainable and unworkable though it is in every other sense, does work to preserve white privilege and common sense ideas founded in lived experience of 'us' and 'them'.

Los Angeles

The foundation of the connection between race and land's market value lies in a history of genocide and conquest – white supremacy's driving impulses have been refined in more recent times as legal instruments developed to preserve white areas as white into perpetuity. California politicians pioneered protective zoning to protect white spaces, although the state court struck down their attempts to use zoning to limit Chinese residence in 1892 (Jones-Correa, 2000-2001). Unable to thus enforce racial

restrictions through city regulations, property owners turned to covenants attached to property deeds. The first such covenant probably dated from 1900; it restricted property against ‘sales or transfers to Negroes or Mongolians or persons of Asiatic blood’ (Tylor, 1945). Restrictive covenants became widespread; through their use lawyer Loren Miller (1955) estimated that between 1934 and 1950, 98% of all new suburban tracts in LA were for whites only.

The institutionalisation of racial criteria – and Jim Crow – into the appraisal of properties for federal government subsidies and mortgage finance through the 1930s has been well documented. It enshrined race as perhaps *the* primary factor in official evaluations of land’s exchange value (Freund, 2007). The federal government formed the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) in 1933 in response to the mass foreclosure of the Great Depression. Its guidelines for appraisal were used to colour code urban neighbourhoods across the country with green most desirable and red least:

Green areas are “hot spots” ... In nearly all instances they are the new well planned sections of the city ... They are homogeneous; in demand ...

Red areas ... are characterized by detrimental influences in a pronounced degree, undesirable population or infiltration of it ... The areas are broader than the so-called slum districts. (Testbed for the Redlining Archives of California’s Exclusionary Spaces, n.d.).

While the HOLC itself made loans to homeowners across all colour designations, its successor the Federal Housing Association (FHA) restricted most loans to green or blue areas, i.e. new builds with white owners (Freund, 2007). The FHA’s 1936 underwriting manual states:

If a neighborhood is to retain stability it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes. A change in social or racial occupancy generally leads to instability and a reduction in values. (United States Federal Housing Administration, April, 1936, p. 233).

Banks used these maps and followed these patterns, and such ‘redlining’ practices continue today, long past the discarding of such openly racist rhetoric (Bell, 2007).

These were legal and policy definitions of value set up to create and protect white-only communities, and they were defended on the levels of law and policy, the regulatory framework of the real estate profession, and by homeowners. Important to remember is that realtors and developers key to the formation of policy themselves lived in white neighbourhoods and were members of homeowner associations to protect their own homes and families; there were no solid boundaries between use and exchange value, personal and professional ‘ethics’ (Gibbons, 2014).

Figure 1-1 helps to better understand the connections between historical struggle against these practices and current patterns of occupation. The colour blocks show concentrations of the African American population from 1890 to 2010. Through my research I have developed an extensive (though by no means complete) database of addresses where racial incidents centred on property disputes took place, which I have titled ‘contested spaces’. Each light blue circle represents an African-American family who encountered white resistance to their presence, ranging from lawsuits to threats, and from burning crosses to bomb attacks. Each blue line represents what I call a ‘racial faultline’, or recognized boundary between white and black neighbourhoods as these have changed over time. This series of maps shows in simplified form how African Americans have remained highly concentrated in Los Angeles, and adjacent to or occupying many of the same areas that they have fought for historically. The highest concentration, and emblematic of how incarceration has increasingly been used to control the African American population, lies just north of downtown in a major prison complex.

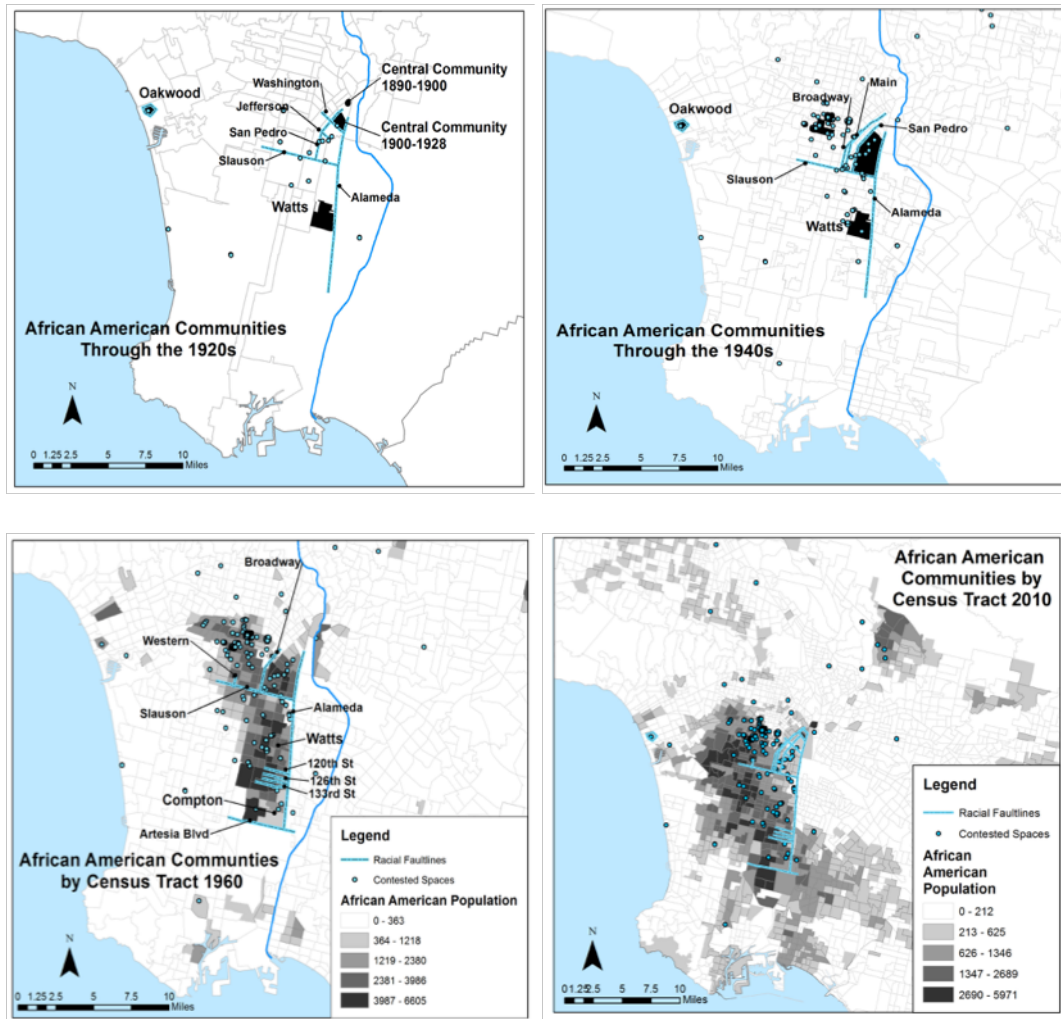


FIGURE 1 L.A.'S AFRICAN AMERICAN POPULATION FROM 1890-2010, MAPPED AGAINST POINTS OF CONTESTATION AND SHOWING SHIFTING RACIAL FAULTLINES (GIBBONS, 2014)

White neighbourhood associations formed to police these white boundaries and enforce racial covenants. Their discourses of justification illustrate perfectly how preservation of use values and social privilege afforded by schools and amenities sat alongside the preservation of property values. This is recorded from the Fremont Improvement Association:

Since time began and people found it necessary to associate or live together, organization for political and economic convenience has been necessary if community progress and stability are to be maintained.

The Fremont Improvement Association is organized for the general welfare of the district radiating from the wonderful Fremont High School,

particularly south of Slauson from Hooper to Main Street. Much has been accomplished, but much must yet be accomplished.

The integrity of our homes is endangered. We must preserve the schools and district for our own race. The safe guarding of all property against the encroachment of the Negro and Mongolian races into the district is our most urgent work. Your co-operation and membership in the Association is necessary – it is your Association – you owe it to yourself and the community in which you are a vital part to join and give all possible assistance in keeping your district WHITE" (CE 10 December 1926).

In 1940 Fremont High School would host a bonfire and symbolic lynching along with distribution of a vile handwritten flyer titled 'No Niggers' (Bass, 1960). Organising themselves neighbourhood by neighbourhood to restrict their properties, whites clearly saw themselves as engaged in a kind of war to preserve their rights through these years. An announcement from the president of the Citizens and Taxpayers Protective League, Inc. of the West Jefferson District makes this very clear:

Prominent citizens have contributed their time and money towards this cause, which has been the most difficult problem of the West Jefferson district...

At this time the battle between members of the Caucasian race and the Ethiopians residing in the district waged subtly but nevertheless furiously. Strange marks and crosses appeared on the doors and on sidewalks in front of residences occupied by whites. Both races were guilty of making threats to the other in a desperate effort to make the neighbourhood a one race community (CE 2 September 1927).

Local homeowner efforts were supported at a city-wide level, again the *California Eagle* quotes from the *Pasadena Independent* dated October 14, 1939:

Opening gun in a city-wide campaign to end racial conflict in Pasadena was fired yesterday when the board of directors of the Chamber of Commerce endorsed 100 per cent the race Restriction program of the Pasadena Improvement Association.

The Chamber's action follows on the heels of similar moves by virtually every area community in the west end of the San Gabriel Valley... (CE 19 October 1939).

During WWII, a strong civil rights movement with support from the NAACP and neighbourhood organising were able to take advantage of the country's fight

against fascism and desired international role as a defender of democracy to bring an end to covenants through two key cases in the Supreme Court in 1948 and 1954 (Gibbons, 2014). The African-American community took advantage of this crack in the walls of white hegemony to expand beyond its earlier racial boundaries in L.A. Unable to turn to a legal solution, white homeowner associations continued to organise themselves around other ways to preserve white spatial hegemony. The words of just one of these groups exposes how this struggle solidified identity both as a member of a certain race and a certain community:

This experience has drawn us much closer together in Leimert Park. We had to buy up one piece of property and we're going to sue the person who sold it to a Negro. There are a lot of constructive things that we can do now that we are organized... We chose the name Neighborly Endeavors, Inc. because we realize that it is only through loving our neighbors that we are going to be able to protect our community (*JAF* Box 76).

Such 'civilised' responses were kept in minutes, but L.A. had its share of bombings, arson attacks, shootings, cross-burnings and everyday aggressions (Gibbons, 2014). Meanwhile, the California Real Estate Association pledged itself to do everything possible to maintain white neighbourhoods, publishing the following statement:

The magnitude of the economic and social loss with which we are confronted is appalling. The widespread depreciation in value of homes, the instability of home ownership, and the discouragement of construction and acquisition of homes are conditions that menace the family life of the nation as we have enjoyed it in the past. Additionally, the insistence of some Negroes upon moving into areas previously restricted exclusively to the occupancy of Caucasians will necessarily create racial tensions and antagonisms and do much harm to our nation's social structure. (*California Real Estate Magazine* September 1948).

A real estate textbook published in 1949 quotes extensively from a Glendale real estate broker in describing the process to be followed for maintaining neighbourhoods white:

The president of a real estate board can arrange for a meeting of a small group of persons interested in helping to solve this problem locally. To this meeting invite persons representing each of such groups as: the real estate board, real estate brokers not members of the board, the local lending agencies, the chamber of commerce, the merchants association, and the planning commission. At this meeting the problem can be discussed and a general planning committee can be appointed to work out a long-range plan whereby certain portions of the community will be designated, and agreed upon by those interested, as most suitable for the residence of nonwhites ... The value of real estate depends upon its salability, or marketability. ... Maximum desirability of residential property depends importantly upon the neighbors being harmonious (McMichael, 1949: 208-209).

This highlights the connection between developers and planners, marketability and whiteness that shaped the massive post-war building subsidised by the federal government (Weiss 1987).

Such tactics were further developed in resistance to pressure from the growing civil rights movement through the 1950s and 60s to force integration of all-white suburbs carried out by groups like the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). The form of this resistance is illustrated particularly well through CORE's two-year campaign against developer Don Wilson, a 'community builder' who created multiple subdivisions and built tens of thousands of homes in the southern suburbs of LA. His business practice of creating different developments for different races exploited to the full the spatialisation of the city's racial hierarchies -- while selling homes to whites only in Torrance, in Dominguez Hills he sold homes to Asians, Mexicans, and whites. For African Americans, as a response to the pressure of CORE's campaign, he completed a development near Compton. Nothing could be more emblematic of the racialised and spatialised rationalities of segregation. These developments all contained similar homes at similar prices, they only differed in the size of the deposit required – able to be raised or lowered by the developer depending on the suitability of the family. Despite the pressure of regular pickets, hundreds of arrests, marches of

thousands of people and high profile coverage generated by support from Hollywood stars like Marlon Brando, Torrance remained white (Gibbons, 2014).

Black-owned newspaper the *Sentinel* published an article written as a first-person narrative of one of the large marches notes:

Across the street, on the corners ahead, unsympathetic white crowds waited...Half-naked white youth sent up a chorus of boos. "Don't you get the message? We don't want you here," shouted a man. (4 July 1963).

Another article notes a group of neighbourhood youth reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the marchers. Signs stated 'Without property rights there are no human rights' and 'We have civil rights too' (*Sentinel* 30 June 1963). In the aftermath of the protest, a family returned to their car to find all of the windows smashed, and that evening a sniper shot three bullets through the plate glass window at CORE headquarters while people were still inside (*Sentinel* 4 July 1963). A statement from the Homeowner's Association shows how the rhetoric has moved from earlier kinds of openly expressed racist sentiment, yet with no shift in the idea that racial harmony consists of people of colour leaving them alone in their privileged neighbourhoods:

We are fed up with them and with their tactics. We want for ourselves the same civil rights they claim to be demonstrating for. We want to be left alone to enjoy our homes and our families. Is that too much to ask? (*Press* 31 July 1963)

An *L.A. Times* article gives a more revealing view into what lies behind this new discourse. It opens with the reactions of tract residents describing children playing a new game: picketing. An angry mother blames the mass protests for 'disturbing our children, upsetting our lives and changes our way of thinking about Negroes' (Neff 4 August 1963). Torrance City Council ultimately passed a city resolution closing the entire neighbourhood to strangers – essentially gating the community. Ultimately this

forced CORE to discontinue direct action in favour of what would prove a fruitless effort through the courts.

This white victory in Torrance showed just what could be achieved through the privatisation of streets and cooperation between developers, city officials and the police in protecting white space. Other developers were taking note, as showed by a meeting of major developers and funders convened by the Home Savings & Loan Association after CORE expanded their picketing of Wilson to his lenders' offices (Abrahamson, 2013). Academics and professionals responded to anti-discrimination legislation with a symposium on how to defend themselves against 'forced housing'.

One author wrote:

The Jewish middle class and the rapidly growing Negro middle class eagerly pursue these values and aspirations, and this pursuit inevitably leads them to suburbia. However, their presence in suburbia is inimical to the status needs and values of many who are (or who can more easily pass as) "old American." In fact, their presence is often inimical to the very image of what a suburban community should be like (Fishman, 1963).

This openly states the intertwining of value, status and ideal community space being created and sold to maximise real estate profit.

The clearest long-term strategy for preserving privileged space has been putting control of streets and public spaces into resident hands. In any Common Interest Development, or CID, a homeowner association could shut down their streets in the same way that Torrance did, without requiring a city ordinance and police. In CIDs individuals own their own homes and hold in common the development's streets, amenities, and public spaces. Membership in the self-taxing homeowners' association is mandatory (McKenzie, 1994). One government source reported that the new phenomenon of CIDs 'probably accounts for the most significant privatization of US local government responsibilities this century' (ACIR 1989: 18).

Fewer than 500 of these associations existed in 1964. By 1970, this number had skyrocketed to 10,000. By 1992, 150,000 associations governed an estimated 32 million Americans, and homes within CIDs composed 11 percent of the housing stock (McKenzie, 1994). These numbers reflect both the enormous amounts of surplus capital being channelled into suburban real estate development through this period, and its rigorous control as white privileged space. It is not just neighbourhoods that were sectioned off from the city. Miller (1981) describes how suburban areas protected their tax bases and ensured control over their public spaces through municipal incorporation over this same period – LA Country now contains 88 incorporated cities and multiple unincorporated areas. Returning to Lefebvre, ‘Capitalism has taken possession of the land, and *mobilized* it to the point where this sector is fast becoming *central*... Capitalism has thus rushed into the production of space’ (1991: 335). Importantly for Lefebvre this has been production of social space, the selling of home as a ‘place of privilege’ and ‘place of happiness’ (1996: 84). In LA this has meant protected and homogenous white space.

This is visible in the ways that higher property values and whiteness coincide across suburbia (Ethington et al, 2001) as well as how the more recent return of capital to the centre city has brought with it the mass displacement of the poor and communities of colour. Even Los Angeles had to hit limits of infrastructure, commuting distances and land itself. As Harvey (2007) and Smith (1982) describe, the process of uneven development has made the failing infrastructure of the centre city a fertile ground for redevelopment, where the rent gap has been steadily growing. The unbroken link between race and value has meant that no physical depreciation is necessary for the existence of a ‘rent gap’ in communities of colour, but of course

redlining practices, the withdrawal of resources, the practices of absentee landlords and the like have also been pivotal in placing capital's spatial fix.

While some of the new loft marketing discourse has focused on selling points such as 'live where you work' and the excitement of the big city, in both discourse and practice it has retained key features developed through decades of white struggle: defensible exclusivity; homogeneity; security; narrow definitions of community and responsibility; and increasingly privatised controls over public areas (Gibbons, 2014; Smith, 2006). Above all, it has tried to replicate the white spaces so necessary to the social reproduction of white privilege. This can be seen throughout the transformation of skid row, and the struggle to convert a neighbourhood where non-profit development corporations were once able to purchase and rehabilitate large hotels as SROs and halfway houses, to a centre of luxury loft building where property values have risen over 200 percent since 1999 (Downtown Central Business Improvement District, 2013).

Historically, Skid Row represented an open policy of segregation. Don Spivack of the Community Redevelopment Agency summarised the city's formal policy this way:

The decision was made with the adoption of the redevelopment plan in 1975 that the program in Central City East would be to try to stabilize it ... following a policy that was subsequently referred to as a "Policy of Containment." The containment idea was not so much that you put a fence around Skid Row to keep people in, but you designate an area in which facilities and services will be encouraged to centralize and exist ... (Spivack, 1988)

Despite the focus on services, there is no getting away from the use of the title 'policy of containment'. By 2012, almost half of those homeless in Los Angeles –over 50,000 people in conservative estimates – were African American, forming a majority in skid row (Wagner and White, 2012). The primary reason for this lies in L.A.'s massive

deindustrialisation and the widespread closure of factories and industry through the processes of globalisation, deinstitutionalisation and the dismantling of North America's limited welfare state, and the ways in which this hit the African-American community the hardest (Wolch, 1996). Containment failed to provide any kind of real solution to homelessness as it failed to grapple with its underlying causes, but it did provide some level of housing, services and space for community.

The return of capital to L.A.'s centre has worked to destroy what little support remains without providing alternatives, converting residential hotels and offices into luxury apartments despite the desperate and growing need for affordable housing. The Los Angeles Housing Department estimated that between 1995 and 2003, ten SRO hotels were converted, with a net loss of 1,087 units (Los Angeles Housing Department, 2005). The cost of lofts and condos went from an average of \$198 per square foot in 2000 to \$487 in 2013 despite the economic crisis (Downtown Central Business Improvement District Annual Report 2013). One solitary square foot of the new housing being created thus cost more than double the monthly income issued to a downtown resident through General Relief. A demographic survey of the new loft dwellers moving into downtown showed the majority to be between the ages of 23 and 29, and heavily 'young professionals'. Of these, 57.9 percent were Caucasian, with the next highest ethnicity Asian/Pacific Islander at 17.1 percent. Arguably this could be a parallel to Don Wilson's building of three separate tracts of housing for different groups – a slight opening of the more privileged community to those groups higher up within the racial hierarchy. The median income of these new residents was almost \$90,000, close to 8 percent earned over \$200,000 (Downtown Central Business Improvement District, 2011).

Examination of *DTLA Life*, a glossy magazine geared to downtown's new residents and published by L.A. Lofts Realty, reveals the importance of exclusivity and luxury as the primary themes. A shop/gallery space opening on the top floor of a downtown skyscraper and calling itself 'Please Do Not Enter' is described as 'A new kind of *private* space Please Do Not Enter invites a particular community to discover an eclectic array of exclusive, carefully selected and timeless goods' (*DTLA Life* 2014). Lofts are pictured as fully self-contained with pool, spa, and gym, the other skyscrapers of downtown their only background.

The CEO of the Central City Association, and the Business Improvement District that it runs, notes another key aspect of downtown's development tied into the macro-circuits of capital:

We also have a community that basically supports growth. People don't live Downtown unless they can handle commercial activity, noise, and all the things you find in the center of a big city. That all portends very well for development because we're not seeing the kind of no-growth behavior that you see in other markets in Los Angeles. (CCA's Carol Schatz On LA's Downtown Development Boom, *Downtown News* 2012)

To have wealthy people not just willing to live in high-density environments but be supportive of further development has been a dream come true after decades of fighting the rise of the slow-to-no-growth movement among suburban homeowners looking to protect their home values as documented by Mike Davis (2006). It is significant that business identified the only check to expansionary growth in the downtown area as the poor and the people of colour.

The Central City Association (CCA) and the Central City East Association (CCEA) spearheaded this return of capital to the downtown area. From the time of its incorporation, the Central City East Association conducted a hard push to 'clean up' the streets, lobbying the city, and working with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and other city agencies to conduct sweeps of the area targeting homeless

encampments (Clifford & McMillan, 1987). It had formed two Business Improvement Districts (BIDS) by 1999, providing private security and additional cleaning and beautification services to businesses and the new residents. Pete White of the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LACAN) explained the ways in which BIDs were able to occupy and control space through coercion:

Prior to the formation of the BIDs residents could move about as they pleased if the activity was lawful. Now such basic social interactions as resting for a spell on a street corner, eating lunch on a curb, or just standing on the street having a conversation with a friend result in hassle from Business Improvement Districts. (2000, p. 96)

That same year, the ACLU filed a lawsuit, *Cervantes v International Services, Inc.* The ‘suit, the first of its kind in the nation, alleges that downtown property owners, through their support of the business improvement districts, bankrolled a “systematic, concerted campaign” to chase homeless people off public property in violation of their civil liberties’ and that ‘guards intimidated and harassed homeless individuals through illegal searches, seizures, detentions, and threats in an effort to coerce the individuals into leaving the BID’ (NLCHP and NCH, 2009).

In addition to increasing security activities they could directly control through increased numbers of officers, clean-up crews and aggressive patrols by the BIDs they directed, the CCA and CCEA also helped create political will and drove coordinated political action to promote a newly enforced rhetoric of public safety and health. This demanded the eradication of any homeless presence through the attempted introduction of new public health ordinances effectively making homelessness illegal. They also worked to achieve the private and public transformation of existing buildings into lofts and boutique hotels to displace more long-term and stable low-income tenants in housing, aided by a new downtown redevelopment plan. But after a

major activist victory to preserve over ten thousand units in residential hotels, their tactics shifted. As a LACAN activist noted,

every for profit hotel pulled some kind of scam to illegally evict tenants so they could jump into the loft-building craze, that's what they wanted to do, and when we won that housing preservation ordinance, that preserved the housing for the next 50 years, the first thing that come out they mouth again was ok, well you won your housing, but when you come out your housing, come out in the streets, we got Sergeant Crook and Lieutenant Paulson right here that's going to throw you up against the wall, you better be straight, you going to jail. (Focus Group, 2012)

This ushered in the third prong of the CCEA and CCA offensive, which consisted in fighting for Los Angeles Police Department's Safer Cities Initiative (SCI) and drug enforcement policies. These concentrated more than 50 police within skid row to focus on 'quality of life' issues, with additional massive sweeps by narcotics and parole officers. In the first year of SCI 12,000 citations were issued, averaging 1,000 a month, with a majority being for pedestrian violations. Thousands of low-income residents found themselves with arrest warrants, newly criminalised if they had not been arrested before. SCI also averaged about 750 arrests per month on other quality-of-life violations (Blasi, 2007).

In 2005 the CCEA had started regular walks through the neighbourhood. Their CEO authored an editorial in the *Downtown News* titled 'Walk With Us: Taking Back the Streets of Skid Row Requires a Community Effort' (*Los Angeles Downtown News*, 1 August 2005). This march demanding increased police enforcement drew a line that included those of wealth and privilege who felt the police were there to protect them as part of the 'community', while excluding the poor and people of colour being harassed, arrested, beaten and killed by the LAPD. SCI represented more than lines of cops marching down the street; it meant occupation (amongst many such references, see *Community Connection*, 2008, December). LA CAN member Deborah

Burton testified how the police enforced geographical and racial lines of community before the City Council on September 29, 2009:

I used to feel safe in my community, but since the safer city initiative was placed in 2006, I don't feel safe anymore. I don't feel safe as I walk to my home or my job. Walking in my community is like walking in a minefield. You don't know when five or six police are going to jump out at you, throw you against the wall, put you in handcuffs, search you, and then let you go. ... I feel like just because we're black and live in the downtown community, I'm a criminal.³

This is the brutal face of domination and racial cleansing in service of rising real estate values based on an underlying understanding of value formed over decades of struggle to preserve white communities and privilege. The wider community's passivity in the face of such abuses of human rights is only another aspect of the slow violence the people of skid row face in their struggle to maintain their place in the city.

Conclusions

Over many years white supremacy has been cemented into the fabric of the city through the links between land's use and exchange value, white hegemonic space and white privilege. Examining the ongoing connection between skin colour and land value, and the extraordinary efforts to create and maintain homogenous and privileged white space in both the suburbs and the central city, show that: (1) racism lies at the heart of both sprawl and the increasingly privatised and fragmented form that the city has taken; (2) the struggle to maintain this segregation of physical communities has articulated over time with ideas of belonging and definitions of 'us' and 'them',

³ Video can be found online at http://lacity.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=&clip_id=6784&caption_id=9554960, accessed March 16, 2013.

facilitating and legitimating violence against people of colour; (3) this ongoing violence in defence of white spatial privilege continues to be central to broader dynamics of violence against communities of colour as well as the social cleansing being driven by capital's investment in rebuilding city centres.

The link between property values and defensible homogenous white space forged through so many years of defending white communities against the 'invasion' of people of colour now informs the reversal of real estate capital in its drive to racially cleanse downtown of its long-time residents through efforts to rebuild for a new community. The impossibility of imagining value in redeveloping the centre for an existing community of the poor and people of colour reinforces just how powerful real estate logics of profit, whiteness and property values have become. The violent mobilisation of the Safer Cities Initiative and criminalisation of homelessness in L.A. to facilitate the creation of privileged space also shows how these logics both leverage and contribute to a broader criminalisation of poor people of colour, what Michelle Alexander (2012) describes so eloquently as the new Jim Crow. Multiple deaths, and the struggle to ensure that #BlackLivesMatter, highlight this state violence, just as a broad refusal to acknowledge the justice of such a campaign highlights limited white definitions of the community as 'us', and the protected role of the police in their use of force against those excluded from it. The bleakness of this present is already working to define the new segregated lines of our future. Ever greater social and environmental catastrophe lie in the mass displacement of people of colour and the poor to the city's most run-down and polluted margins, where lives become harder to hold together at an ever greater distance from new amenities and public transportation networks.

Above all, this article argues that anti-racist theorising cannot remain peripheral to critical work on the city, or our visions of creating a better future.

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