

Trojan Horses:  
“Urban Renewal,” Race, Class, and Displacement in USC Campus Expansion, 1961-2017

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Since the 1880 founding of the University of Southern California, there have been ebbs and flows of change and migration to the size and style of its campus. The most significant of these was the city's radical transformation from a colonial Hispanic town to the sprawling American metropole in a relatively short time frame. With the initial expansion in the late nineteenth century from a frontier town to an urban center, then the growth of the West Adams neighborhood for predominantly middle-class, white families in the 1920s and 1930s, USC's conception of the "appropriate" environment for its students changed. Subsequently, white flight from the craftsman homes of West Adams and University Park to new areas like Beverly Hills and Brentwood and the influx of low-income Black and Latinx families into South Central Los Angeles changed how the university viewed its surrounding communities. Instances of uprising in the city such as the 1965 Watts Uprisings and 1992 LA Uprisings precipitated ideas of flight from USC's historic and central location adjacent to downtown. USC's conceptions of "appropriate" university communities<sup>1</sup> relied on race-based and class-based language of what they deemed conducive to their economic and social interests. At best, USC's plans for campus expansion from 1961 onward at surface level were race-neutral, but analyzing them more critically reveals the central role of race and class in the city and how USC sought to shape the surrounding community to their vision that has disproportionately removed low-income Black and Latinx residents.

It first began in 1966 when the University of Southern California partnered with the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles (CRA) to create the Hoover Redevelopment Plan.<sup>2</sup> The plan was part and parcel of city, state, and federal efforts at the time to combat "urban blight," or dilapidated, run-down housing considered a nuisance to society,

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<sup>1</sup> Casey, Jack, lecture notes, Lecture by Leland Saito, *USC Expansion*. University of Southern California. September 13 & 18, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Adaptive Mitigation Management Approach, "University of Southern California 2030 Master Plan," May 2011.

with Hoover referring to the thoroughfare running north through the University Park neighborhood. Policies included in the Federal Housing Renewal Program and the Housing Act of 1949 permitted practices such as restrictive covenants and redlining<sup>3</sup> that perpetuated race-based segregation of cities. For instance, the Housing Act of 1949 advanced the authorization of “federal advances, loans, and grants to localities to assist slum clearance and urban redevelopment.”<sup>4</sup> Chavez Ravine, a long-established low-income Mexican-American neighborhood in what is now Dodger Stadium, is an example of displacement through the rationale of “urban renewal” and its racialized effect.

Labeled by the city as “dilapidated” and “blighted,” city officials claimed eminent domain over the land and used it to construct what would be one of the first baseball stadiums on the West Coast.<sup>5</sup> Originally, it had been set to become affordable public housing for its original residents, but public stigma towards public housing during the era of McCarthyism resulted in its defeat.<sup>6</sup> City funds were used to clear families’ homes and prepare the land for the Brooklyn Dodgers’ owner, Walter O’Malley, so as to entice him to bring an iconic baseball team to the other side of the county. Legal scholar George Lefcoe cites Chavez Ravine as an important precursor to 2005 Supreme Court decision *Kelo v. New London* that upheld the ability of city redevelopment plans to ascertain land for “public use” with little to no accountability for how they affected communities.<sup>7</sup> Or that city proposals to institute “urban renewal” are not under contract to follow a plan to the letter, such as when the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment

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<sup>3</sup> Restrictive covenants were stipulations in the sale of property from one owner to another to not sell to certain racial or ethnic groups. Redlining was the policy of the Federal Housing Administration to selectively distribute loans based off of city maps that zoned low-income Black and Latinx communities as “at-risk” to award loans for homes.

<sup>4</sup> Housing Act of 1949, Public Law 81-171, June 15, 1949.

<sup>5</sup> Baxter, Kevin, “Orphans of the Ravine,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 29, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Casey, Jack, lecture notes, Lecture by Leland Saito, *USC Expansion*. University of Southern California. September 13 & 18, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Lefcoe, George, “Redevelopment Takings After *Kelo*: What’s Blight Got to Do With It?,” 17 *S. Cal. Rev. L. & Soc. Just.* (2008), 814.

Agency condemned and cleared Chavez Ravine under the pretense of building public housing. The CRA then quickly turned over the property to the Brooklyn Dodgers.<sup>8</sup>

The Hoover Redevelopment Plan expanded USC's campus to its current trapezoidal block cornered by Exposition, Figueroa, Jefferson, and Vermont.<sup>9</sup> This growth of campus displaced 3,000 local residents and at least 300 businesses.<sup>10</sup> The University Village was supposed to ameliorate the loss of local businesses on what is now the USC Village, but it was purchased by the university in 1999 after its original 1976 opening. The main impetus for the Hoover Redevelopment Plan was the 1965 Watts Uprisings, which broke out because of a Black motorist Marquette Frye's scuffle with the Los Angeles Police Department. The incident instigated six days of what has since been called "riots."<sup>11</sup>

As a result of the Watts Uprisings, USC began to consider leaving South Central LA for Orange County, which was wealthier and whiter, and appeared to better suit their student body of mostly upper-class, white students, who might possibly be dissuaded from attending because of the stereotypical associations of the city with crime and poverty.<sup>12 13</sup> In the wake of the uprisings came the growth of campus police forces such as the Department of Public Safety, one of the largest in the country,<sup>14</sup> and later the founding of the USC Real Estate Development Corp.<sup>15 16</sup> An

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<sup>8</sup> Lefcoe, George, "Redevelopment Takings After *Kelo*: What's Blight Got to Do With It?," 17 *S. Cal. Rev. L. & Soc. Just.* (2008).

<sup>9</sup> Adaptive Mitigation Management Approach, "University of Southern California 2030 Master Plan," May 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Casey, Jack, lecture notes, Leland Saito.

<sup>11</sup> However, I would like to refrain from calling the Watts Uprisings "riots" because this term has been used in a racialized way to describe the actions of people of color in order to undermine their reason for protest. Instead, seeing the Watts Uprisings as intelligible actions against police brutality and systemic racism should be reflected in the language that commemorates it.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon, Larry, "But School Seeks Closer Ties: USC Growth: Neighbors Fearful of a 'Trojan Horse.'" Jan 25, 1988.

<sup>13</sup> Almeida, Monica, "After the Riots; Unscarred USC Tries to Silence Fear of Riots," *New York Times*, May 17, 1992.

<sup>14</sup> Almeida, "After the Riots" *New York Times*, May 17, 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon, "But School Seeks Closer Ties," Jan 25, 1988.

<sup>16</sup> Created in 1988 in order to build and revive housing for students and faculty and new office buildings for academic and private research near the University Park and Health Sciences campuses, the USC Real Estate Development Corp further displaced low-income people of color from the community.

early version of the Master Plan records President Topping and the Board of Trustees' consideration to move from University Park. However, they chose to "honor the intent of USC's founders by providing the City of Los Angeles with a metropolitan center of higher education."<sup>17</sup> In the language of the plan, authors described their urban renewal efforts as central to creating the "appropriate" environment for the university.<sup>18</sup>

At this point, USC had been working with the CRA<sup>19</sup> since 1957 to purchase land around the university for campus expansion.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the Hoover Redevelopment Plan could be considered a concession from the city to maintain an institution of higher learning in the center of the city for the support of the CRA in acquiring more land. The threat of USC moving to Orange County posed the loss of a major attraction to Exposition and University Park in the center of the city. Other college campuses in Los Angeles like the University of California, Los Angeles, sitting precipitously in Westwood adjacent to Beverly Hills, did not experience similar issues. Although the university would never admit it, the Board of Trustees took the city's support of the Hoover Redevelopment Plan as a *carte blanche* of how they would shape the surrounding community to their vision, with little to no compromise.<sup>21</sup> For example, the 150-unit Trojan Apartments on Jefferson were originally meant to house poor families, but the university bought it in 1978 for dormitories<sup>22</sup> and proved university interests' precedence over those of the community. Once the plan began to be implemented, more instances of prioritizing USC came

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<sup>17</sup> USC University Park Campus Master Planning, "The Master Plan for Enterprise in Education and Excellence," <https://upcmasterplan.usc.edu/background/history/1961-master-plan/>.

<sup>18</sup> Casey, Jack, lecture notes, Leland Saito.

<sup>19</sup> The Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency, a government agency previously responsible for the removal of Chavez Ravine.

<sup>20</sup> USC University Park Campus Master Planning, "The Master Plan for Enterprise in Education and Excellence," <https://upcmasterplan.usc.edu/background/history/1961-master-plan/>.

<sup>21</sup> Casey, Jack, lecture notes, Leland Saito.

<sup>22</sup> Gordon, "But School Seeks Closer Ties: USC Growth: Neighbors Fearful of a 'Trojan Horse.'" Jan 25, 1988.

to light as the community and student body reported mixed controversy, with displaced property owners voicing the most criticism of their removal as the city's bending to USC.

In the October 11, 1968 edition of the *Daily Trojan*, student reporters covered the story of “two elderly women staging their futile protest against the Hoover Redevelopment project.”<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Majorie Woodell and Miss Eula Maynard spearheaded the Hoover Area Improvement Plan, Inc.,<sup>24</sup> and voiced strong opposition to USC President Norman H. Topping's opinion that the destruction of fifty-seven acres of homes neighboring the center of campus was beneficial to all. This article came in response to a previous article printed by the *Daily Trojan* on October 3, 1968, that spoke highly of the project in an interview with the project manager, Anthony Lazarro.<sup>25</sup> “The university has taken the position that its relationship with the community is every bit as important as the pursuit of its own objectives.”<sup>26</sup> Woodell and Maynard felt differently and stated that “Dr. Topping cares about nobody ... This project isn't helping anybody; it's helping people out of their property.”<sup>27</sup>

USC and the Community Redevelopment Agency, charged with purchasing land and relocating residents, believed that the Hoover Urban Renewal Advisory Committee (HURAC) allowed for the community's voice to be heard in the deliberations regarding the plan.<sup>28</sup> Maynard spoke against this, arguing that it failed to include property owners from the local community, except for one, and instead overwhelmingly consisted of people from churches, businesses, or the university that had something to gain from the plan.<sup>29</sup> For instance, part of the Hoover Redevelopment Plan included the construction of the Hebrew Union College, University Village,

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<sup>23</sup> Gillard, Melaney, “Two women fight development plan,” *Daily Trojan* Oct 11, 1968 Vol. 60 No. 18.

<sup>24</sup> Woodell was president and Maynard vice president of this organization to counteract the displacement of the community during the Hoover Redevelopment Plan.

<sup>25</sup> Parfit, Mike, “Hoover Project to create life out of muddy rubble,” *Daily Trojan* Oct 3, 1968 Vol. 60 No. 13.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Gillard, “Two women fight development plan,” *Daily Trojan* Oct 11, 1968 Vol. 60 No. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Parfit, “Hoover Project to create life out of muddy rubble,” *Daily Trojan* Oct 3, 1968 Vol. 60 No. 13.

<sup>29</sup> Gillard, “Two women fight development plan,” *Daily Trojan* Oct 11, 1968 Vol. 60 No. 18.

and Hilton Hotel (later Raddisson and now USC Hotel) to the north and east of the university respectively, as concessions to the community.<sup>30</sup> Maynard and many others saw these plans as “Trojan Horses,”<sup>31</sup> or cloaked efforts to displace the community under the guise of cooperation.

Maynard and Woodell asserted that the Community Redevelopment Agency was being used to “do the dirty work” for the university and that HURAC was a “stooge for [the] CRA.”<sup>32</sup> They continued that “this project was started by people outside of the community ... but at one point we had signatures from seventy-five percent of property owners against the project.”<sup>33</sup> In *Community Redevelopment Agency v. Superior Court*, January 27, 1967, Maynard’s contest to the plan passed a year prior was struck down on the grounds of her petition being submitted the final day of the sixty-day period allotted to her.<sup>34</sup> Despite their efforts, all twenty-five blocks were bulldozed and eventually replaced with what is now the western portion of campus such as the Viterbi School of Engineering, Parkside Residences, the Davis School of Gerontology, and numerous other academic and athletic facilities. These displacements stem from the 1966 Hoover Redevelopment Plan, which was part of the USC Master Plan, passed in 1961 with a 1966 amendment. In the 1966 rendition of the university’s plans for expansion, they stated:

The plan’s implementation depended largely on the cooperation of the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles, which would enable the acquisition of property for the campus’s expansion. The City was concurrently working on the Hoover Redevelopment Project, which targeted areas of ‘blight’ for urban renewal and in part paved the way for the expansion of USC’s campus.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> USC University Park Campus Master Planning, “The Master Plan for Enterprise in Education and Excellence,” <https://upcmasterplan.usc.edu/background/history/1961-master-plan/>.

<sup>31</sup> Gordon, Larry, “But School Seeks Closer Ties: USC Growth: Neighbors Fearful of a ‘Trojan Horse.’” Jan 25, 1988.

<sup>32</sup> Gillard, “Two women fight development plan,” Daily Trojan.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> *Community Redevelopment Agency v. Superior Court*, 248 Cal. App. 2d 167 (1967).

<sup>35</sup> Adaptive Mitigation Management Approach, “University of Southern California 2030 Master Plan,” May 2011.

The terms “blight” and “urban renewal” carried specific meanings in the 1950s and 1960s which were used in race-based and class-based ways. Naming a building “blighted” became a facile way to displace the residents and rebuild in the name of “urban renewal.” Again, consider the removal of the working-class, Chicano, neighborhood Chavez Ravine for promised public housing that instead became Dodger Stadium. Claims of “blighted” buildings abounded in order to bring “urban renewal” to this section of the city, but it failed to come to fruition. Instead, structures beneficial to the university were built. This again raises questions of whose interests are at play in making these decisions.

Why did the city abandon pledged public housing to instead build an expensive sports stadium? Is it the interests of the community? Or those of what sociologist C. Wright Mills called the “power elite”?<sup>36</sup> The power elite can be described as members of local government, officers of large corporations, and highly militarized police forces that cooperate to advance their interests.<sup>37</sup> In Chavez Ravine, commitments to serving the community came secondary to appeasing the owner of a baseball franchise. Strikingly similar, USC’s later consideration to leave their historic location in the center of Los Angeles following the Watts Uprisings demonstrates the threat that USC felt from people of color protesting oppressive conditions.

“Acts of the wayward,” or revolutionary action by people of color in urban settings, seemed at odds with the interests of a predominantly white and wealthy university tied to the elite of Los Angeles.<sup>38</sup> USC believed these “wayward acts” of resistance to be a hazard to their physical and reputational position within the city and thought to move to Orange County: a more remote, wealthier, and whiter community that might be more aligned with their interests. As the

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<sup>36</sup> Mills, C. Wright, *The Power Elite*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956).

<sup>37</sup> Wright, *The Power Elite*, 1956.

<sup>38</sup> Hartman, Saidya, “The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* Vol. 117 No. 3 (2018).



Hoover Redevelopment Plan controversy demonstrates, procuring land in the center of the city required more monetary and legal resources and threatened the image of a university perched in the city, but free from the crime and grime typically associated with large metropolises.

Expending large sums on property near downtown and policing what they saw as “inappropriate” for the university environment demanded more work for the university. And if the community fallout from the Hoover Redevelopment Plan was any indication, then it would come with plenty of difficulties.

USC’s consideration to leave South Central Los Angeles for Orange County following the 1965 Watts Uprisings shows the lack of a keen interest in building relationships with the surrounding community. In its place came displacement and physical demarcations of boundaries as set out in the 1966 Master Plan that introduced the four-gateway structure of campus that still exists today.<sup>39</sup> Spatial markings cutting themselves off from the community were put in place after employing eminent domain through the government to take land for their own use. Even if there were concessions made to the community, such as monetary compensation for their loss of property, these fell flat, such as the community center on the corner of Hoover and McClintock in the 2017 USC Village project. Paralleling to when USC considered relocation after the Watts Uprisings, the 1992 LA Uprisings spurred efforts by the university to create the “appropriate” environment for themselves after massive demonstrations ensued following the inaction of local courts to the blatant racial police violence against Rodney King.

Immediately following the 1992 LA Uprisings, *LA Times* higher education writer Larry Gordon wrote affectionately about USC being “spared by the riots” as there was destruction to buildings on the opposite of Vermont Avenue, but “nothing worse physically than one broken

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<sup>39</sup> Gordon, Larry, “Riot Aftermath: Spared by Riots, USC Intent on its Own Damage Control: Campus: School uses phone banks and mailings to soothe nerves of students, parents, alumni and donors who might reconsider ties,” *Los Angeles Times* May 6, 1992.

window at a parking kiosk.”<sup>40</sup> Gordon describes “USC leaders and staff using telephone campaigns and massive mailings to soothe jittery nerves of students, parents, alumni and donors who may be reconsidering ties to a school so close to some of the trouble spots.”<sup>41</sup> Note how Gordon employ’s the racially-coded phrase of “trouble spots” to describe protests about the lack of justice following the verdict of the police officers that violently beat Rodney King as well as news of the lack of prosecution of the perpetrator of the slaying of Latasha Harlins. In addition, Gordon describes the university’s immediate concerns following the destruction suffered by the community, as donations and enrollment, not investing in and rebuilding the community they purportedly cared for so deeply.

To this day, alumni and administration alike say that USC was “spared by” the uprisings in the surrounding community because of their dedication to supporting them, not because of the armed National Guard officers positioned on Exposition Boulevard. USC President Steven B. Sample believed the ““unscathed”” nature of campus to be due to ““our neighbors understand[ing] that USC is an anchor institution in this city, and they do what they can to help it flourish.””<sup>42</sup> Concurrent to this was students donning shirts that read “University of South Central. I Survived the Finals Week Riot! April 29, 1992.”<sup>43</sup> Although USC was “seeking to shed old stereotypes of being an affluent island amid hostile poverty” through neighborhood education and improvement, the vast majority of administrators and students failed to address the root of the issue, that being systemic racism and police brutality that the LA justice system refused to recognize and ameliorate.<sup>44</sup> Twenty-eight years later following the deaths of Black men and women at the hands of police like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, there has yet to be an

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<sup>40</sup> Gordon, “Riot Aftermath,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1992.

<sup>41</sup> Gordon, “Riot Aftermath,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1992.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

adequate response from the university despite national protests and student action calling for the administration to properly address police murder. Moreover, campus and community dynamics of tension persist, with the construction of the USC Village being an example of the university's dense response to community needs.

It becomes hard to not compare the Hoover Redevelopment Plan and its consequences for the surrounding community to the recent construction of the USC Village in 2017. Both came at the expense of the property and business owners such as Lil Bill's Bike Shop, a family-owned local business serving campus for forty years, that was asked to leave USC-owned property once USC signed a non-compete with Solé Bicycles.<sup>45</sup> Instead, local businesses were replaced with more expensive ones that limited access to the non-student community, who cannot enter the gated campus after certain times. Abercrombie and Fitch, Sunlife Organics, Workshop Salon and Boutique, Nail Garden, Kaitlyn, and Face Haus are among the most jarring businesses in the extension of campus that overwhelmingly cater to higher-income students while low-income students receiving financial aid find it difficult to locate affordable options. USC claims to want to dispel the well-known moniker "University of Spoiled Children," but continues to cater to its historic student body in new construction while pledging equity and inclusion.

University policy relies heavily on the representation present on the Board of Trustees, a "power elite" of the university governing system, if you will. By lacking people of color, non-donors, and non-chief officers of corporations, the Board of Trustees promises to fail the surrounding community that consists of low-income people of color. As the governing body of the university, they devise and approve campus master plans, a powerful position and more importantly a conflict of interest for how power dynamics of urban space, race, and class play

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<sup>45</sup> Chan, Sarah, "With USC Village set to open, Lil Bill's Bike Shop told to leave campus." *Daily Trojan*, March 24, 2017.

out around the campus. It is composed largely of the most well-known university names of donors such as Annenberg, Dornsife, and Marshall, among others such as LA real estate tycoon Rick Caruso and Oscar Muñoz, CEO of United Airlines. What is their relationship to the university and more importantly the surrounding community? Why is there not representation of community members who have more at stake in the community than real estate development? More importantly, notably absent are Trust South LA and the Esperanza Community Housing Corporation.

Organizations such as these have fought to repel the overpowering effects of gentrification in the University Park neighborhood by pooling financial resources together to purchase property. The severe lack of affordable housing and the competition between students and community members for limited housing has pushed the historic community of people of color out to build ostentatious apartment complexes like the Lorenzo, Gateway, Icon Plaza, and Tuscany. Stemming from the relatively recent mission of the university to be a global research university, insufficient campus housing needed to hold the burgeoning numbers of students in the past twenty years has resulted in increasing gentrification to the surrounding neighborhoods. The inaction of the university has fostered these displacements and encumberments placed upon the local community.

Historically, the culprit of these race- and class-based displacements of community members has been “dog whistle” politics of supposedly race-neutral terms that have racialized outcomes.<sup>46</sup> Even today, one of the most frequent nominations that students employ for the surrounding neighborhood is “ghetto.” This is done, for the most part, with little interaction with local community members and instead preys upon surface-level race neutral terms that have a racialized meaning of poor and non-white.

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<sup>46</sup> Gotanda, Neil. “A Critique of ‘Our Constitution is Colorblind,’” *Stanford Law Review* Vol. 44 No. 1 (1991).

The cognitive dissonance in the university's statements and their actions for how they impact the local community disproportionately and unjustly disadvantages people of color. An integral component of this has been the growth of campus police that discriminatorily polices people of color in the student body and the surrounding community.<sup>47</sup> USC alumnus, L.A. city council member, and former Chief of Police Bernard Parks stated himself that "USC is not an inclusive place," adding that "they're the greatest neighbor in the world as long as you do as they say."<sup>48</sup> USC's undue influence on the community through purportedly balanced government programs meant to serve the community as a whole have instead proven to benefit the university and what they envisioned as appropriate to the campus that has hurt the community in and out of times of crisis. To put it bluntly, USC has failed the Black and Latinx community throughout the twentieth century and to today with "Trojan Horses," promises of protection from displacement that hold nothing of substance but deceit.

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<sup>47</sup> Von Berg, Kaya, "DPS continues to be an agent of discrimination," *Daily Trojan*, February 26, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Kiefer, Peter, "Can C.L. Max Nikias Change USC Into the Stanford of Southern California?," *Los Angeles Magazine*, October 27, 2014.

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