

Los Angeles' War on the Poor: A Case Study in Militarism,
Displacement, and Public Space at Echo Park Lake



Luis Sinco, 2021.

Ina Morton

Occidental College Senior Comprehensive Project

Department of Urban and Environmental Policy

Professors Cha, Matsuoka, and Rodnyansky

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Abstract

This paper analyzes militarism, displacement, and public space in the urban environment through a case study of the March 2021 eviction of a tent community at Echo Park Lake, a public park in a gentrifying neighborhood in Los Angeles. Building on existing literature on spatial injustice, militarism, public space, and houselessness, this paper studies the Echo Park Lake sweep as a significant modern iteration of displacement and dispossession in the city's long history of colonialism, racial capitalism, and state violence. Ten semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted for this research with unhoused former residents of Echo Park Lake, housing justice organizers, researchers of displacement and houselessness, and a neighborhood councilmember. Analysis of the interviews was coupled with document review of relevant policies and legal decisions, namely Section 41.18 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code and Ninth Circuit Court ruling *Martin v. Boise*. The research identified that the displacement was not a pure function of criminalization policy and legal frameworks being enforced, but rather one caused by pre-existing political and structural factors; namely, how the city is structured to politically empower anti-unhoused interests, and the insurgence of policies of racial policing and displacement being executed with military tactics, ideology, and organization. This paper recommends ending policies that criminalize houselessness, demilitarizing the Los Angeles Police Department, reallocating police funding to go towards non-carceral social housing solutions, and creating truly public spaces in Los Angeles.

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Introduction

My Standpoint

Feminist standpoint theory asks that we recognize all knowledge is rooted in our embodied experiences and positionalities and its influence on our lives, our organizing, and our artistic or academic work.¹ Simultaneously, the scientific method requires that I go beyond my own personal experiences and knowledge, so this assertion of my standpoint is not the entirety of my understanding of the subject but rather the starting point. This work, my senior comprehensive project for completion of the Urban and Environmental Policy degree at Occidental College, is grounded in my experiences as a housing justice organizer protesting eviction and militarist policing, particularly at the Echo Park Lake tent community. Those three days at Echo Park Lake, along with many others spent protesting the state violence and oppression leveled against our unhoused neighbors during the COVID-19 pandemic, cemented my perception that most of us are far closer to becoming unhoused than we are to being in positions of great wealth and power—of being in Los Angeles' elite class as a corporate developer, wealthy homeowner, or elected official with large campaign coffers. Still, by virtue of my status as a housed person who, despite experiences with housing insecurity, has always been housed, I recognize my invaluable privilege of living with the safety and security of a formal residence. Residence that isn't just carceral shelter or a temporary solution, but humane housing. Housing wherein we can make our homes and feed our families without state surveillance, police harassment, exposure to hypothermic conditions, and violence.

I will never forget what it felt like to stand by the lake on Glendale Boulevard opposite the police line, watching the police officer in front of me turn his body camera off as he mounted his

¹ Sandra Harding, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, New York: Routledge, 2004.

“less than lethal” crowd control rubber bullet gun. Though I was shoved back by an officer with a baton, I didn’t break an arm or suffer a concussion from a foam bullet, which happened to other protestors at the park.^{2 3} I was not one of the hundred and eighty-two people arrested those nights, though I had many friends who were.⁴ Though I had a warm residence to sleep after returning home from the displacement, I cannot say the same about the people who had now been forcibly removed from the place they called home for over a year, from the place where they build a community kitchen, grew a garden, and planted roots where there were few places else to do the same. My experience does not and should not center me in the conversation surrounding Echo Park Lake, but it grounds me in my scholarship and attempt to pursue a comprehensive understanding of how this happened. Specifically, what were the structural, legal, and policy factors that facilitated the displacement of the Echo Park Lake tent community? I ask, as many organizers, journalists, and Angelenos ask, how was our local government allowed to violently displace people from park space intended for public use, and why?

This work is also informed by my particular experience as a diasporic Filipina whose immediate family moved to Los Angeles because of the exploitation inflicted onto the Philippines by American imperialism which has created an economy dependent on Overseas Filipino Workers extracted from their homeland and into the imperial core.⁵ We colonized peoples are not defined

² Kevin Rector, “Echo Park protestor alleges LAPD officer broke his arm with baton strike,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 2021.

³ City News Service, “Judge restricts LAPD use of projectile launchers following Echo Park demonstrations,” *The Eastsider*, April 19, 2021.

⁴ Jesus Sanchez, “182 Echo Park demonstrators arrested; Echo Park Lake encampment cleared out,” *The Eastsider*, March 26, 2021.

⁵ E. San Juan Jr., *Overseas Filipino Workers: The Making of an Asian-Pacific Diaspora*, Indiana University Press, 2009.

by our displacement or dispossession, though it is inadequate to describe our current conditions, and the contradictions of being a colonized person and a settler on stolen Tongva land, without it. The anti-imperialist synthesis of displacement and dispossession as applied to the urban landscape is the beating theoretical heart of this paper, which asks that you consider how all urban evictions, sweeps, and removals fit into the continuum of American colonialism and imperialism predicated on the displacement of “othered” peoples from homes. For non-white immigrants, Indigenous populations, and Black and Brown people, the banishment of our unhoused neighbors to far flung, invisible spaces is reminiscent of a history of the United States doing exactly that to ourselves and our ancestors.

Background

Imagine a world where there was no “bottom.” One where your neighbor was your neighbor because they’re your neighbor, not because of tax brackets or real estate. A world where good is done for the sake of good not gain. In the past few months, we the unhoused community at Echo Park Lake, have been creating the groundwork for this world.

–Ayman Ahmed, *Echo Park Rise Up: A New Vision for Homelessness*⁶

The Echo Park Lake Tent Community

Though a number of small encampments or separate tents have popped up in Echo Park Lake over the years, the evolution of Echo Park Lake encampments into a cohesive, interconnected tent community began in November 2019 when unhoused Angelenos Ayman Ahmed and Devon Brown moved onto Echo Park Lake’s grassy banks to find a safe space to stay.⁷ Unlike living in

⁶ Echo Park Rise Up, “Echo Park Rise Up: A New Vision for Homelessness,” YouTube Video, 7:17, October 4, 2020, <https://youtu.be/2rMAbs62xvw>.

⁷ Katie Fedigan-Linton, “The Unhoused Community of Echo Park Lake Thrives, Despite City Shortcomings,” *Knock-LA*, November 19, 2020.

an encampment under a freeway underpass, in a vehicle, or in more secluded green space, the park offered crucial resources like public bathrooms and water fountains. “You end up with folks who have nowhere to go. Why they choose Echo Park is not because of the natural spring in the fountain. It’s not because of the boat rides. They’re there because they’re trying to survive,” said one former Echo Park Lake resident.⁸ Organizations in the Services Not Sweeps (SNS) housing justice coalition, namely Streetwatch LA—an organization founded by the Los Angeles chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA-LA) and the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN), worked alongside Echo Park Lake’s growing houseless community helped provide essentials such as food, water, clothing, and NARCAN (a nasal spray called Naloxone that can be used to reverse an opioid overdose). When the City formed CARE+ teams—“comprehensive cleaning and rapid engagement” teams to conduct cleanups called “sweeps” by housing advocates for their “sweeping” of not only garbage but unhoused people and their possessions as well—began visiting the lake weekly with city park rangers, members of Streetwatch LA and the SNS coalition mobilized members to actively watch the sweeps and ensure that residents were not being evicted unjustly.⁹

In March 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended that cities not sweep outdoor houseless encampments without non-congregate shelter alternatives so as to slow the spread of COVID-19 which could be caused by displacing and therefore dispersing houseless individuals.¹⁰ The encampment grew significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic,

⁸ Erin Wisti, “Misrepresentation, Intimidation, Violence—How the Media’s Narrative of the Echo Park Lake Unhoused Causes Harm,” *Knock-LA*, February 23, 2021.

⁹ Fedigan-Linton, “The Unhoused Community of Echo Park Lake Thrives, Despite City Shortcomings.”

¹⁰ “Interim Guidance on People Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, March 2020.

when more unhoused people began to set up camp at Echo Park Lake at the beginning of an unprecedented public health crisis that left many wary of the safety of the already limited shelter options in Los Angeles. Activists say that the city stopped the weekly sweeps from CARE+ teams to the lake during the first several months of the pandemic, which too caused an increase in the community's rising population. "The pandemic gave a pause to the sweeps...Slowly more and more people came to the park, seeing the organizing and thinking it was a safe haven. Many unhoused people don't want to go to a shelter while COVID is a problem," said Streetwatch LA organizer Jed Parriott in an interview for Knock-LA.¹¹ During this early pandemic period, residents continued to organize and share resources both with their housed neighbors working alongside them in the SNS coalition, and with each other: raising over \$59,000 in funds to build a communal kitchen, medical tent, showers, community garden, and even start a jobs program to pay unhoused residents at the lake to help manage stock in the kitchen, pick up trash in the park, and do other activities central to the continued operation of the community.¹² An unhoused board of directors at the park helped manage and facilitate the jobs program, though residents maintained that the lake remained horizontal in its leadership and community-building.¹³

Many unhoused residents of the park praised not only the privacy from sweeps and physical resources provided, but also the camaraderie and closeness formed through the creation of a shared community as well. "The cops tried to kick us out, the Councilman tried to kick us out, but no one was telling us where to go instead. It was just community forming cause of the tough times. Fast

¹¹ Fedigan-Linton, 2020.

¹² GoFundMe, "Echo Park Rise Up: A Vision of Love and Community," created October 4, 2020. <https://www.gofundme.com/f/echo-park-rise-up-a-vision-or-love-amp-community>.

¹³ @echoparklakeriseup, "Echo Park Rise Up – BIG things are happening!" *Instagram*, August 7, 2020.

forward, we're situated in the park, and we can't really get swept right now, and now we're just getting all the blessings," said aforementioned Echo Park Lake resident Ayman Ahmed for the Los Angeles Times.¹⁴ A March 2021 *Los Angeles Times* count identified that at its height, 174 tents and makeshift structures lined the lake.¹⁵

Leading up to the displacement, a petition titled "Save Echo Park Lake" that alleged lake residents had been engaging in a variety of activities ranging from committing "ongoing cruelty against the geese and ducks" to prostituting unhoused women to local visitors, had been circulating and gaining momentum on Nextdoor, a neighborhood-focused media application that has drawn criticism for platforming racism and vigilantism.^{16 17} Residents shared that police cars had begun approaching the lake late at night and flashing their headlights at encampments nightly, harassing residents more consistently than on prior occasions. Organizers were getting reports from sympathetic Echo Park residents that Councilmember Mitch O'Farrell had been sighted attending multiple neighborhood meetings and whipping support for a potential displacement, describing the encampment as "dangerous" and "inhumane."

The Echo Park Lake Displacement

Described as a flashpoint in the houselessness crisis by the *Los Angeles Times*, the forced removal of unhoused Echo Park Lake residents who had established a large informal settlement at the lake during the COVID-19 pandemic sparked major news headlines, with a hashtag developed by the local community, #EchoParkRiseUp, becoming the #2 trending Twitter hashtag

¹⁴ Fedigan-Linton.

¹⁵ Benjamin Oreskes and Doug Smith, "How a commune-like encampment in Echo Park became a flashpoint in LA's homelessness crisis," *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 2021.

¹⁶ Riley Montgomery, *Save Echo Park Lake*, <https://www.change.org/p/save-echo-park-lake>, accessed February 7th, 2022.

¹⁷ Eric Baradat, "Can Nextdoor Solve Its Racism Problem?" *National Public Radio*, April 22, 2021.

nationally.¹⁸ As militarized Los Angeles Police Department officers in riot gear faced off with—eventually striking, kettling, and arresting—activists, organizers, legal observers, and journalists who had gathered to provide eviction defense or to document the removal, residents of the tent community gathered their belongings and spoke to the crowd about the community they had created. “Without the constant LAPD and city harassment uprooting our lives we’ve been able to grow. To come together as a community, not just unhoused but housed as well. Please continue to leave us alone or stand with us,” read a statement released by the community.¹⁹ As the police occupation continued, a crew of public workers slowly began establishing steel fences around the perimeter of the park to enclose the area around the remaining residents. After days of protest, most residents closed in by the fence left with the belongings they could carry, with the remaining few residents being arrested and removed forcibly by the park after they chose to stay at the site.²⁰ At the end of the three-day displacement, the city had spent \$2 million in police salaries and overtime, \$250,000 to install CCTV cameras, and \$104,000 to install fences.²¹

Nearly two months after the displacement, the park re-opened to the public on May 26th with the earlier erected fences becoming a new permanent feature at the park to control access. During the day, couples rent the lake’s swan boats for an enjoyable outing and parkgoers picnic and read on the park’s meadows. But at night the public park is closed to shutout any unhoused

¹⁸ Oreskes and Smith, “How a commune-like encampment in Echo Park became a flashpoint in LA’s homelessness crisis,” 2021.

¹⁹ @AlmostKelvin, “Please read and share this the statement written by the residents of Echo Park lake. It’s truly remarkable.” Twitter, March 23, 2021.

²⁰ Alissa Walker, “Last Night in Echo Park,” *Curbed*, March 26, 2021.

²¹ Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, *Blueprint for Displacement: Breaking Down LAPD’s Echo Park Rehabilitation After Action Report*, September 2021.

locals seeking to rest, camp, or otherwise access the space.²² A host of security cameras and private security guards surveil the park around the clock, limiting public use to city park authorities' desired public. These are the signs left that a community built from nothing over months was destroyed systematically in days, signs that demonstrate the city's determination to ensure that no tent settlements rise at Echo Park Lake again. Though city officials touted their efforts in providing temporary shelter and transitional housing to former residents of the lake, it is unclear how many of the lake's residents remain in housing today or if they have returned to living unsheltered in Los Angeles.²³ Many former residents have organized to form a new organization, the United Tenants Against Carceral Housing, to decry the conditions and stipulations of the aforementioned local shelter housing in programs such as Project Roomkey.²⁴ The demands of Echo Park Lake's residents and their allies articulate that their tent community sought more than simply shelter housing, but dignified housing, the right of the poor to access public space, and the right to urban life free of police harassment and surveillance.

Though unique in its scale, the sweep of Echo Park Lake and the resulting urban insurgency was not one of a kind in its occurrence.²⁵ A militarized police force descending upon the unhoused residents of a public park, injuring protestors and press who stood in their way, encapsulated the sentiment of many housing justice organizers and unhoused Angelenos that there is not simply a housing crisis, not simply a criminalization issue, but a fully-fledged war on the poor in Los

²² Libby Denkmann, "Fencing and Private Security: Echo Park Lake Has Reopened, With Some Big Changes," *LAist*, May 26, 2021.

²³ Erika Smith, "A week later, here's what happened of the homeless people booted from Echo Park," *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 2021.

²⁴ Benjamin Oreskes and Emily Alpert Reyes, "Echo Park Lake to reopen May 26, two months after forced removal of homeless campers," May 19, 2021.

²⁵ Ananya Roy, "Emergency Urbanism," *Public Books*, November 24, 2020.

Angeles. The circumstances of Echo Park Lake raise questions about the current mode of service provision and shelter housing production and think more critically of how public service providers, housing agencies, city officials, and increasingly militarized law enforcement have become inextricably intertwined in a class struggle contested in public space.²⁶

History of Echo Park and Echo Park Lake

“Open a good drive into this park on a continuation of Alvarado Street passing Reservoir No. 4 which should be ornamented, and few cities would have as fine a drive or one containing a greater variety of scenery,” spoke Los Angeles Mayor Henry Hazard after the signing of an 1891 deal that sold the thirty-three acres of land surrounding then “Reservoir No.4” to the city for the creation of a new public park.²⁷ Once a reservoir made by digging a ditch from the Los Angeles River to empty out into the Arroyo de las Reyes, Echo Park Lake is a physical marker of Los Angeles’ early pre-20th century development. Framed by rolling hills littered with small Victorian homes and Spanish duplexes, Glendale Boulevard to the east, Sunset Boulevard to the north, and the 101 Freeway to the south, Echo Park Lake situates itself at the geographic center of Echo Park; a neighborhood itself geographically located near the center of Los Angeles which grew around the lake. Reportedly named “Echo Park” after city parks superintendent and landscape architect Joseph Henry Tomlinson heard his voice echoing throughout the hills of the ravine, Echo Park was the picture perfect postcard for Los Angeles’ boosterism, depicting images of white swans, towering palm trees, couples canoeing, to allure East Coast and Midwesterners to its banks.²⁸

²⁶ Ananya Roy, Terra Graziani, and Pamela Stephens, Graziani, Terra, and Stephens, Pamela, “Unhousing the Poor: Interlocking Regimes of Racialized Policing,” *The Square One Project*, New York: The Justice Lab at Columbia University, 2020.

²⁷ Echo Park Historical Society, “Echo Park Lake,” *Historic Echo Park*. <http://historicechopark.org/history-landmarks/places-landmarks/echo-park-lake/>, accessed September 13, 2021.

²⁸ Nathan Masters, “Echo Park’s Lake Began as a Drinking Water Reservoir,” *KCET*, May 16, 2014.

By the mid-1900s, the postcard image of Echo Park Lake was falling into disrepair. The middle class white neighbors and upper class real estate interests fled for more suburban climates, the Pacific Electric Red Car that dropped passengers off for picnics at the lake was discontinued, and the public library which had resided on the park's expanse was demolished.²⁹ During this period of post-war white flight, working-class immigrant families—largely from Mexico, Central and South America, and the Philippines—flocked to the newly affordable neighborhood and created a new history for the neighborhood of Echo Park, one where public art and Chicano culture flourished amidst the navigation of a changing urban environment plagued with disinvestment.³⁰ During this period, the entities that supported the original green and commercial development of Echo Park and Echo Park Lake decried the “blight” and gang violence that purportedly haunted the area. “Which Way for Echo Park – Inner City Oasis or Slum?” read one Los Angeles Times article.³¹ In being made the city's first Historic Preservation Overlay Zone in the 1980s, Echo Park escaped some of the “urban renewal” that demolished housing in many other perceivably “blighted” neighborhoods nationwide. Still, the socioeconomic costs of disinvestment remained as the historic designation was fought for by white residents seeking to prevent the development of federally assisted housing for Echo Park's low-income population after the 1968 passing of the

²⁹ Avila, Eric. “The Nation's “White Spot”: Racializing Postwar Los Angeles,” in *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2004.

³⁰ Kimberly M. Soriano, *Getting Up: Gentrification, Gang Injunctions, and Graffiti in Echo Park, Los Angeles*, University of California: Santa Barbara, June 2019.

³¹ Dial Torgerson, “Which Way for Echo Park—Inner City Oasis or Slum?” *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 1971.

Fair Housing Act.^{32 33 34} “Echo Park’s hill liberals are now fighting federally assisted housing for the underprivileged. People keenly aware of a housing shortage find themselves saying: poor, go elsewhere,” wrote Los Angeles Times reporter Dial Torgerson in the aforementioned article.³⁵ This mantra of “poor, go elsewhere” would follow low income Echo Park residents into the 21st century where gentrification and displacement would pose a threat to the neighborhood’s working class immigrant population.

In 2011, the city ushered in a return to the Echo Park Lake as they knew it in 19th century Los Angeles by investing \$45 million into improvements and renovations for Echo Park Lake and implemented a gang injunction to deter all “gang-related” activity. On paper and in design, it was a beautification project to restore Echo Park Lake to its former glory. In effect, Echo Park’s non-white, particularly Brown youth population, were made unwelcome at the park for the recreation of white parkgoers.³⁶ With wealthier residents moving into the hillside homes, new coffee shops and record stores popping up onto Glendale Boulevard, and now the neighborhood’s centerpiece public green space restricted, Torgerson’s question of “Are the poor to inherit Echo Park?” seemed to answer itself. As March 2021 rolled around, whispers of another potential clean up and renovation hit Echo Park Lake, this time apparently in response to the large Echo Park Lake tent community encampment.³⁷ Echo Park’s historic conflict between disinvestment and investment,

³² Echo Park Historical Society, 2021.

³³ Matthew Fleischer. “How did Echo Park become so stratified with landed gentry and poverty? There was a plan 50 years ago.” *Los Angeles Times*, March 23, 2021.

³⁴ Andrew Small, “The Wastelands of Urban Renewal,” *Bloomberg CityLab*, February 13, 2017.

³⁵ Torgerson, 1971.

³⁶ Soriano, 2019.

³⁷ Benjamin Oreskes, “City plans to close Echo Park Lake and clear homeless encampment,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 23, 2021.

beautification and access, Brown housing stability and white wealth, suggest that the 2021 displacement at Echo Park is another microcosm for Los Angeles' greater struggles for spatial justice in both residential and public space.

Houselessness in 21st Century Los Angeles

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines people experiencing homelessness broadly as people living in a place not intended for human habitation, in emergency shelter, without a primary nighttime residence, or in transitional housing, though this definition is not always strictly applied by service providers, law enforcement agencies, houseless justice activists, and unhoused individuals themselves.³⁸ Hereafter, individuals experiencing homelessness will be referred to as “unhoused” or “houseless” individuals in this paper, as many advocates have rightly criticized the term “homeless” for being an often stigmatizing and ill-fittingly normative term.³⁹ Perhaps no city in the United States has become more synonymous with houselessness than Los Angeles, which has become a characteristic of the city despite facing a host of other political, social, economic, and environmental issues. One *Los Angeles Times* survey found that 95% of polled Los Angeles County residents agreed that houselessness was a “very serious” problem, with more agreement on it as a pressing issue than climate change, taxes, or even traffic.⁴⁰

It is no secret that a significant number of people live houseless and unsheltered in Los Angeles, often highly visibly. In a city of 3.97 million people, the 2020 Greater Los Angeles Point-

³⁸ National Alliance to End Homelessness, Changes in HUD Definition of “homeless,” accessed September 2021.

³⁹ Nicholas Slayton, “Time to Retire the Word ‘Homeless’ and Opt for ‘Houseless’ or ‘Unhoused’ Instead?” *Architectural Digest*, May 21, 2021.

⁴⁰ Benjamin Oreskes, Doug Smith, and David Lauter, “95% of voters say homelessness is L.A.’s biggest problem, Times poll finds. ‘You can’t escape it,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 2019.

In-Time Homeless Count reported that 41,290 people were experiencing houselessness in city as of January 2020, a figure which has not been updated since the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴¹ The massive loss of income and resulting housing insecurity due to the COVID-19 pandemic has been predicted by activists and scholars alike to have significantly increased these numbers, with one estimate suggesting that as many as 120,000 households in the greater Los Angeles County were at risk of experiencing homelessness because of COVID-19 pandemic related loss of income and/or housing.⁴² Significant racial disparities exist in the unhoused population, with BIPOC Angelenos disproportionately overrepresented. Despite the fact that only 9% of the city of Los Angeles' residents identify as Black, Black individuals make up over 38% of the unhoused population.⁴³ Of the 41,290 unhoused Angelenos counted in 2020, 70% were living unsheltered, residing outside of Los Angeles' limited shelter housing; often living alone inside their vehicles or in encampments under freeway overpasses, on sidewalks, and in public parks. Nationally, the ratio of unsheltered houseless individuals to sheltered houseless individuals is inverse, with only 1 in 3 people experiencing houselessness unsheltered.⁴⁴

The unsheltered nature of houselessness in Los Angeles demonstrates that the crisis is dire not only in its scope, but in its severity. In 2020 alone, 1,383 people experiencing houselessness died in Los Angeles County, nearly four people a day.⁴⁵ This figure reflects an 87% increase in

⁴¹ Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, "2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count Results," January 2020.

⁴² Gary Blasi, "UD Day: Impending Evictions and Homelessness in Los Angeles," *UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy*, May 2020.

⁴³ U.S. Census Bureau, *Los Angeles City 2019*, accessed September 14, 2021.

⁴⁴ Samantha Batko, Alyse D. Oneto, and Aaron Shroyer. "Unsheltered Homelessness: Trends, Characteristics, and Homeless Histories," *Urban Institute*, December 2020.

⁴⁵ Ethan Ward, "They were homeless, now they're dead, *Crosstown*, February 10, 2021.

mortality since 2015, despite only a 50% increase in houselessness during the same time span. Of those 1,383 unhoused deaths in 2020, only 315 are reported to have been caused by underlying health issues.⁴⁶ Just 4% died of COVID-19.⁴⁷ Despite the city's sunny reputation for mild and warm weather, significant unsheltered exposure to the weather has led to more people experiencing houselessness dying of hypothermia in Los Angeles than in San Francisco and New York City combined.⁴⁸ The steadily increasing deadliness of houselessness in Los Angeles has become a rallying cry for housing and houseless advocates who argue that the lack of affordable housing and quality transitional shelter has become little short of a death sentence for Los Angeles' unhoused. "It is a complete failure of leadership.... None of these people needed to die. The reason this is happening is because there's not proper housing," said organizer Adam Rice with the Los Angeles Community Action Network in an interview for *The Guardian*.⁴⁹

LAHSA, Emergency Shelter, and Project Roomkey

The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), a joint power-authority between the City and the County of Los Angeles, is the lead civic agency coordinating shelter housing and homeless services throughout the county of Los Angeles in the Los Angeles Continuum of Care. LAHSA describes its mission as "to drive the collaborative strategic vision to create solutions for the crisis of homelessness grounded in compassion, equity, and inclusion," but has received

⁴⁶ Center for Health Impact Evaluation, "Recent Trends in Mortality Rates and Causes of Death Among People Experiencing Homelessness in Los Angeles County," Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, January 2021.

⁴⁷ Center for Health Impact Evaluation, 2021.

⁴⁸ Lexis-Olivier Ray, "In Sunny Los Angeles, More Homeless People Die From the Cold than in SF and NYC Combined," *L.A. Taco*, January 19, 2021.

⁴⁹ Sam Levin, "More than 1,000 homeless people died in Los Angeles county last year," *The Guardian*, October 30, 2019.

criticism from both economically conservative interests who allege LAHSA’s strategies are too costly, and left-leaning houseless justice advocates who have condemned LAHSA for their partnerships with the Los Angeles Police Department and limited shelter and service offerings.⁵⁰ Operating on a budget of \$649.1 million for the 2022 fiscal year, the agency derives the bulk of its funding from Measures H and HHH—a county sales tax approved in 2017 to fund homeless services and a \$1.2 billion bond approved in the same year to support the construction of housing units for the unhoused, respectively—as well as from the federal, state, and Los Angeles city government.⁵¹

The 2021 Housing Inventory Count, a census conducted by LAHSA that surveys all interim and permanent housing options in the agency’s system found that only 14,854 emergency shelter beds were available in the City of Los Angeles on the night of the count, January 27, 2021; the majority of which were congregate, meaning shelters with shared residential areas.⁵² This figure does not fully reflect “decompression,” the reduction of congregate shelter’s living capacity during COVID-19 in alignment with the CDC recommendation that such shelters should reduce their capacity by 50% to prevent infection, so an actual shelter bed figure may likely be significantly lower than the 14,854 number provided by LAHSA.⁵³ Offers for a brief stay in a shelter bed may be rejected by someone experiencing houselessness for a number of reasons ranging from a shelter’s location, sobriety requirements, shelter restrictions that would result in separation from family or a pet, concerns about safety, and the understandable hesitancy to live without privacy or

⁵⁰ “Our Mission,” *Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority*, <https://www.lahsa.org/about>.

⁵¹ Ethan Ward, “Confused About What The LA Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) Does?” *LAist*, September 27, 2021.

⁵² “2021 HIC and Shelter Count,” *Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority*, July 21, 2021.

⁵³ “Interim Guidance on People Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*.

individual space in a congregate setting.⁵⁴ Between the increased risk of contracting COVID-19 at congregate shelters, extremely limited bed availability, and resistance to offers of congregate shelter, there was, and continues to be, an immediate need for non-congregate and non-carceral housing to meet the needs of the city's houseless population.

Project Roomkey was launched by California Governor Gavin Newsom in April 2020 with the purported aim to mitigate the aforementioned health risk of congregate emergency shelter during a pandemic with the provision of hotel and motel rooms for people experiencing homelessness.⁵⁵ The program was to be funded first by the state of California before being reimbursed from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and managed on the local/regional level. As the region's homeless services authority, LAHSA was responsible for the program's implementation in Los Angeles County, stating: "To combat the spread of COVID-19 and address the needs of the most vulnerable individuals in the community, local leaders created a hotel/motel program, entitled Project Roomkey to provide temporary housing for asymptomatic people experiencing homelessness (PEH) who are most at-risk of contracting COVID-19. High-risk individuals are those 65+ or who have certain underlying health conditions."⁵⁶ By all accounts, Project Roomkey was foremostly a public health project to place particularly vulnerable members of the unhoused population into a medically protective environment, rather than a transitional housing project.

⁵⁴ Rebecca Cohen, Will Yetvin, Jill Khadduri, *Understanding Encampments of People Experiencing Homelessness and Community Responses*, US Department of Housing and Urban Development: Office of Policy Development and Research, January 7, 2019.

⁵⁵ Anna Spencer and Kathy Moses, *California's Project Roomkey: A Homelessness and COVID-19 Innovation Snapshot*, Center for Health Care Strategies, April 2020.

⁵⁶ Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, *Project Roomkey*, lahsa.org, April 2020.

Though Project Roomkey offered a non-congregate shelter option, it was similarly, if not more so, restrictive than congregate shelter housing. Program participants were required to abide by strict curfews, could not possess their own room keys and had to depend on program staff to allow them into their rooms, were only allowed to maintain a small number of personal items, and were barred from receiving any guests, including family members.⁵⁷ Program staff could enter resident's rooms at will to perform "wellness checks," even if the resident expressly stated opposition to their entry, rendering the supposed privacy offered by non-congregate shelter moot. With such stringent restrictions on autonomy and space in Project Roomkey, participants have likened it to jail, describing the conditions as carceral and dehumanizing. "I feel like as if I did something wrong. I'm a criminal. I committed a crime, and I'm in jail, or I feel like, I'm...I don't want to say how it really makes me feel. It makes me feel useless, worthless," said participant Karyn Goldstein for an interview with Spectrum News 1.⁵⁸

In the days leading up to the displacement of the Echo Park Lake tent community, Councilmember Mitch O'Farrell described that his office had provided transitional housing offers to the residents of the lake in partnership with LAHSA and other city agencies, mentioning programs Project Roomkey and Project Homekey (a similar project spearheaded by the city) as providers of such housing, despite the fact that the program lacks any structure to actually move its participants into permanent housing.⁵⁹ The state and local misrepresentation of a program initially designed to provide quarantine for unhoused individuals to a program that would transition

⁵⁷ Sam Lutzker, "Project No Key," *Knock-LA*, February 24, 2021.

⁵⁸ Zarina Khairzada, "Homeless residents say Project Roomkey restrictions feel like 'jail,'" *Spectrum News 1*, May 20, 2021.

⁵⁹ @MitchOFarrell, "Since this morning, there has been a large amount of social media discussion and speculation about Echo Park Lake. (1/5)," *Twitter*, March 22, 2021.

people into permanent housing was further undermined by its own lackluster housing outcomes. Despite the city and county's aim to place 15,000 people into Project Roomkey, fewer than 9,000 participants had actually been placed as of July 2021 when the program first began phasing out before being ultimately extended until June 2022.⁶⁰ According to the same LAHSA data set, 73% of the program's participants went into other temporary shelter, had returned to unsheltered homelessness, had since passed away, were institutionalized, incarcerated, or entirely unaccounted for after having exited Project Roomkey.

Literature Review

This literature review presents the major existing theoretical and methodological frameworks analyzing urban displacement and spatial injustice in Los Angeles. Engaging with how previous scholars have conceptualized urbanism, colonialism, and policing—in the context of Los Angeles as a postmodern, global city—will provide the early foundations for this research and contribute to understanding how local policy and politics facilitated the removal of unhoused people from Echo Park Lake. Through the framework of militarism, I intend to weave together multiple theoretical frameworks to place Los Angeles' colonial, urban, and carceral histories in the same continuum of militarist violence that utilizes state weaponry, footmen, and powers to subjugate a perceivably violent populous—in this case study, the unhoused community, and their supporters at Echo Park Lake. After a review of scholarship on policing, homelessness, and urbanization as it relates to militarized displacement and dispossession, a final framing of how public space and public parks have been identified as significant, contested geographies for the city's unhoused population will set up this paper's analysis of Echo Park Lake as a flashpoint for Los Angeles' struggle with poverty and militarized violence, contextualizing why homeless

⁶⁰ Anna Scott, "The end of Project Roomkey leaves some unhoused people in limbo," *KCRW*, July 26, 2021.

activists and houseless justice organizers have decried the city's armed sweeps as emblematic of its "war on the poor." This literature review shows the importance of an interdisciplinary, mixed methodological approach to understanding the complex struggles of spatial injustice and demonstrates the potential of an original militarist framework in discussions of urban displacement and banishment in Los Angeles.

Urbanization and Spatial Injustice

Anthropologist Catherine Lutz broadly defines militarism in the context of its ideological roots in her 2009 book *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle Against U.S. Military Posts*, describing militarism as "an ideology that supports such policies by suggesting that the world is a naturally dangerous place which requires the control brought by armies."⁶¹ Scholars of militarism argue that this ideology of militarism has driven American imperial conquest both abroad, with the continuing policies of base building and installation in the Middle East and the Asia Pacific, and domestically, with the colonial frontier project which established hundreds of military bases on native land during the Mexican-American War.⁶² No analysis of spatial, racial, or economic injustice in 21st century Los Angeles would be complete without this contextualization of its militarist beginnings in the city's history as a settler colony which violently displaced, enslaved, incarcerated, and killed Indigenous peoples, as well as Black and immigrant populations, to consolidate wealth, land, and whiteness. As historian Kelly Lytle Hernández writes in her book *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965*, early colonial alienation of Indigenous people to the physical and political margins in slowly

⁶¹ Catherine Lutz, *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle Against U.S. Military Posts*, New York University Press, 2009, pg. 21.

⁶² Alyosha Goldstein, *Formations of United States Colonialism*, Duke University Press, 2014.

urbanizing Los Angeles represented one of the region's first establishments of structural spatial injustice.⁶³ Spanish colonial authority in early Los Angeles overthrew pre-colonial collectivist Indigenous Tongva economies and community structures for a highly stratified, hierarchical system of governance that uplifted the armed authority of the colonizer *gente de razón* caste (people with reason) and subjugated the Indigenous *gente sin razón* caste (people without reason), stripping away their rights to land ownership and coexistence.⁶⁴

In conjunction with decades of disease, incarceration, forced assimilation, and violence under the Spanish and subsequent American colonial regimes, the oppression of local Indigenous Tongva populations that built much of the region's infrastructure on chain gangs and in more explicit forms of slavery, led to a devastatingly population decline from an estimate of 10,000 to just 316 by the end of the 19th century.⁶⁵ The history of racism, genocide, and slave labor on chain gangs in Los Angeles demonstrates how deeply embedded early ideologies of militarism are in the city, with settlers seeking to completely deprive Indigenous peoples of their agency by force. Los Angeles' postwar expansion was another defining moment in the city's saga of sociospatial stratification and exclusion, this time dividing the region into "chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs" that drove the fleeing white flight population into the wealthy suburbs and hinterlands and relegated Los Angeles' non-white residents into the disinvested, redlined urban core.⁶⁶ This postwar spatial reordering of the city appeared both in contradiction and accordance with what urban historian Eric Avila referred to as the "racialized fantasies" of Los Angeles early 20th century

⁶³ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

⁶⁴ Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates*, pg. 27.

⁶⁵ Lytle Hernández, pg. 43.

⁶⁶ Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*, 2004.

white boosters and developers who sought to position the city as the nation's "white spot." The banishment of racialized workers in the settler colony is an early example of later local policies in Los Angeles which effectively do the same, identifying non-white or poor residents as inherently unworthy and incapable of serving visible roles in the city.

Lytle Hernández identified the racialized fantasy or colonial imaginary of whiteness as emblematic of both Los Angeles and the United States as a whole as settler colonial projects, writing "Settler cultures, institutions, and politics simultaneously trend toward excluding racialized workers from full inclusion in the body politics, corralling their participation in community life...deporting, hiding, or criminalizing them or otherwise revoking the right of racialized outsiders to be within the invaded territory."⁶⁷ Avila argued similarly, writing that though the city's contemporary existence as a "cultural kaleidoscope of global proportions" exists demonstrably in contradiction to the racial fantasy of Los Angeles as a "white spot"—as the city is now predominantly non-white demographically—the persisting spatial injustice and segregation of the region fulfills fantasies of whiteness which have awarded white Angeleno communities with wealth, housing, investment, and space at the disadvantage of the city's poor and BIPOC populations well into the 21st century.⁶⁸ Together, Avila and Lytle Hernández represent a canon of academics grounding contemporary analyses of urban spatial injustice and militarized displacement in their historic origins in land dispossession and racial exclusion. Their analysis of colonialism's past and present bears weight on potential policy recommendations arguing that given that the foundations of contemporary discriminatory public policy and planning are deeply embedded in systems of colonialism and racial capitalism, any possible solutions should speak to

⁶⁷ Lytle Hernández, pg. 8.

⁶⁸ Avila, pg. 20.

dismantling their underlying racist structures as well. This position is at odds with policymakers and academics who reject the implication that colonial, militarist, and segregationist histories continue to undergird contemporary public policy and planning and instead push for modern and/or technological fixes for urban crises of spatial injustice, houselessness, and poverty, among others.

As Lytle Hernández and Avila sought to demonstrate the persistence of spatial injustice and the governing of non-white poor bodies through historical contexts, postmodern urban theorists studying carceral and militarist cities have done so through studying the spatial patterns and processes of urban development and design. In *Postmodern Urbanism*, urban theorists Michael Dear and Steven Flusty posit a centerless structure of urban structuring based on Los Angeles' model in which the "hinterland organizes the center," the inverse of the Chicago School's concentric ring theory, as initially introduced by sociologist Ernest Burgess.⁶⁹ ⁷⁰ The result of this centerless urbanism, according to the authors, is "keno capitalism," which further dictates the heterogenous sociospatial arrangement of the city, organizing the city not into readily definable zones such as central business districts and civic centers but into crudely juxtaposed sites of warfare, wealth, and spectacle.⁷¹ Under keno capitalism, private residential utopias fulfilling racial fantasies of white suburban domesticity exist not only in stark contrast to carceral zones but because carceral zones exist, because the city can banish nondesirable entities from districts of prosperity to those of surveillance and control. Dear and Flusty's model of postmodern urbanism as driven by Keno capitalism provides a Los Angeles specific model for urban structuring into the global 21st century and conceptualizes how central the contradictions between wealth and poverty,

⁶⁹ Michael Dear and Steven Flusty, "Postmodern Urbanism." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 88, No.1, 1998.

⁷⁰ Ernest Burgess, Roderick McKenzie, and Robert Park, *The City*, The University of Chicago Press, 1925.

⁷¹ See Appendix D for the Keno capitalism model of urban structuring.

privacy and surveillance, suburban safety, and urban violence, are to the sociospatial arrangement of the city.

Dear and Flusty's postmodern move represents an ideological and theoretical shift for urban scholars in the late 20th century, with more academics embracing nonconventional schools of urbanism like the Los Angeles School that identify the disorganized, polarized urban form of sprawling cities like Los Angeles and Houston to be the new normal for urban development under global capitalism, not traditionally studied cities like Chicago, New York City, or Paris.⁷² Dear and Flusty's centralization of the ebb and flow of violence, surveillance, and incarceration espouses that the use of state force is spatially embedded into Los Angeles' postmodern development. Though they don't use the term militarism (or related terms militarist and militarization), they are pointing to a phenomenon other urban scholars would identify as such, such as urban geographer Edward Soja who similarly noted the material and spatial realities of Los Angeles as a highly polarized city in *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*.⁷³ In his analysis of Los Angeles as an archetypal postmodern urban geography, Soja detailed the influential post-Fordist reindustrialization and suburbanization of the city and the region's endearing legacy of military investment and enterprise. Soja contextualized Los Angeles' militarism in its location on the Pacific rim, where the city is positioned as a financial and commercial hegemon signaling the nation's imperial dominance across the Pacific.⁷⁴ In doing so, Soja reintroduced the histories and geographies of military development into postmodern

⁷² Christopher Hawthorne, "Los Angeles, Houston, and the appeal of the hard-to-read city," *Los Angeles Times*, 2018.

⁷³ Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, New York: Verso Books, 1989, pg. 193.

⁷⁴ Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, pg. 210.

urbanist studies of Los Angeles, identifying Los Angeles as not only a city afflicted with contradictions of wealth and poverty, but of obscurity and militarism that is both “holocaust and halcyon,” “lethal and tranquil.”⁷⁵

Where Dear and Flusty’s argument faltered in their more abstract depictions of spatial injustice, Soja grounded his argument in the larger geopolitical context of urban dominance in the imperial core, building some of the earliest postmodern bridges between urban theory and militarism studies. Soja’s refocusing on military industry and development in Los Angeles as a key influence on the city’s spatial, socioeconomic, political context is further researched in historian Mike Davis’s seminal book *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*.⁷⁶ “Welcome to post-liberal Los Angeles, where the defense of luxury lifestyles is translated into a proliferation of new repressions in space and movement, undergirded by the ubiquitous ‘armed response,’” writes Davis.⁷⁷ Focusing on the neo-military syntax of Los Angeles’ built environment, Davis detailed the distinctly carceral, hostile, and militarist fixtures and developments that shape space in Los Angeles; to the explicit exclusion of poor and non-white Angelenos. Unlike Dear and Flusty who took a largely theoretical approach to studying urban structure, or Soja who took a largely geographical approach, Davis analyzed the politics at work beyond the physical form and function of hostile urbanism in Los Angeles to map out the organization of power that facilitates this design and its motivators: “paranoid” middle and upper-class residents demanding social insulation from the “undesirable” inner-city, corporate redevelopment interests catering to this vision by developing surveilled enclaves and shopping malls, and ultimately a city government

⁷⁵ Soja, pg. 225.

⁷⁶ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, New York: Verso Books, 1990.

⁷⁷ Davis, *City of Quartz*, pg. 223.

eager to cater to these monied demands.⁷⁸ In his both spatial and political historic analysis of Los Angeles as a “hostile” city, Davis identifies the militarist character of governance and development therein. As the state utilizes its own law enforcement agencies for its militarist agenda of armed response, it likewise influences a culture of private security neighborhoods for those who can afford it and social vulnerability and police harassment for those who cannot.

Militarism and Policing

Framework synthesizing colonialism, imperialism, and hostile urbanism into a continuum of American militarism has been adopted by critical scholars of policing and criminalization who look at the policing and incarceration of Black and Brown bodies as American military violence turned inwards. Scholars of militarism and policing argue that foreign policy both starts and ends at home, fulfilling a cycle of violence that utilizes military tactics, ideologies, and strategies to subjugate marginalized peoples who don’t serve the financial or political interests of the state. “Although they may take a different form upon return, violent or repressive policies deployed *over there* often have a second life *back here*. Designed to sustain endless violence abroad, military weapons and tactics flow into local police departments and threaten public safety,” reads one of the tenants of anti-militarism think-tank The Security Policy Reform Institute.⁷⁹ Between police budgets that reach into the billions, the US Department of Defense’s domestic arms transfer program 1033 that puts military equipment into the arms of local law enforcement and has a positive and statistically significant relationship with police killings, the parallels drawn between

⁷⁸ Davis, pg. 227.

⁷⁹ The Security Policy Reform Institute, “Our Tenets,” <https://www.securityreform.org/our-tenets>, accessed October 19, 2021.

police violence and imperial violence have been backed by both quantitative and qualitative methods.⁸⁰

The study of militarism and policing goes beyond an analysis of militarization as merely the act of police adopting military tactics and becoming more heavily weaponized but moves towards a synthesis of the concepts that understands urban policing as being representative of the same strategies and ideology of imperial militarism. In a 2007 article on policing: *Militarization and Policing—Its Relevance to 21st Century Police*, author Peter Kraska breaks down the false dichotomy between military and police, arguing that academic and political demarcation between the two has only continued to blur.⁸¹ Kraska agrees with other scholars of policing that American police forces have always been “militaristic to some degree,” but identifies four dimensions of the military model of police militarization that define police militarization for the 21st century:

- Material—martial weaponry, equipment, and advanced technology;
- Cultural—martial language, style (appearance), beliefs, and values;
- Organizational—martial arrangements such as ‘command and control’ centers;
- Operational—patterns of activity modeled after the military such as in the areas of intelligence, supervision, handling high risk situations, or war-making/restoration.⁸²

By Kraska’s metric and other literature on police militarization, there is less a question of if police militarization is happening, or even why, and many scholars have chosen to structure their research in identifying the consequences and lived impacts of police militarization at large rather than

⁸⁰ Casey Delehanty, Jack Mewhirter, Ryan Welch, and Jason Wilks, *Militarization and Police Violence: The Case of the 1033 Program*, SAGE Publications Limited, 2017.

⁸¹ Peter Kraska, *Militarization and Policing—Its Relevance to 21st Century Police*, *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, Volume 1, Issue 4, 2007.

⁸² Kraska, *Militarization and Policing*, 2007, pg. 3.

demonstrating its existence broadly. With the agreed universality of militarization within policing, many scholars have dropped the adjective militarization and integrated an understanding of militarism and militarization into policing broadly as interlocking and symmetrical matrixes of power.

Community and community-aligned researchers have led this shift towards aligning policing and militarism studies with analyses of policing seeing modern policing as inherently militarized and centering the personhoods of victims of urban police violence in the American police state. In their public education, research, and organizing, the abolitionist Stop LAPD Spying Coalition have repeatedly articulated the Los Angeles Police Department's core roots in militarism and how the police force's "othering" of "suspect bodies" is directly imported from colonial, imperial, and chattel slavery strategies to create political justifications for violence.⁸³ Los Angeles in particular has a long and storied history with both militarism as it pertains to military industry and development, and militarism as it pertains to an unprecedentedly militarized police force (a process most notably motivated by the 1984 LA Olympics which brought military crowd control tactics, a tank, and military arms to the LAPD).⁸⁴ ⁸⁵ "The police state is an ever-expanding endeavor that is fundamentally flawed by design, intended and organized to repress and control Black, Brown, and poor communities, causing irreparable physical and emotional harm," reads one Stop LAPD Spying Coalition report on predictive policing and the adoption of "data-driven" military technologies in the Los Angeles Police Department.⁸⁶ These interlocking systems of

⁸³ Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, *Before The Bullet Hits The Body: Dismantling Predictive Policing in Los Angeles*, 2018.

⁸⁴ See map of major military bases and sites of military industry in Appendix E.

⁸⁵ NOlympics Los Angeles, "Examining the LA 1984 Olympic Legacy: Capitalism, Police Violence, and Privatization," June 29, 2020.

⁸⁶ Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, 2018.

militarism and racialized policing are supported by a city hall that routinely introduces militarist measures, ordinances, and programs which utilize the language of “law and order” to combat perceived future violence with actualized militarized state violence.⁸⁷

The Criminalization of Houselessness

Contemporary literature on the criminalization of houselessness is nearly unanimous in its agreement that criminalization is an ineffective, inequitable, and inhumane tactic in mitigating houselessness, yet legislation criminalizing acts nearly or completely unavoidable by unhoused people has only continued to increase nationally and in Los Angeles. The act of criminalization is at the crux of the relationship between not just carceral systems and houselessness, but of militarism and houselessness, as it provides a legal justification to remove people from space by force by virtue of their housing status. For unhoused people living without shelter in public space—whether that be in a tent community, in their vehicle, in a public park, or place structure not originally intended for human habitation—they have no choice but to live in discordance with local law. Bans on camping, sitting, lying, sleeping in public, loitering, vagrancy, solicitation, and property storage are just a few of the many measures that cities continue to use as an approach to criminalize houselessness and force unhoused people into potentially dangerous or deadly interactions with law enforcement, costly fines that they largely have no means of which to pay off, and even jailing or imprisonment. This is especially true in Los Angeles, where there have been significant annual increases in arrests of unhoused people, largely for minor offenses.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Max Felker-Kantor, *Liberal Law-and-Order: The Politics of Police Reform in Los Angeles*, *Journal of Urban History*, 2020.

⁸⁸ Gale Holland and Christine Zhang, “Huge Increase in Arrests of Homeless in L.A. but Mostly for Minor Offenses,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2018.

While many interactions with law enforcement do ultimately result in jail time, expensive fines, or police violence, the bulk of them result in the displacement from one point in public space to another in what city officials describe as “clean-ups” and activists have more aptly dubbed “sweeps.”⁸⁹ These sweeps frequently occur with few housing alternatives, sometimes with the promise of a shelter bed but largely with the instruction that if they decline to move before the time of the sweep, their property may be confiscated and destroyed, and they may face charges for disobeying the law. Several key findings from a 2019 National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty report identified that the criminalization of homelessness: a) results in fines and fees that perpetuate the cycle of poverty, b) harms public safety and public health, c) costs upwards of hundreds of millions of dollars per jurisdiction, and d) is often deemed unconstitutional and discriminatory under federal law and is potentially in violation of a number of global human rights conventions.⁹⁰ Unhoused people of color, particularly unhoused Black populations, are criminalized at an even higher rate than their white unhoused counterparts, who are in turn criminalized at a rate disproportionate to their makeup of the larger housed and unhoused population.⁹¹

Public Parks as Refuge and Protest

Given the aforementioned policing of public space through criminalization of acts commonplace to existing as an unhoused person, many unhoused individuals have opted to reside in green spaces such as public parks that are often more secluded from public view and provide

⁸⁹ Matt Tinoco, “LA Will Spend \$30M This Year On Homeless Sweeps. Do They Even Work?” *LAist*, April 10, 2019.

⁹⁰ National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, *Housing Not Handcuffs: Ending the Criminalization of Homelessness in US Cities*, 2019.

⁹¹ National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2019.

rare privacy. In the 2019 paper *The City Is not Innocent: Homelessness and the Value of Urban Parks*, authors Jessie Speer and Eric Goldfischer ask, “What theories of the value of urban parks arise when we take the perspective of those without property?” and argue that urban park space is a significant material, as well as spiritual, sustaining space for unhoused peoples striving to find livable space free of harassment, violence, and surveillance.⁹² Environmental and urban literature has long accepted the positive health and quality of life impacts green park space has in cities, yet the value of urban park space has largely been predicated on its appeal and profitability to housed, white populations rather than the general public.⁹³ While domestic usage of public parks for leisure, exercise, and other recreation is seen as a worthwhile good to the capitalist city, camping by unhoused people seeking to enjoy access to the park for survival are seen as devaluing to the park and altogether undesirable.⁹⁴ This represents a duality of valuation and devaluation in urban park space echoes other urban dichotomies of simultaneous power and subjugation, disinvestment and renewal, that lies at the core of capitalist urban governance that honors only place-making and profit-making.⁹⁵

Speer and Goldfischer advocate for the inclusion of memoirs of houselessness in park space in policy and academic consideration, with many self-published unhoused memoirists providing valuable first-hand examples of residing in public urban park space. “Central Park is ideal because it’s so big, and the precinct over there doesn’t have enough man-power to cover the whole

⁹² Jessie Speer and Eric Goldfischer, *The City Is not Innocent: Homelessness and the Value of Urban Parks*, Taylor & Francis, 2019.

⁹³ Speer and Goldfischer, *The City is not Innocent*, 2019.

⁹⁴ Jesse Speer, “It’s not like your Home’: Homeless Encampments, Housing Projects, and the Struggle over Domestic Space,” *Antipode* 49 (2): 517-535, 2017.

⁹⁵ Nik Theodore, Jamie Peck, and Neil Brenner, “Neoliberal Urbanism: Cities and the Rule of Markets,” in *The New Blackwell Companion to the City*, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

area...The bigger the park, the better. Astoria Park is no good, it's not that big and they patrol it," wrote one unhoused memoirist Cadillac Man who wrote of his experiences living outside in New York City.⁹⁶ This inclusion of memoirs that highlight the three overarching themes of living in urban park space while unhoused—privacy, survival, and solace—provides a glimpse into the value of a methodological and epistemological approach that centers personal narrative as knowledge.

There is limited research documenting the specific intersection between militarized policing, public parks, and houselessness; with much research on houselessness and public parks largely looking at the physicality of living in green space, research on militarized policing and public parks focusing on armed response in public space broadly, and research on militarized policing and houselessness together taking a less site-specific or spatial approach.^{97 98} In the absence of research generally studying the militarized policing of unhoused people in public parks, a specific case study of Berkeley's People's Park offers particular insight by comparing phenomena of militarized displacement of unhoused populations from public parks. Owned by the University of California since its 1967 acquisition via eminent domain, the parcel known as "People's Park" has long been a site of renewed protest and activism as students and local organizers have staved off development of the space predominantly occupied by houseless people for decades. Like at Echo Park Lake, the residents and supporters of the People's Park unhoused community sought to create a "haven for persons evicted by dominant society."⁹⁹ In 1969, when

⁹⁶ Speer and Goldfischer, 2019.

⁹⁷ Setha Low and Neil Smith, *The Politics of Public Space*, New York: Routledge, 2006.

⁹⁸ Forrest Stuart, *On the Streets, Under Arrest: Policing Homelessness in the 21st Century*, *Sociology Compass*, Vol 9, Issue 11, 2015.

⁹⁹ Don Mitchell, *The End of Public Space? People's Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy*, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 85, No.1, 1995.

the university sought to transform People's Park into volleyball courts, activists and residents who refused to leave the park were met with a police response that consisted of wooden and putty bullets, physical beatings of activists, and other violent crowd control measures. People's Park activists ultimately won and maintained control of the park, marking it as "an important symbol of political power" for these supporters of public space.¹⁰⁰ Invertedly, the displacement of the unhoused community at Echo Park Lake has been seen as a political blow to the housing justice movement in Los Angeles that were unable to retain control over the park in the face of a militarized police response.

The aforementioned colonial, urban, and police studies of Los Angeles can be synthesized together through militarism, which has provided the ideology and means for cities to banish, incarcerate, and brutalize populations it identifies to be undesirable, dangerous, and therefore deserving of violence—from Los Angeles' original genocide of Indigenous Tongvaar peoples to today's displacement of unhoused and low income BIPOC populations. The militarist theoretical framework situates the eviction of the Echo Park Lake tent community into a continuum of spatial injustice, hostile urbanization, and policing, disagreeing with the *Los Angeles Times* that it was a "flashpoint in L.A.'s homelessness crisis" and suggests that the displacement is more accurately understood as another chapter of the city's history of colonial urbanism. In L.A.'s militarist urban geography, Echo Park Lake's public park space represents a battlefield between the city's political interests and those banished to the urban hinterlands.

Methodology

Case Study Research Design

¹⁰⁰ Mitchell, *The End of Public Space?* 1995.

To address the primary research question—What are the structural, policy, and legal factors that facilitated the March 2021 displacement of the Echo Park Lake tent community?—I employed an explanatory case study research design that utilized the specific context of the displacement of Echo Park Lake’s tent community to explore the militarist mechanisms behind the larger phenomenon of displacement and dispossession from urban public space. This research design recognized that though the Echo Park Lake displacement is neither a perfectly interchangeable example with other sweeps from public space, nor an incomparably unique one, it was an example altogether worth analyzing for its embodiment of what housing organizers and people experiencing houselessness fear most from a sweep—violent removal, police brutality, political loss, and the potential construction of a new blueprint for displacement in Los Angeles.¹⁰¹ Echo Park Lake as a microcosm of militarized displacement in Los Angeles is doubly relevant in a city which itself can be described as a historic microcosm of police militarism and displacement nationally, if not internationally.

Interviews

Within this case study research design, my primary research method was qualitative semi-structured interviews to capture varied perspectives on the causes and mechanisms of the Echo Park Lake displacement, as well as to capture the phenomenology of militarized displacement as not only a policy, legal, or political act but as a harrowing physical experience belonging to a larger canon of state seizure and police violence. It is, of course, critical to have quantitative data representative of the scale and urgency of houselessness and displacement, but the dimension of personal storytelling and oral history added by qualitative interview most closely captured the multifaceted and fundamentally embodied experience of the Echo Park Lake displacement. I

¹⁰¹ GoFundMe, “Echo Park Rise Up,” 2020.

conducted ten interviews with subjects selected for their personal experience, organizing, or scholarship with the Echo Park Lake community: three housing justice organizers who protested the displacement, three researchers of displacement and houselessness, three unhoused activists and former residents of Echo Park Lake, and one Echo Park neighborhood councilmember.

Three city agencies were reached out to multiple times for an interview or comment over a month long period, the Department of Recreation and Parks, the Los Angeles Housing Services Authority, and the Office of Councilmember Mitch O'Farrell, but with the exception of Councilmember Mitch O'Farrell's office who responded detailing their disagreement with the nature of my study, none responded for comment.¹⁰² Subjects could choose to accept a \$25 VISA gift card as compensation for their time and could opt out of the interview, or any pre-determined questions inquiring into their experiences or perceptions of the Echo Park Lake displacement, at any time. Interviews were thirty minutes to an hour in duration depending on subject interest and availability, were recorded and transcribed for clarity, before being coded and analyzed by emergent themes. Interviews with people close to the displacement by proximity, organizing, or scholarship provide critical insight into what the impact of public space law, policy, and politics actually looks like on the ground.

Content Analysis

To supplement qualitative interviews with the specific political and legal context of public space in Los Angeles, I utilized policy analysis of the various ordinances and measures that restrict public space, and legal analysis of the various court rulings that have both upheld and overturned various public space restrictions. The bulk of analysis focused on one policy in particular, Los Angeles municipal ordinance 41.18 which restricts "sitting, lying, or sleeping or storing, us,

¹⁰² Mitch O'Farrell's office response to my inquiry can be found in the appendix of this paper.

maintaining, or placing personal property in the public-right-of-way,” and legal analysis on one particular decision, *Martin v. Boise* by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, a decision that ruled in favor of six unhoused plaintiffs, stating that cities could not constitutionally enforce anti-camping ordinances without an adequate supply of shelter beds available for the local unhoused population.¹⁰³ Existing literature and frameworks in critical urban studies also helped inform this policy analysis and identify the common histories, characteristics, and conditions of public space governance in Los Angeles.

Findings and Analysis

The ten interviews I conducted, alongside an analysis of relevant policy and legal documents, revealed a number of themes and findings which ultimately concluded that the Echo Park Lake displacement was not a pure function of criminalization policy and legal frameworks being enforced, but rather one caused by pre-existing political and structural factors, specifically:

- 1) How the city is structured to politically empower City Councilmembers to favor acting in alignment with “NIMBY” voters, donors, and interests; and
- 2) The pervasiveness of militarism in the city that manifests in the continuance of the city’s history of racial policing and banishment against its unhoused population.

Interviewees spanning all interview groups frequently expressed themes of chaos, fear, anger, worry, and pessimism in reflection on the displacement. Other notable findings included the experientially traumatic policing of the displacement, the city’s outreach failures and a lack of governmental transparency leading up to the displacement, skepticism surrounding the existence of public space in Los Angeles, and organizing challenges as the Overton window appears to move rightward on houselessness.

¹⁰³ City of Los Angeles, *Section 41.18 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code*.

The Displacement as a Military Invasion

A predominant theme that emerged in all ten interviews was the nature of the militarized displacement, both as experienced by organizers and residents of the park, and as viewed from the outside by researchers and neighbors who watched it unfold on social media. Interviewees used language such as “violent,” “terrifying,” “chaotic,” and “disturbing,” to express the physical and emotional experience of being on the ground at the displacement and facing off with deployed police officers. On the first night of the displacement, housing and racial justice organizer Albert Corado, who is running for Los Angeles City Council in District 13, the council district in which Echo Park Lake is situated, described the police presence as a military occupation: “It was what I imagined an occupied territory would look like. There were cops in riot gear everywhere, covering every block, laughing at us as we were trying to hold down a line.” Corado’s running on a campaign of police abolition, working to defund and abolish the Los Angeles Police Department after two LAPD officers opened fire into a crowded Trader Joe’s in Silverlake, killing his younger sister Melyda Corado who was store manager.¹⁰⁴ “It was hard not to feel like we were physically losing a battle to the police,” said Corado.

Steven Chun, a housing justice organizer with Jtown Action and Solidarity, recounted his own experience as a demonstrator at the second night of protests at Echo Park Lake: “I keep coming back to the idea of how chaotic it was, just pure chaos, the most terrifying thing ever.” On that night of protest, Chun vividly remembers fear sinking in as he watched officers seemingly target smaller women in the crowd for arrest. He pushed himself to the front of the skirmish line where protestors were being pushed back by police officers outfitted in riot gear in an attempt to deescalate, and in doing so was beaten repeatedly by a police officer with a baton so severely that

¹⁰⁴ Liam Fitzpatrick, “‘If We Don’t Do Anything, They’ll Keep Killing People,’” *Knock-LA*, July 16, 2020.

he received a contusion which lasted several months. Chun was not alone in his experience with police brutality at the Echo Park Lake protests, with at least two other known incidents: one in which protestor Isaac Scher received a “nightstick fracture,” a nickname many doctors use to describe an injury inflicted on someone with their forearm raised as one would to block a blow from a baton or “nightstick,” and another in which Echo Park resident Becca Standt sustained severe head injuries after LAPD officers charged an alley Standt was standing in, knocking Standt to the ground repeatedly.¹⁰⁵ ¹⁰⁶ In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Scher stated that he was protesting in support of the encampment’s unhoused residents when he sustained the fracture and in opposition to the “stigmatization of poverty in a neighborhood that is increasingly gentrifying.” Standt, the other known victim of police brutality at the protest, was not attending the protest but merely standing behind her residence when police inflicted injury, and has since filed a lawsuit against the LAPD alleging “brutal assault.”

The second night of protests would end with a hundred and eighty-two demonstrators arrested, at least twenty of which were journalists and legal observers documenting the protest, after the police tactic “kettling” (in which police officers surround a group to prevent free exit before advancing) was used following the police’s declaration of an unlawful assembly.¹⁰⁷ Of the 56 members of the press who were arrested, detained, or assaulted by police in the United States in 2021, at least 20 were journalists documenting the sweep at Echo Park Lake, meaning 35% of

¹⁰⁵ Kevin Rector, “Echo Park protestor alleges LAPD officer broke his arm with baton strike,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 2021.

¹⁰⁶ Kevin Rector, “Echo Park resident sues LAPD, alleging ‘brutal assault’ by officers near protest,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Kevin Rector, “Reporters, legal observers cry foul after being caught up in LAPD’s mass arrests at Echo Park protest,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 2021.

all journalist arrests or detainments in the US in 2021 came from that single incident.¹⁰⁸ “When I think back to it, that night, I think we were only there for a couple hours, but it felt like forever,” spoke Chun. The expression of feelings of chaos, terror, and loss that was repeated by a number of interviewees and demonstrators, was overwhelmingly described as resulting from the massive police presence at the lake and the exertion of militaristic crowd control tactics ranging from kettling, to arrest, to outright brutalization. Housing justice organizers and unhoused activists shared that while it was not unique for a displacement to utilize police as some sweeps are monitored by a member of law enforcement, the particular role that the militarized police presence at Echo Park Lake played made it less comparable to smaller encampment sweeps, and more comparable to police resistance faced by protestors with the Black Lives Matter movement in Los Angeles’ Fairfax District in May 2020.¹⁰⁹

Strategic Silence and Outreach Failures

Central to the frustration experienced by organizers and lake residents surrounding the displacement was what they felt was deliberate and strategic deception from the local councilmember’s office to stifle organized opposition to encampment displacement; a strategy that came at the direct cost of building successful paths to services and housing for the lake’s unhoused residents. “The secrecy, the misinformation, the lying, why?” said interviewee Dr. Robin Petering, founder of research nonprofit LensCo and organizer with the Services Not Sweeps coalition. Several interviewees described the weeks leading up to the displacement as ones full of paranoia, anxiety, and rumors as the community braced itself for action from the city that it felt certain was

¹⁰⁸ David Folkenflik, “From kid gloves to rubber bullets: How the LAPD’s ties to news media unraveled,” *Georgia Public Broadcasting*, March 31, 2022.

¹⁰⁹ Dino-Ray Ramos, “Los Angeles’ Fairfax Protest: The Peaceful and Inspiring Demonstration You Didn’t See, and First-Hand Accounts of the Aftermath that Played Out on TV,” *Deadline*, June 3, 2020.

coming. Outreach workers from the Los Angeles Housing Services Authority had begun visiting the camp, offering some residents placement in hotel rooms through Project Roomkey. The news that the encampment would be swept on March 25th was eventually made public via a confidential whistleblower who reportedly worked for the city.

Petering described the “...bizarre feeling of knowing something was going to happen without knowing when or how” to me, stating “Of all things, the way it went down, and the amount of deception involved, was just wrong.” Petering recounted that on the day of the displacement, organizers were scrambling to find temporary shelter placement in hotels for lake residents who had no viable alternatives for housing than at Echo Park Lake and no offers for placement within Project Roomkey. Residents recounted in interviews feeling torn between packing up all of their belongings and being determined to stay put in the park and resist displacement in their newfound home. On the strategic silence and misinformation from the councilmember’s office, Petering said:

It didn’t have to happen that way. Lying to us, lying to the press, putting up a fence in the middle of the night, these things are shady and are not the way these things should happen. It was very telling of Mitch’s priority to sweep the encampment, not house people. It was so obvious to me the reason he was doing this.

Now on the campaign trail for re-election, Councilmember Mitch O’Farrell has been championing his clearing of the park. In an emailed response to my request to speak to a member of the councilmember’s office on the displacement, Communications Director Dan Halden wrote: “Respectfully, what occurred in 2021 at Echo Park Lake was not a “displacement,” but rather a *placement* of nearly 200 people—who had been living in dangerous, inhumane conditions in the park—into safe, secure, managed, transitional housing. The transitional housing placements were the result of substantial outreach efforts that took place over a period of three months.”¹¹⁰ These

¹¹⁰ Mitch O’Farrell’s office’s full response to my inquiry can be found in the appendix of this paper.

statements were denounced by organizers, lake residents, and researchers I spoke to who described the relocation of residents into interim or permanent housing by the council office as entirely unsuccessful with next to no residents having been successfully placed in longer term housing. LAHSA's most recent data on housing outcomes since the encampment's sweep reports that of all 183 residents displaced from the park, 174 were in interim housing, five were unaccounted for, and only four had been placed in permanent housing as of October 2021.¹¹¹ An internal estimate by Streetwatch LA organizer Jed Parriott was that approximately 63 residents had accepted housing services from the city at the time of the displacement.¹¹²

Though the councilmember's office continues to celebrate the clearing of the Echo Park Lake tent community and its declared extensive efforts to place former residents into transitional housing, former residents of Echo Park Lake emphasized in their interviews that not every resident received a shelter offer and that those that were offered, were often done so under the implicit or explicit threat of being reported as service resistant if not and therefore subject to citation, arrest, or even institutionalization. "The city expects people to take anything and be grateful for it, and if we don't take it, we're criminals," said Will Sens, a former resident of Echo Park Lake currently staying in a Project Roomkey shelter. The purported offer of housing, regardless of if it is actually made (or if the offer in question is actually housing) provides the legal justification for the city to clear an encampment in compliance with LAMC 41.18. Sens described the outreach workers with LAHSA and contractor Urban Alchemy who were visiting the community leading up to the displacement as "car salesmen for shitty hotel rooms who will tell you anything to get you to leave

¹¹¹ Sam Levin, "LA clears another park encampment in battle over worsening housing crisis," *The Guardian*, October 14, 2021.

¹¹² Jamie Loftus, "Former Echo Park Lake Residents, Internal LAHSA Communications Contradict Housing Placement Claims," *Knock-LA*, April 1, 2021.

an encampment, even if it isn't true. They make it sound as appealing as possible without putting any of the necessary work into building trust." Though he was placed in a hotel downtown, he knew of other residents who had been told they could stay in a hotel nearby before ultimately being given placement in a Project Roomkey site as distant as Palmdale—a city in the Antelope Valley over sixty miles away from the lake. For residents dependent on local resources, community-members, families, or jobs, placement so far away would only make the process of transitioning into permanent housing all the more difficult. "A lot of people didn't want to come in, and even more didn't want to stay in it after seeing how the program was," said Sens. Between the program's carceral nature, its inaccessible site locations, and the fact that the program was being leveraged to displace other encampments, Project Roomkey quickly became a rallying point of protest for a lot of unhoused organizers and their allies following the displacement at Echo Park Lake and again demonstrated the importance of non-carceral permanent housing solutions.

Perceptions of Displacement Politics, Law, and Policy

Interviewees across all groups identified that they perceived the displacement as less of a result of any particular law or policy, but as the result of a city structured to politically empower city councilmembers to police houselessness in their district as they see fit to themselves and their political base. Researchers of displacement and houselessness, in particular, spoke to the nature of displacement politics, sharing that displacement is rarely a function of pure policy or law, but that of the political will to displace which creates exclusionary policies to serve those interests. Dr. Ananya Roy, Professor of Urban Planning, Social Welfare, and Geography at the University of California, Los Angeles and founder of the newly established After Echo Park Lake research collective, was emphatic that the Echo Park Lake displacement was not about any particular policy or legal mechanism, but about the continuation of Los Angeles' history of policing the poor. "Los

Angeles has continued to expand its regime of racial banishment. It is about displacement and dispossession...it's a sort of state organized violence against unhoused communities and working class communities of color more generally," spoke Roy.

Dr. Gary Blasi, Professor of Law Emeritus at UCLA Law echoed a similar sentiment to Roy from his perspective as a legal scholar, describing the dubious legality of some encampment displacements in Los Angeles as indicative of how legality is a "relatively trivial consideration" for decision-makers in the city. "The law is always just another way of playing politics. The displacement was completely political. The political will to displace comes first, the law comes after." These statements from researchers embody the sort of chicken-and-the-egg debate surrounding displacement governance, wherein some view the criminalization of houselessness, and policy restrictions of public space—be it noise abatement, anti-sit-lie ordinances, etc.—as the documents providing impetus for displacement. Scholars like Roy and Blasi however, argue that when those policies do not exist, policymakers create them. When laws or legal decisions discourage criminalizing behavior, the city takes on the legal and financial risk by opposing them or failing to abide by them. The foundational mechanism for displacement in Los Angeles is therefore not policy or law but political will. "The emerging consensus is 'We're going to get rid of encampments by hook or by crook.' The only question for them [politicians] is not really 'What are the legal consequences of that?' but 'What are the public relations consequences of that?'" said Blasi.

The findings of my document review and content analysis are in-line with Roy and Blasi's consensus and demonstrate that the city engenders potential legal risk to adopt contentious policy restrictions on houselessness and public space as suitable to their political will to displace. Landmark 2018 ruling *Martin v. Boise* by the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals explicitly ruled

“an ordinance violates the Eighth Amendment insofar as it imposes criminal sanctions against homeless individuals for sleeping outdoors, on public property, when no alternative shelter is available to them,” finding that it was “cruel and unusual punishment” to criminally punish, by law or threat of violence, unhoused people for sitting, sleeping, and lying down with no viable housing alternatives.¹¹³ After the Supreme Court declined to hear the case despite submissions of amicus briefs by both the city and the county of Los Angeles, the city was forced to replace existing Section 41.18 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code, the city’s hallmark anti-sleep-lie ordinance, for noncompliance with the ruling.

The amended code adopted in July 2021 now reads: “No person shall be found in violation of any prohibition set forth in Subsection (c), unless and until: (i) the City Council has taken action, by resolution, to designate a specified area or areas for enforcement against sitting, lying, sleeping, or storing, using, maintaining, or placing personal property, or otherwise obstructing the public right-of-way.”¹¹⁴ The amendment creates a type of legislative loophole in which instead of a blanket ban on sitting, sleeping, and lying, councilmembers are allowed to themselves designate location-specific anti-sit-lie zones in their districts. Since the amendment’s passing, 403 sites have been proposed, resolutions which were approved in nearly all instances.¹¹⁵ Two such zones are in direct proximity to Echo Park Lake, as depicted in Figure 1 below. In a public statement, Los Angeles City Councilmember for the 11th District Mike Bonin described the measure as the

¹¹³ *Martin v. Boise*, 920 F.3d 584 (9th Cir. 2019).

¹¹⁴ City of Los Angeles, *Section 41.18 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code*.

¹¹⁵ Ktown for All, *Los Angeles City Council Report Card: 2021 in Housing and Homelessness Policy*, <https://ktownforall.org/reportcard>, February 2022.

“cornerstone of the City’s failed approach to homelessness,” citing a costly history of litigation with the ordinance for its unconstitutionality across iterations.¹¹⁶

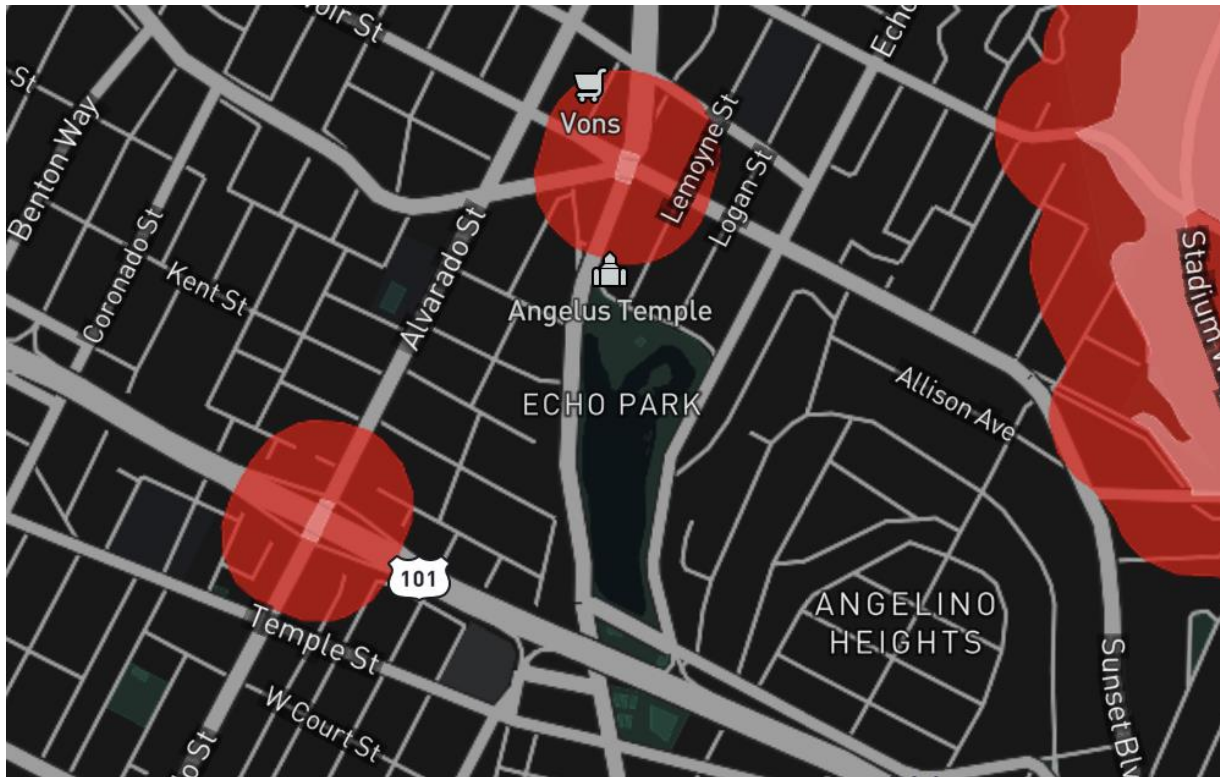


Figure 1: 41.18 Anti-Homeless Zones Map in the Echo Park Lake area, map courtesy of the Kenneth Mejia for LA City Controller campaign. Red indicates zones designated as a specific area for enforcement.

Public Space Isn't Public.

The militarized enforcement of Echo Park Lake’s displacement coupled with widespread establishment and enforcement of 41.18 zones and pre-existing criminalization policies, has given further credence to the perception that public space is somewhat of a myth in Los Angeles. A number of interviewees I spoke to suggested that it is no longer a question of preserving public space for the general public, but about creating it, as no public space currently exists in Los Angeles. Theo Henderson, founder of the We the Unhoused podcast and Activist-in-Residence at the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy, spoke to me on his experiences living

¹¹⁶ Mike Bonin, “Where Will People Go?” <https://11thdistrict.com/4118-faq/>, July 2021.

houseless at Echo Park Lake, and in public space in Los Angeles, for several years. “There is no public space in Los Angeles. It is so very regulated that you are not allowed to stay in public space without the threat of violence from police if you are unhoused, or even if you support the unhoused,” said Henderson. Another interviewee Steven Chun shared a similar sentiment, saying: “Something we’re seeing across the city is this segregation of public space, all around the city places are being fenced off, supposedly for the public, but it’s really for the white public.” Roy likewise agreed, stating “Whatever seems to be ‘public space’ isn’t quite that, with the constant monitoring of who gets to be in that space and under what conditions with what rules and restrictions, public space is not ‘public.’”

If the displacement of Echo Park Lake residents represented the continuance of what interviewees describe as either segregated public space or city-owned property that was not actually public space at all, then the encampment at the lake represented a rupture in Los Angeles’ canon of public space in which members of the public took ownership of public land for communal benefit. As Roy explained:

I can see (for a) fact that this community was able to create a living space in the park, and create the showers, and the community kitchen and other things, as perhaps an exception in typically regulated, monitored, surveilled public space. That was their huge accomplishment. Not that they were left alone—they were being constantly harassed by the police—but that they made this public space a place of community refuge.

Lake residents I spoke to shared, with great pride, the community they had built with both housed and unhoused residents in Echo Park that was largely unique for an encampment. Organizers remember community potlucks, dance competitions, and voter registration events organized between residents and activists at the park, bringing public programming to a park more otherwise known for its swan boat rides.

The political organization of the encampment in public space was more than just a factor in the goal of removal, but a factor in the violent nature of the displacement as well, according to my interviewees. “I think a big part of the fact that there was such an aggressive displacement was because this group of unhoused people who had the audacity to organize, build community, stand up for themselves, and organize for their right to public space,” said Chun. “It was sort of a model of what living outside of the city’s grasp could look like, and I think the displacement showed how angry the state gets when you try to figure out ways to live without them,” said organizer and City Council candidate Corado.

Manufacturing Political Will and Consent for Displacement

All the organizers, researchers, and neighborhood councilmembers I spoke to mentioned one group they saw as quintessentially responsible for providing political support for the Echo Park Lake displacement, and for encampment sweeps more broadly. “NIMBYs,” a colloquialism meaning “Not In My Back Yard” refers to the assorted conglomerate of neighborhood residents, business and development interests, and sympathetic public officials who take pro-criminalization and anti-housing stances that organizers decry as exclusionary, reactionary, and anti-humanitarian. In the context of Echo Park Lake, supporters of the aforementioned “Save Echo Park Lake” petition and neighborhood organizations groups such as Friends of Echo Park Lake, a “volunteer organization founded by progressive residents of the community of Echo Park,” would fall into such a category for their public support for the Office of Councilmember Mitch O’Farrell and the Los Angeles Police Department pursuant to removing unhoused residents from the lake. Jane Nguyen, interviewee, organizer, and co-founder of houseless advocacy group Ktown for All, shared:

The big motivator for displacement [for Mitch O’Farrell] was his need to appease the NIMBYs, the angry constituents who just want him to get rid of homeless people. Those

are the people he answers to. I think a lot of criminalization policies are driven by politicians wanting to appeal to that voter base, that donor base, rather than actually try to address the root causes of homelessness.

Echo Park Lake neighborhood councilmember (and recently announced candidate in Los Angeles' mayoral race) Alex Grunenfelder described that though he "knew for a fact" that Councilmember O'Farrell refused to engage with groups supportive of the Echo Park Lake residents such as the Echo Park Neighborhood Council and Streetwatch Los Angeles despite building relationships with local homeowners associations and "NIMBY-type organizations," O'Farrell is not alone on the council for pandering to this particular base. "You see folks who come to City Council from different political ideologies and different organizing capacities end up backing NIMBY policies and NIMBY philosophies that represent the opinions of NIMBYs rather than the actual majority of the community or population that they represent," said Grunenfelder. O'Farrell does not stand alone in this regard, with many other city leaders representative of the phenomenon of seemingly liberal individuals adopting conservative stances on housing and homelessness once on larger political platforms. Three interviewees I spoke to referenced the 2022 Los Angeles mayoral race to replace outgoing Mayor Eric Garcetti as being emblematic of this effect, wherein all of the frontrunning candidates thus far, including longtime community organizer Congresswoman Karen Bass, have indicated support for LAMC 41.18 and "continued to pander to NIMBYs," to quote Grunenfelder.¹¹⁷ Interviewees shared that they believed the apparent political sway NIMBYism has over politicians in Los Angeles also extends to larger systems such as the media, and even to the general public at large who are frustrated by the city's inaction on homelessness. On NIMBYism and public support for displacement, Grunenfelder stated:

¹¹⁷ Taiyler Simone Mitchell, "Los Angeles mayoral candidates discuss homelessness and policing during first debate as protestors shout in disapproval," New York City: *Business Insider*, February 24, 2022.

The fact of the matter is most people in Los Angeles don't want to walk past human beings who are forced to sleep outside. It's a terrible human rights travesty on our streets and NIMBYs who support criminalization offer an easy answer to concerned people. It's not a real idea, and it's not rooted in the reality that there's not enough shelter for unhoused people in Los Angeles, but it is an easy solution.

Policy Shift and Organizing Challenges

While housing justice organizers and activists have been pushing leftward for transformative housing measures to end houselessness such as rent cancellation, vacant property and hotel seizure, and social housing, the Overton window (the politically acceptable range of policy ideas and solutions in the mainstream population) for policy responses to houselessness has been seemingly moving to the right in alignment with NIMBY organizing and advocacy. When asked if they believed the city was moving towards or away from policies, practices, and ideologies that led up to the displacement at Echo Park Lake, all ten interviewees stated that they believed the city has moved towards such policies, hastening or escalating what interviewees perceived as the new status quo approach for housing. Though the "Housing First" model which identified housing as the primary and imminent solution for unhoused populations with a variety of needs had grown in popularity since the mid 2010s, officials have begun pivoting towards a more criminalization-focused approach.¹¹⁸ This "safe sidewalks," pro-criminalization approach is best embodied by 15th District Los Angeles City Councilmember and mayoral candidate Joe Buscaino, who has laid bare his commitment to physically removing unhoused people from public view with police force, as well as his support for a significant expansion of the police force to meet that

¹¹⁸ Emily Tumpson Molina, *Housing America: Issues and Debates*, Oxfordshire, United Kingdom: Taylor and Francis, 2017.

enforcement need.¹¹⁹ “The dominant view, the public opinion of people with political power, has certainly shifted far to the right on homelessness,” spoke Blasi.

While sharing what they believed to be the necessary solutions for preventing displacement from happening again, all organizers expressed doubt for if the necessary circumstances for such solutions to be enacted would occur. “To end houselessness we have to provide housing for everyone so that no one is unhoused. That’s the only solution that I see would end displacement and violent enforcement...We need housing for everyone, but I don’t know if that’s possible in the capitalist world that we live in,” said Nguyen. Organizers and researchers both described how current organizing in Los Angeles was largely focused on mutual aid and survival efforts by virtue of the scale of the crisis and the limitations of the movement, which puts them at a disadvantage to opposing organizing interests who possess the physical, financial, and political capacity enabled by backing from the city, police departments, and business interests. Roy described this experience in her interview, stating:

We were doing all this work during the pandemic with communities, doing mutual aid and organizing for mass public acquisition of hotel rooms. But while we were doing this, electeds had locked themselves into the same room and were conspiring about how they were going to come back with the most brutal regimes of policing and banishment. That’s what makes this such a difficult moment. The organizing is happening, yet where things sit in terms of policy practice is all about criminalization and banishment.

All of the organizers I interviewed for this research represented organizations which are either entirely, or largely, volunteer based. The volunteer-based nature of this organizing has a demonstrably finite capacity, particularly when organizers are forced to act not only as advocates, but as service providers of PPE, food, housing, and other resources necessary to survival—especially during a pandemic. “We’re trying to show that there are successful ways to get people

¹¹⁹ Danielle Chiriguayo, “Arrest is last option if unhoused Angeleno rejected shelter bed: Joe Buscaino,” *KCRW*, March 24, 2022.

of the street that respect people's dignity, and self-determination, and rights, but we're also mostly just trying to survive and help people survive at this point in the pandemic," said Chun. Lake residents I spoke to described themselves as grateful to be working in community with organizers at Streetwatch-LA and other organizations in the Services Not Sweeps coalition, who built trust with residents in order to help connect them to resources and strengthen their political power as organizers themselves. Organizers shared with me that it was regular practice for city agencies from LAHSA to the council office to redirect unhoused residents looking for support to them, largely unpaid volunteers, rather than connecting them to existent or nonexistent resources internally.

Militarism as the Through Line

Gustavo Otzoy, an unhoused organizer with Streetwatch LA and the United Tenants Against Carceral Housing who lived at Echo Park Lake until the displacement, shared pictures of his injuries with me after he was tackled to the ground and arrested by three LAPD officers for trying to affix a flyer reading "No Fences at Echo Park Lake" to the new fence surrounding Echo Park Lake. After being advocated for by strong pro bono lawyers through Streetwatch he was able to get the charges dropped, but shared with me his fears of what would have happened had he not been connected. "The police and the sheriff don't see you as a human, they see you as a problem and a way they can get money. How many innocent people are in jail? How many people are there for life for something they didn't do?" said Otzoy. Otzoy was told by the police that no footage of his arrest existed, despite the fact that \$250,000 worth of CCTV cameras were installed in the park, and body cameras being standard issue for wear by LAPD officers. "There's no need to look abroad for war and violence. The war is here too. No need to look for terrorists or soldiers far away, they're all here working in the police and sheriff's departments," said Otzoy.

Militarism is the overarching through line that ties together the multifaceted nature of the displacement. Silence from the council office on when a sweep would occur or what it would look like, and the crafting of a discursive narrative that frames the Echo Park Lake tent community as a hub of violence and danger despite no evidence to prove such, laid strategic militarist groundwork for eviction. The violence of the militarized police invasion and the continued brutalization of former residents of the park represented the demonstrated the tactical militarism of the Los Angeles Police Department and the extent to which the city was determined to clear the park. The displacement of the Echo Park Lake tent community has captured in a single incident how the City of Los Angeles is adopting militarist tactics and ideologies to justify their reestablished regime of armed banishment, their war on the poor.

Policy Recommendations

The results of this research project have found that the overarching and mechanisms for the displacement were not any particular policy or law, or even policy or legal framework, but rather pervasive political and structural causes in a city guided by militarist ideology and practices. The militarized displacement of Echo Park Lake's tent community is inextricably intertwined with the only increasing houselessness crisis in Los Angeles, housing unaffordability and unavailability, the political structure of the City of Los Angeles that empowers councilmembers to respond only to the desires of their most influential NIMBY constituents, and a heavily funded, politically powerful, and highly militarized, local police state. Larger contexts of colonialism, spatial injustice, and racial capitalism all inform the origins and persistence of the aforementioned issues of housing, policing, and displacement in Los Angeles, and a complete resolution of such is predicated on an approach not only informed of these systems, but critical of the continued nature of their existence through abolitionist and anti-colonial frameworks.

Had there been only one errant policy responsible for the displacement of nearly two-hundred city residents on account of their housing status, the solution to preventing future displacements would be much simpler than it is, and the actions required to move towards that solution would likewise be simple. Even securing housing for all, the solution suggested by a number of interviewees which responds to the most fundamental root cause of the state of houselessness—the lack or loss of housing—requires a complete interrogation of the systems of land use, development, speculation, and capital that govern housing in Los Angeles. Nonetheless, a series of non-comprehensive policy recommendations in alignment with the demands of housing and racial justice organizers in Los Angeles offer guidance for necessary actionable steps to move towards ending urban displacement in public space, militarized or otherwise. The following four recommendations will be detailed in the following section: 1) Ending 41.18 and policies that criminalize the existence and behaviors of unhoused city residents, 2) demilitarizing and defunding the Los Angeles Police Department, 3) implementing non-carceral outreach and social housing solutions, and 4), creating, as opposed to simply preserving, public space.

End 41.18 and Criminalization Policies

The most evident necessary change to move towards ending displacement and potentially-dangerous interactions between people experiencing houselessness and the Los Angeles Police Department is to end sweeps by striking 41.18 and related ordinances from the city's municipal code which criminalize nearly inescapable acts such as camping, sitting, lying, loitering, and property storage. Critics and activists have long condemned such policies expressly aimed at forcing unhoused people into accepting undesirable congregate and/or carceral shelter conditions under the threat of citations, forced removal, and even incarceration or institutionalization, and the striking of such policies is overdue for any city purportedly serious about ending houselessness. A

number of interviewees I spoke to mentioned the importance of removing the ordinance and described having organized and protested around its removal, particularly in its newest iteration which allows councilmembers the full discretion to create entire zones in which unhoused people cannot legally reside.

These policies ultimately banish people experiencing houselessness instead of putting them on a path towards permanent housing, further distance unhoused people from communities and resources critical for their survival, and make unhoused residents understandably distrustful of public agencies and any programs or housing solutions the city may offer. Still, its apparent political popularity on the Los Angeles City Council, and in the 2022 mayoral race, presents a significant challenge to overturning criminalization governance.¹²⁰ Though court rulings in favor of unhoused plaintiffs illegitimately subject to such policies provide a legal pathway for advocates seeking to challenge the criminalization of houselessness, they ultimately have yet to seriously deter cities from pursuing policy loopholes and even promoting abjectly unconstitutional measures when deemed favorable to their political agenda. Given the centrality of 41.18 and related criminalization policies to the city's existing strategy of policing houselessness, however, it is clear that any possibility of implementing a comprehensive and humane approach to addressing houselessness in the city will require its removal.

Demilitarize and Defund the Los Angeles Police Department

Displacement in Los Angeles is facilitated by law enforcement, whether explicitly through citation, brutality, or arrest, or implicitly through the threat of such. While local evictions from private residences are enforced by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department through writ of

¹²⁰ Mitchell, "Los Angeles mayoral candidates discuss homelessness and policing during first debate as protestors shout in disapproval."

possession orders, sweeps of unhoused people from public space are generally enforced by Los Angeles police officers accompanying city sanitation employees. Outside of sweeps carried out pursuant to 41.18 and related measures, armed police officers frequently interact with unhoused communities when housed residents unhappy with the residence of their unhoused neighbors call the police on them for sidewalk obstruction, mental health crises, and simply existing in shared space. A number of these interactions ultimately escalate, and in 2019 the LAPD reported 801 use of force incidents against people experiencing houselessness, representing 1/3rd of all use of force incidents in that year.¹²¹ The police disproportionately target and arrest unhoused populations, endanger unhoused communities, and obstruct efforts to meaningfully end houselessness through connection to resources, services, and housing. Policing disproportionately targets Black and Brown unhoused people, especially in Los Angeles, a factor which organizers have described as playing a significant role in Echo Park Lake's displacement.

As described earlier in the findings and analysis section of this paper, the military scale and tactics employed by the police at the Echo Park Lake displacement resulted in brutalization, arrest, and trauma. The proliferation of militarism ideologically is contingent of the existence of an accessible, willing, and local militarized force such as the LAPD, and we must first demilitarize police in order to further dismantle militarism as it appears politically in the city. Incumbent to demilitarizing the police is drastically reducing the city's possession of military weaponry, technology, and equipment, a process facilitated in part by transfers from the federal government through the 1033 Program.¹²² Another necessary facet would be to significantly reduce the number

¹²¹ Leila Miller, "Use-of-force incidents against homeless people are up, LAPD reports," *Los Angeles Times*, January 21, 2020.

¹²² Delehanty, Mewhirter, Welch, and Wilks, *Militarization and Police Violence: The Case of the 1033 Program*.

of police officers and other personnel in the department, which maintains a nearly 10,000 officer force.¹²³

The policy mechanism I suggest to reduce police militarization is defunding, a policy which describes exactly what it sounds like: the decrease/removal of funding from the police and reallocation towards other areas in the city budget more appropriate for receiving funds, such as housing and community development. In the 2020-2021 fiscal year, the Los Angeles Police Department received \$3 billion in funding when including the unrestricted revenues in the city budget reallocated to the police, with the police receiving representing 45.9% of the entire city budget.¹²⁴ Despite bipartisan support from political leaders on the local, state, and federal level to “fund” police departments nationwide, there is demonstrable local support for the reallocation of police funding.¹²⁵ In 2021, the People’s Budget LA Coalition led by Black Lives Matter-Los Angeles collected 24,426 survey responses from Angelenos and found when given the opportunity to design their own budgets, respondents allocated an average of only 1.64% of the city budget to law enforcement and policing, instead prioritizing funding to go towards housing security, mental health and wellness, and public health and healthcare.¹²⁶ In 2020, the Austin City Council unanimously voted to cut its police department budget by one-third and invest the bulk of the reallocated funding towards “alternative forms of public safety and community support.”¹²⁷

¹²³ Carl Sullivan and Carla Baranauckas, “Here’s how much money goes to police departments in largest cities across the U.S.,” Virginia: *USA Today*, June 26, 2020.

¹²⁴ People’s Budget LA Coalition, *The People’s Budget: City of Los Angeles 2021-2022*, May 2021.

¹²⁵ Joseph Biden, *State of the Union Address*, March 1st, 2022.

¹²⁶ People’s Budget LA Coalition, *The People’s Budget: City of Los Angeles 2021-2022*, May 2021.

¹²⁷ Meena Venkataramanan, “Austin City Council cuts police department budget by one-third, mainly through reorganizing some duties out from law enforcement oversight,” *The Texas Tribune*, August 13, 2020.

Defunding the police is therefore an effective mechanism to move towards demilitarization and also a locally popular one for moving towards reinvesting in other public goods and social services. Though the essential solution to the white supremacy and classism, that is not only pervasive but foundational to policing, is police abolition, defunding poses an actionable policy mechanism to move towards that goal.

Implement Non-Carceral Housing Solutions

Two months after the displacement at Echo Park Lake, a number of former lake residents and other unhoused Angelenos who accepted placement in Project Roomkey (PRK) announced the formation of a houseless union Unhoused Tenants Against Carceral Housing (UTACH). In their first public statement, they wrote:

UTACH’s mission is to fundamentally transform Project Roomkey and other forms of carceral shelter—that is, housing options where people are treated as if they are prisoners—offered to homeless people as an alternative to the street. Facing conditions in PRK that many describe as jail-like, UTACH demands community self-determination, autonomy, and the same rights as housed tenants in Los Angeles...UTACH rejects the city’s strategy of shuffling people between carceral, temporary shelters and the street, a process which immiserates the houseless by continuously and forcibly—but unpredictably—removing them from the communities and support networks.¹²⁸

It is not that people want to remain unsheltered, but that the quality of limited shelter housing offered is so poor that some unhoused are choosing to remain in unideal, unsheltered living conditions to maintain their autonomy and connection to community resources.

One alternative model advocated for local housing justice organizers is social housing, also known as public housing, which recognizes not only the need for dignified housing for people experiencing houselessness, but the importance for permanently affordable (or free) publicly

¹²⁸ @LATenantsUnion, “Meet UTACH: Unhoused Tenants Against Carceral Housing! Right now, on the steps of city hall, Project Roomkey residents are issuing their short and long-term demands: end the infantilizing curfews, jail food, and staff harassment, abolish the carceral shelter system itself,” Twitter, May 19, 2021.

owned housing that services people from all backgrounds and demographics.¹²⁹ A number of policy mechanisms can be used to create social housing; from eminent domain, to construction and development, to the purchase of existing buildings. The comprehensive investment in all three policies of social housing creation could radically shift the state of housing provision for unhoused people from one of “shelter” to one of housing, affirm the human right to housing for all, and even lead to the eventual decommodification of housing by transforming housing into a public good. Though the cost of significant investment into the creation of state-owned housing may be the most significant challenge faced while advocating for social housing, utilizing existing funding streams and reallocated funding from the law enforcement budget provide clear financial pathways. The current model utilized by the city that combines criminalization and an average cost of \$596,846 per carceral housing unit constructed is ineffectively expensive, and the cost of social housing’s investment should not prevent the city from pursuing such a solution.¹³⁰

Preserve and Create Public Space

At the heart of sweeps and the Echo Park Lake displacement is a contestation for public space, namely, a space free of policing, surveillance, and harassment that can be interacted with by any member of the public at any time. The usage of public space as incidental refuge for unsheltered people with no other place to go is as an appropriate use of public space as a picnic, a jog, or a brief sit. The antagonism is specifically levied at the mere presence of poor people in public space, a similar antagonism levied to Brown and Black people existing in public space. Until the city can sufficiently house all of its residents, public space likely will continue to exist as refuge for those with no other place to reside providing an impetus for both the preservation of

¹²⁹ Jenna Chandler, “Will LA start building public housing again?” *Curbed LA*, February 12, 2020.

¹³⁰ Linus Chua, “LA is Paying \$600,000 Apiece for Units to House Homeless People,” *New York City: Bloomberg*, February 23, 2022.

existing public space and creation of new public spaces. Alongside removing policies that criminalize and restrict the usage of public space, the city should adopt planning practices and policies that seek to turn the tide on the privatization of public lands, spaces, and commons and create possible sites for the creation of new public spaces already hosting public movement. Such a policy would require a political shift away from the private redevelopment of urban space particularly in downtown areas and financialization of land use generally, but would represent a step towards what David Harvey described as “the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves...one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights,” a freedom most possible in space where the public may freely interact without state or corporate intervention.¹³¹

Conclusion

Echo Park Lake and Los Angeles

This research investigated the structural, legal, and policy mechanisms of displacement through a case study of Echo Park Lake, a public park in Los Angeles where a nearly two hundred person tent community was forcibly removed by a militarized police force during the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2021. Adopting a critical theory framework analyzing militarism—the belief and ideology that a certain danger pervades society and must be responded to with the strength, control, and violence brought by a standing military—this study sought to situate the phenomenon of urban displacement within the context of Los Angeles’ history as a colonial, carceral, and militarist city. Through interviews with unhoused Angelenos, local housing justice and racial justice organizers, researchers of urban displacement, and neighborhood leaders, this research has revealed that though a series of policy changes could revert the increasing shift towards militarized

¹³¹ David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, New York: Verso, 2013.

displacement, the displacement was ultimately not a function of any particular policies but of deeply structural and political factors that politically empower anti-poor and anti-BIPOC interests to the detriment of public space and spatial justice.

Echo Park Lake was deliberately crafted to serve as the picture perfect postcard for late 19th century Los Angeles' boosterism, depicting images of white swans, towering palm trees, and couples canoeing, to allure white Americans who wanted to live in an urban region without urbanity to its banks.¹³² Contemporary development interests share similar desires to fully gentrify the neighborhood to allure new white residents to the areas restaurants, bars, and shops. The image of Echo Park today is not too far flung from these images, bar the fence surrounding the lake that represents a notable slippage in this image of Los Angeles and an ever-present reminder of the violence utilized to erect and maintain it. There is no novelty to the analysis that Los Angeles rises to its institutional imaginary, embracing its sunny weather, breezy palms, and car culture, yet falls far short of idyllic. Joan Didion said it, Edward Soja said it, and as Angelenos we've all said it while explaining to visitors why it is that in a city so famously leisurely and glamorous there are communities living unsheltered under freeway overpasses. But these slippages that remind us of the limitations of "public space" that isn't truly public, the criminalization and banishment of the poor, are worth representing until the day they no longer exist—and not for a lack of visibility, but for a lack of inequity. Though a Los Angeles of the people and for the people may sometimes feel a seemingly insurmountable ideal, ending criminalization policies, demilitarizing and defunding the Los Angeles Police Department, implementing non-carceral housing solutions, and creating public space are all decisively strong steps in the right direction.

¹³² Nathan Masters, "Echo Park's Lake Began as a Drinking Water Reservoir," *KCET*, May 16, 2014.

Future Research

More research that centers the perspectives and experiences of people experiencing homelessness through the employment of qualitative research is critical, particularly in the context of displacement which is a fundamentally embodied experience not appropriate to reduce to statistics alone. Critical urban geographers and anti-colonial theorists have long studied contemporary dispossession and displacement within the historic context of colonialism, though many studies today of homelessness and displacement find it too irrelevant or too in the past to mention. Lastly, I encourage researchers and academics in urban planning to consider more deeply the worth in aligning themselves with movements for housing, racial, and spatial justice. The truths that organizers on the ground and other people with lived experience can provide is invaluable, and will always provide as much—if not more—information into any particular process or phenomenon than you as a researcher may identify.

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Appendices

Appendix A: List of Interviewees

Interview Date	Interview Group	Interviewee	Affiliation(s)
January 21, 2022	Housing and racial justice organizers	Jane Nguyen	Ktown For All, Services Not Sweeps
January 21, 2022	Housing and racial justice organizers	Steven Chun	Ktown For All, Jtown Action and Solidarity
January 31, 2022	Housing and racial justice organizers	Albert Corado	NOlympics LA, People's City Council LA, AI for LA 2022
January 21, 2022	Professors/researchers of displacement and houselessness	Dr. Ananya Roy	UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy
January 26, 2022	Professors/researchers of displacement and houselessness	Dr. Gary Blasi	UCLA School of Law
January 26, 2022	Professors/researchers of displacement and houselessness	Dr. Robin Petering	LensCo, Services Not Sweeps
February 8, 2022	Unhoused organizers and former residents of Echo Park Lake	Theo Henderson	We The Unhoused
February 9, 2022	Unhoused organizers and former residents of Echo Park Lake	Will Sens	United Tenants Against Carceral Housing, Streetwatch LA
February 10, 2022	Unhoused organizers and former residents of Echo Park Lake	Gustavo Otzoy	United Tenants Against Carceral Housing, Streetwatch LA
February 9, 2022	Local government or neighborhood officials	Alex Grunfelder	Echo Park Neighborhood Council

Appendix B: List of Interview Questions

1. Describe your experience with and/or understanding of the Echo Park Lake tent community.
2. Describe your experience with and/or understanding of the Echo Park Lake March 24-27, 2021, displacement.
3. What policy and legal mechanisms do you believe facilitated the displacement at Echo Park Lake?
4. How do you believe the political culture and ideology at City Hall, in LAPD, and other relevant housing agencies, facilitate the kind of displacement we saw at Echo Park Lake?
5. Do you feel the city is moving towards or away from policies, practices, and ideologies that led up to the displacement at Echo Park Lake? If so, how? If not, why?
6. What is different about the Echo Park Lake displacement as compared to other sweeps/removals/evictions? What is similar?
7. How do you feel public space is limited, restricted, or regulated in Los Angeles?
8. Describe your understanding/experience with public space and policing, especially militarized policing, in Los Angeles.
9. A recent report from the ACLU California suggested that there is a “legal war against unhoused people.” Would you agree or disagree with the position that there is a “war on the poor” in Los Angeles? Why?
10. What do you think has to be done to prevent these kinds of displacements from happening again? Housing/policing/public space policy change?
11. Do you wish to share any final thoughts or comments related to any of the topics discussed? Public space, policing, houselessness, Echo Park Lake, etc.

Appendix C: Email from Councilmember Mitch O’Farrell’s Office



Ina Morton <mortonc@oxy.edu>

Interview Request from Occidental College, Department of Urban and Environmental Policy Student

Dan Halden <Daniel.Halden@lacity.org>

Tue, Jan 18, 2022 at 6:30 AM

To: Ina Morton <mortonc@oxy.edu>

Cc: Juan Fregoso <juan.fregoso@lacity.org>, Kevin Brunke <kevin.brunke@lacity.org>, david.cano@lacity.org, jeanne.min@lacity.org

Hi Ina,

Thank you for reaching out. Respectfully, what occurred in 2021 at Echo Park Lake was not a “displacement,” but rather a *placement* of nearly 200 people — who had been living in dangerous, inhumane conditions in the park — into safe, secure, managed, transitional housing.

The transitional housing placements were the result of substantial outreach efforts that took place over a period of three months.

Unfortunately, Councilmember O’Farrell is not available for an interview. If you have specific questions for our office, please feel free to email me.

Thank you and best wishes,

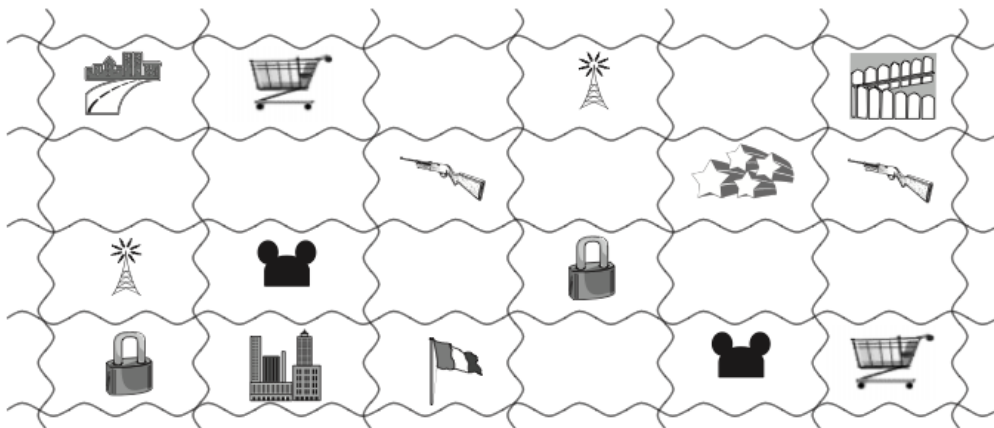
Dan

[Quoted text hidden]

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Dan Halden
 Communications Director
 Director, HEART of Hollywood
 Councilmember Mitch O’Farrell
 (213) 473-7013

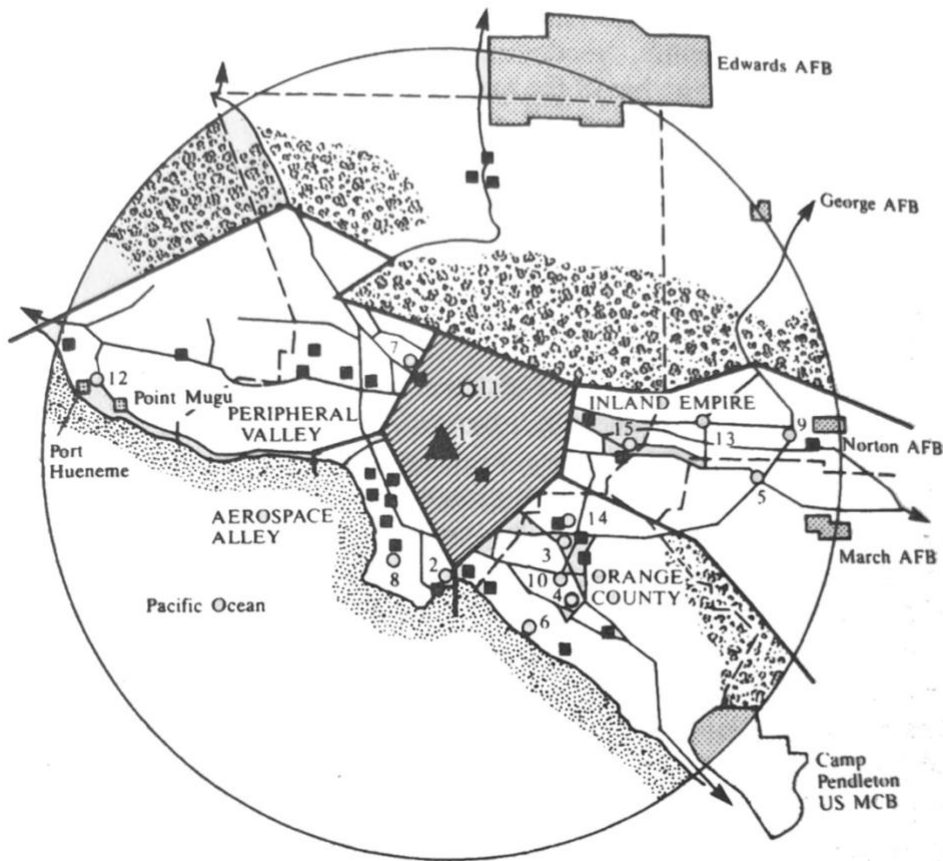
Appendix D: The Keno Capitalism Model of Postmodern Urban Structure



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|--|-------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| | DSH/Interdictory Spaces | | Ethnoburb |
| | Edge Cities | | Containment Centers |
| | Theme Parks | | Consumption Opportunities |
| | Gated Communities | | Command & Control Centers |
| | Street Warfare | | Spectacle |
| | Corporate Citadels | | |

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Appendix E: Military Bases and Defense Contractors in the Los Angeles Region



Soja, Edward W. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. New York: Verso Books. 1989.